

ETHNIC STRUCTURE OF PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN COVASNA COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

The article provides a detailed and rigorous analysis of the current situation of Romanian education in Covasna County, using accurate and up-to-date statistical data. The study presents punctually, for each locality and school institution, the number of pupils, the existing classes and the ethnic structure of the locality as well as the situation of the Romanian-speaking school population. Demographic and educational trends that directly affect Romanian schools are identified and analyzed, highlighting the continuous decrease in the number of pupils and the shrinking of Romanian language classes. In particular, the research highlights the critical situations in some localities where Romanian-language education is in danger of disappearing, emphasizing the strategic importance of educational policies based on statistical data, aimed at ensuring the preservation of the cultural and linguistic identity of the Romanian communities in these counties.

Keywords: education, school statistics, educational policies, demography, Covasna.

1. INTRODUCTION

Covasna, Harghita and Mureș counties in south-eastern Transylvania offer a unique context of interethnic coexistence, strongly reflected in the education system. Covasna and Harghita are known for their Hungarian numerical majority (85.7% Hungarians in Harghita county and 71.8% Hungarians in Covasna)⁸² but also for their large Romanian community, while Mureș county has a more balanced population, with a Romanian majority (54.4% declared themselves Romanian at the last census) and a large Hungarian community (35.6%), together with other minorities (Gypsies, Germans, etc.)⁸³. This demographic distribution reflects a

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⁸² National Institute of Statistics, „Harghita County Directorate of Statistics Press release Population and Housing Census, round 2021 – provisional data for HARGHITA county”, January 2023, Available at: https://harghita.insse.ro/wpcontent/uploads/2023/02/HR_CPdateprovizoriiRPL2021_ian-2023.pdf, Accessed on April 2, 2025.

⁸³ Mirela Rotar, „Județul Mureș are cei mai mulți etnici romi”, [“Mureș County has the most ethnic Roma”], in *Radio Mureș*, February 1, 2023, Available at: <https://www.radiomures.ro/stiri/judetul-mures-are-cei-mai-multi-etnici-romi.html>, Accessed on February 22, 2024.

reality created by the policy of ethnic segregation aggressively initiated by the Hungarian minority party (UDMR) and tacitly or explicitly accepted by successive Romanian governments since January 1990, which allowed the separation of schools on linguistic criteria and the gradual elimination of mixed education. This phenomenon has been consistently pointed out in the analysis of the ethnic structure of pre-university education in Covasna and Harghita counties. Ethnic separatist manifestations in the fields of education and culture were the result of tensions built up over time among radical groups, amplified by the influence of new political, civic, professional and cultural organizations formed exclusively on ethnic grounds. These organizations constantly benefited from external support and impulses, especially from Hungary, and were supported by an aggressive and intolerant Hungarian-language press⁸⁴.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ROMANIAN EDUCATION IN SOUTH-EASTERN TRANSYLVANIA

From a historical perspective, Romanian schools in the Covasna-Harghita area have had a history marked by efforts to assert and preserve their identity in often adverse contexts. The first Romanian schools in the present-day Covasna and Harghita counties were Orthodox denominational schools, attested as early as the 16th century. For example, in Covasna county, Romanian educational institutions are documented in Zagon (~1540), Araci (~1700), Belin (1774) or Sfântu Gheorghe (1799), and in Harghita in Gheorgheni and Voșlăbeni (1765) or Odorheiu Secuiesc (1768)⁸⁵. These schools functioned under the patronage of the Church (Orthodox or Greek-Catholic), which played a crucial role in supporting Romanian-language education in a region where, until 1918, the Austro-Hungarian administration promoted an intensive mechanism of Hungarianization through state institutions. In the second half of the 19th century, educational policies in the Hungarian Kingdom led to the closure of many Romanian schools – for example, in the former county of Trei Scaune the number of Romanian primary schools decreased from 34 (in 1883/1884) to only 15 (in 1905)⁸⁶. The local Romanian communities, supported by the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Church (through personalities such as Andrei Șaguna, Ioan Vancea, etc.), made considerable efforts

⁸⁴ Ioan Lăcătușu, Vasile Lechințan and Violeta Pătrușel, *Românii din Covasna și Harghita: istorie, biserică, școală, cultură* [Romanians from Covasna and Harghita: History, Church, School, Culture], Miercurea-Ciuc, Grai Românesc Publishing House, 2003, p. 84.

⁸⁵ Nicoleta Ploșnea, *Biserici, școli, comunități rurale românești din Covasna și Harghita (1850-1918)* [Churches, schools, Romanian rural communities in Covasna and Harghita (1850-1918)], PhD thesis, Miercurea Ciuc, Grai Românesc Publishing House, 2012, p. 42.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

to maintain these Romanian educational centers, seeing them as a guarantor of national identity in the areas where Hungarians (Szeklers) also lived.

After 1918, the unification of Transylvania with Romania officially brought the Romanian schools in the counties of Mureș, Ciuc, Odorhei, Trei Scaune under the authority of the Romanian state, allowing the development of the Romanian-language school network. However, ethnic Hungarian minorities still enjoyed a special regime at that time, with education in their mother tongue⁸⁷. Later, the years of the Vienna Dictatorship (1940–1944), as well as those that followed under the Soviet occupation and during the Hungarian Autonomous Region, represented one of the most difficult periods for Romanian education in the history of the centuries-long coexistence between Romanians and Szeklers/Hungarians. Between 1940 and 1944, schools and departments teaching in Romanian were dismantled and Romanian teachers were forcibly removed. The return to a state of normality was difficult, especially during the years of the Hungarian Autonomous Region. In this context, the work of Romanian teachers was all the more remarkable, as they were often forced to attend meetings organized exclusively in Hungarian or to accept official documents written only in Hungarian. As of October 15, 1940, the date set by the Hungarian government for the start of schooling, there were only eight Romanian-language secondary schools in the whole of Northern Transylvania, including three gymnasiums, compared to 114 before the Vienna Dictatorship⁸⁸. Only 8.1% of pupils were of Romanian nationality and the number of teachers available for this level of education was limited to 35⁸⁹.

The measures implemented during the communist period, especially after 1970, were not aimed at increasing interethnic tensions, but were essentially aimed at correcting the existing imbalances and favoring ethnic integration and peaceful coexistence between Romanians and Hungarians. This policy was concretely manifested through the establishment of schools and classes taught in Romanian, the bringing of a larger number of specialized teachers to Covasna and Harghita counties, and through measures to promote and respect the official language of the Romanian state and national symbols.

A key moment in this process was the administrative-territorial reorganization in 1968, when the Hungarian Autonomous Region was abolished and Covasna and Harghita counties were created in its place. This reorganization allowed a considerable urban, economic, social and cultural development, especially in the cities of Sfântu Gheorghe and Miercurea Ciuc. The numerical

⁸⁷ A.N.I.C., *Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction*, file 51/1947, f. 17.

⁸⁸ Valentin Florin Vătamanu, *Viața religioasă a românilor din județele Harghita și Covasna în perioada Dictatului de la Viena (1940-1944)* [*The Religious Life of Romanians in Harghita and Covasna Counties during the Vienna Dictat Period (1940–1944)*], Miercurea Ciuc, Grai Românesc Publishing House, 2023, p. 343.

⁸⁹ Balázs Ablonczy, *Transilvania reîntoarsă 1940–1944* [*Transylvania Returned 1940-1944*], Iași, European Institute, 2014, p. 175.

growth of the Romanian population in these cities, largely due to the return of former refugees, led for the first time in the region's history to the creation of a genuine Romanian intellectual elite, made up of outstanding specialists in education, health, administration and justice⁹⁰.

The mixed schools created during this period were a deliberate attempt to build a framework of mutual understanding and intercultural dialog, thus promoting the integration of ethnic communities and eliminating the tensions that had built up over time. The rhetoric promoted later, after 1990, by the UDMR, describing these measures as conflict-generating, reflects specific political interests rather than objective historical reality. In reality, the measures during the Ceaușescu regime were designed to balance inter-ethnic relations and ensure an integrated social framework. The grievances of some groups of the Hungarian population were not directly caused by these integrative educational measures but resulted mainly from the general excesses of the totalitarian regime, which affected the entire population of the country, regardless of ethnicity.

The 1989 revolution and democratic transition radically reshaped the educational context of the region. On the one hand, Romania's new legislative framework enshrined the rights of national minorities to education in their mother tongue – the Education Law 84/1995 and later the National Education Law 1/2011 guaranteed the possibility of teaching in minority languages at all levels, the establishment of separate classes, sections or school units for them. The Hungarian community in the area thus benefited from official recognition of its linguistic identity in schools. On the other hand, the application of these principles was not without practical difficulties and local disputes. In the first post-revolution years, there were cases of sudden ethnic segregation in educational establishments: in January-March 1990, in some high schools and schools in cities such as Odorheiu Secuiesc, Miercurea Ciuc, Târgu Secuiesc or Sfântu Gheorghe, Romanian sections were separated from Hungarian ones, and Romanian pupils in mixed classes had to withdraw and be transferred to other Romanian-language establishments. Reports of the time even mention incidents in which Romanian pupils and their teachers were practically expelled from Hungarian-language schools, amid the Hungarian community's enthusiasm to regain its institutions and exacerbated nationalist manifestations. These tensions culminated in dramatic events, such as the inter-ethnic conflict in Târgu Mureș in March 1990⁹¹, which highlighted language and identity sensitivities in schools and in the public space⁹².

In the same period, the process of restitution of property to religious denominations had a direct impact on education: many buildings of Transylvanian

⁹⁰ Ioan Lăcătușu, Vasile Lechințan and Violeta Pătrununjel, *quoted work*, p. 82.

⁹¹ Csaba Zoltán Novák, „Revoluție și schimbare de regim la Târgu-Mureș” [“Revolution and regime change in Târgu-Mureș”], in ***, *Schimbare de regim la Târgu-Mureș [Regime Change in Târgu-Mureș]*, Cluj-Napoca, Institute for the Study of National Minorities, 2014, pp. 215–261.

⁹² Ioan Judea, *Târgu Mureș. Cumpăna lui Martie, [Târgu Mureș. The turn of March]*, Târgu Mureș, Tipomur Publishing House, 1991, p. 88.

historical high schools and schools (built before 1918 with public funds but claimed after 1990 by Hungarian churches such as the Roman Catholic or Reformed) were restituted, in many cases abusively, to their former owners. Many retrocessions were illegal because properties built before 1918 from public funds or by owners compensated after *the optants' lawsuit* were assigned, and the documentation for the claims was often incomplete or falsified, a fact confirmed in numerous legal cases documented in recent legal literature and historical analysis⁹³. In some cases, the new denominational leaderships decided to reorganize these establishments exclusively for Hungarian-language education, which led to the transfer of Romanian pupils to other state schools⁹⁴. A notorious example is the “Bolyai Farkas” National High School from where numerous tensions also erupted in the spring of 1990 in Târgu Mureș as well as the Roman-Catholic Theological High School in Târgu Mureș (National High School “Unirea”), where legal and administrative disputes over ownership and languages of instruction have spanned over two decades, straining interethnic relations to this day.

The effects of these changes have been felt in the changing ethnic structure of the teaching staff and school population in the region. Between 1990 and 2000, thousands of Romanian families, including teachers, left Harghita and Covasna counties, either because of the perceived hostile interethnic climate or because of the rise of administrative constraints and the possibility of moving to majority Romanian areas. Sociologists have estimated that in the first years of transition (1989–1995) more than 10,000 Romanians emigrated internally from Covasna and Harghita, leaving behind smaller Romanian communities vulnerable to cultural assimilation⁹⁵. Those who remained were faced with an acute shortage of qualified teaching staff in Romanian-language schools, as many Romanian teachers left, and it became difficult to attract new specialists to the area. This shortage had direct consequences on the quality of Romanian-language education and led in some cases to a gradual Hungarianization of education⁹⁶: some Romanian parents, lacking accessible alternatives, enrolled their children in Hungarian-language schools in order to benefit from the existing infrastructure and resources⁹⁷. Thus,

⁹³ Vasile Ștefan Tutula, „Procesul optanților unguri – un act cu urmări dureroase în vremurile de azi” [“The Hungarian Optants Trial – an act with painful consequences in present times”], in *Cetatea Cavalerilor*, No. 2, October 2020.

⁹⁴ Ioan Sabău-Pop, „Un sfert de secol de retrocedări ilegale (I)” [“A quarter of a century of illegal retroceding (I) ”], in *Cuvântul Liber*, August 8, 2014, Available at: <https://www.cuvantul-liber.ro/305153/un-sfert-de-secol-de-retrocedari-ilegale-i/>, Accessed on March 4, 2025.

⁹⁵ Maria Cobianu-Băcanu, „Românii minoritari din Covasna și Harghita. Despre o posibilă strategie a păstrării proprii lor identități naționale”, [“The Romanian minority in Covasna and Harghita. On a possible strategy for preserving their national identity”], in *Romanian Journal of Sociology*, No. 3–4, Bucharest, 1999, p. 316.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 317.

⁹⁷ Cristian Anton, „Câți bani primesc de la Budapesta copiii din România care studiază în limba maghiară” [“How much money Romanian children studying in Hungarian receive from Budapest”], in *Pro TV News*, September 5, 2023, Available at: https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/international/cati-bani-primesc-de-la-budapesta-copiii-din-romania-care-studiazainlimba-maghiaraorbanamaritde4orisuma.html?fbclid=IwAR1uQdKLC6VSG04GDjWIFyYmYh-TtnC_HhgDfyaO1ooJS_XvgURQEF24, Accessed on March 10, 2025.

paradoxically, in the 1990s, the local Romanian minority became the one in need of protection and identity affirmation measures, even though Romanians were in the majority at national level.

The apparent cooperation between central and local authorities in the field of education in the counties of Covasna, Harghita and Mureș hides in reality a well-defined strategy of the Hungarian political elite in Romania, which aimed to limit and marginalize Romanian-language schools. Conclusive examples are the situations in Sfântu Gheorghe, where, under the pretext of administrative cooperation, classes taught in Romanian have been drastically reduced and mixed schools have been abolished under various administrative justifications. Following the Minute of June 6, 1990, signed at the City Hall in the presence of representatives of the Ministry of Education, C.P.U.N., the County School Inspectorate, the City Hall and the directors of the Mathematics-Physics High School, Industrial High School No. 2 and Industrial High School No. 3, it was decided to reorganize the schools on ethnic criteria, apparently as a consensual solution. Thus, two exclusively Hungarian theoretical lyceums were established – “Szekely Miko” College and “Mikes Kelemen” High School, and the Romanian-language classes were concentrated in a single unit, “Mihai Viteazul” High School. This educational structure, established under the guise of interethnic and administrative cooperation, resulted in the practical isolation and restriction of the school space for Romanian pupils, who had to transfer from the three schools mentioned above. The teaching staff of the new Romanian high school were relocated from various previously existing institutions (Industrial High School No. 2, Industrial High School No. 3, Mathematics-Physics High School, Textile High School and Economic High School), which underlines the artificial nature of this administrative “collaboration”, which in reality allowed for a clear marginalization of Romanian education in the region⁹⁸.

At the same time, the Hungarian community, with the direct support of the Budapest authorities, strengthened its own education system: fully Hungarian-taught high schools were reopened, some of them continuing the old confessional colleges, a Hungarian line was established at the Babeș-Bolyai University and later a private university (Sapientia). The exclusively Hungarian-language education promoted by the community’s political leaders does not reflect a simple concern for the preservation of authentic cultural identity, but rather serves political and social purposes by cultivating a discourse of victimization and by permanently stigmatizing the local Romanian community⁹⁹. This social reality is documented in numerous recent sociological studies and academic research highlighting the use of

⁹⁸ Ioan Lăcătușu, Vasile Lechințan and Violeta Pătrununjel, *quoted work*, p. 370.

⁹⁹ Radu Baltasiu, *Situația actuală a frontierei de Nord-Vest a României la 100 de ani de la Tratatul de la Versailles [The Current Status of the North-West Romanian Border 100 Years after the Treaty of Versailles]*, Bucharest, Ethnological Publishing House, 2022, pp. 79–85.

the education system as an instrument of political and cultural control over the local Hungarian community¹⁰⁰. A recent study (2011–2023)¹⁰¹ reveals that despite the demographic decline, the share of Hungarian language learners in Transylvania has remained relatively stable at around 15–16% of all Transylvanian pupils, close to the share of the Hungarian population in the region. In other words, the education system has benefited substantially from direct and continuous financial support from local authorities politically controlled by the Hungarian minority party and from the Hungarian government, in contrast to the forced decline of Romanian education, which was simultaneously affected by local, central and external pressures. This is also due to the predominantly ethnically segregated nature of education in the area: the majority of Hungarian children attend Hungarian schools or sections, while Romanian children attend Romanian schools or sections, and there are fewer instances of transfer to other languages of instruction.

3. STRUCTURE OF EDUCATION IN COVASNA COUNTY

In this complex context, Romanian pre-university education in Covasna, Harghita and Mureş remains a subject of sociological and political interest. The present analysis aims to examine the current structure of the school network in Covasna County from the perspective of ethnic distribution. It considers the number and types of educational institutions, exclusively Romanian, exclusively Hungarian and mixed schools, the number of pupils and classes by language of instruction, as well as the recent evolution of these indicators at the level of the 2023–2024 school year. The paper also highlights the challenges facing Romanian-language education in the region – the demographic decline and the consequent annual reduction in enrolment figures, the difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers in remote areas or where another language dominates, as well as school infrastructure problems. An eloquent example is the case of “Mihai Viteazul” National High School in Sfântu Gheorghe, the most important Romanian-language secondary school in Covasna County, whose historic building is undergoing renovation work that has gone well beyond the initial deadlines – a situation which

¹⁰⁰ Alexandru Mihăescu, „Guvernul Ungariei anunță că a creat în Transilvania o structură completă de învățământ în limba maghiară, de la creșă la universitate” [“Hungarian Government announces that it has created a complete Hungarian-language education structure in Transylvania, from kindergarten to university”], in *G4Media*, June 27, 2022, Available at: <https://www.g4media.ro/guvernul-ungariei-anunta-ca-a-creat-in-transilvania-o-structura-completadeinvatamantinlimbamaghiara-de-la-cresa-la-universitate.html>, Accessed on March 10, 2025.

¹⁰¹ SODISO, “Romániai magyar közoktatás. Helyzetkép, 2011–2023” [“Hungarian public education in Romania. State of play, 2011–2023”], commissioned by the School Foundation (Iskola Alapítvány), April 24, 2023.

has meant that for several years classes have had to be held in scattered locations, putting pressure on pupils and teachers.

The objective of this paper is to provide an updated, statistically documented picture of Romanian pre-university education in the three counties, in an attempt to better understand how the ethnic factor influences the organization and functioning of schools. The present analysis is a scientific one, based on recent official data, information provided by the school inspectorates and the National Institute of Statistics, and on the relevant literature, without privileging or stigmatizing any of the communities.

The Romanian-language school network in Covasna County currently comprises the following schools teaching exclusively in the official state language:

Name of unit	Romanian language		LOCAL ETHNICITIES	
	Class	Students	%HU	%RO
“Mihai Viteazul” National High School Sfântu Gheorghe	44	1057	69%	19%
Technical High School “Constantin Brâncuși” Sfântu Gheorghe	15	336	69%	19%
“Nicolae Bălcescu” Technological High School Întorsura Buzăului	17	403	0%	92%
High School “Mircea Eliade” Întorsura Buzăului	13	358	0%	92%
Secondary School “Andrei șaguna” Barcani	31	499	0%	86%
Secondary School “Mihai Eminescu” Valea Mare	9	125	2%	93%
Secondary School “Mihail Sadoveanu” Întorsura Buzăului	63	1335	0%	92%
Secondary School “Nicolae Russu” Sita Buzăului	36	582	0%	97%
Dobârlău Secondary School	18	236	8%	92%
Post-secondary school “FEG Education” Târgu Secuiesc	4	102	85%	6%
TOTAL	250	5033		

So, in total in the school year 2023-2024 in Covasna County there were 9 educational institutions teaching exclusively in Romanian, totalling 250 classes with 5033 pupils.

Covasna County also has a number of mixed schools, i.e., educational institutions with sections or classes taught in both Romanian and Hungarian, according to the following table:

Name of unit	Hungarian language			Romanian language			TOTAL PUPILS	LOCAL ETHNICITIES	
	Class	Students	%	Class	Students	%		%HU	%RO
Sfântu Gheorghe Crèche	14	317	83%	3	66	17%	383	67%	21%
Kindergarten with Extended Program “Benedek Elek” Sf. Gheorghe	7	141	77%	3	43	23%	184	67%	21%
“Csipike” Extended Program Kindergarten Sfântu Gheorghe	7	169	75%	3	57	25%	226	67%	21%
“Gulliver” Extended Program Kindergarten Sfântu Gheorghe	11	218	85%	2	38	15%	256	67%	21%
“Hóféherke” Sf. Gheorghe Pre-Primary Kindergarten	8	178	80%	2	45	20%	223	67%	21%
“Manócska” Kindergarten Târgu Secuiesc	20	376	85%	3	67	15%	443	85%	6%
Covasna Kindergarten No. 1 Covasna	7	155	65%	4	82	35%	237	60%	31%
“Kőrösi Csoma Sándor” High School Covasna	32	663	67%	19	324	33%	987	60%	31%
Art High School “Plugor Sándor” Sfântu Gheorghe	19	407	71%	12	163	29%	570	67%	21%
Technological High School “Apor Péter” Târgu Secuiesc	17	386	80%	5	94	20%	480	85%	6%
“Puskás Tivadar” Technical High School Sfântu Gheorghe	36	784	95%	3	43	5%	827	67%	21%
Secondary School “Ady Endre” Sfântu Gheorghe	17	273	64%	11	155	36%	428	67%	21%

Name of unit	Hungarian language			Romanian language			TOTAL PUPILS	LOCAL ETHNICITIES	
	Class	Students	%	Class	Students	%		%HU	%RO
Secondary School "Avram Iancu" Covasna	3	48	16%	14	257	84%	305	60%	31%
"Benkő József" Secondary School Braduț	25	335	41%	22	476	59%	811	65%	5%
Bölöni Farkas Sándor Secondary School Belin	8	90	16%	24	470	84%	560	29%	27%
Secondary School "Comenius" Brețcu	13	185	66%	10	95	34%	280	73%	23%
Secondary School "Gábor Áron" Chichiș	5	51	65%	5	27	35%	78	51%	45%
Secondary School "Gödri Ferenc" Sfântu Gheorghe	15	292	86%	2	47	14%	339	67%	21%
Secondary School "Mikes Kelemen" Zagon	17	225	46%	17	260	54%	485	64%	18%
Secondary School "Romulus Cioflec" Araci	4	41	3%	63	1358	97%	1399	5%	32%
Tatrangi Sándor Secondary School Ozun	22	349	94%	3	21	6%	370	79%	13%
Secondary School "Turóczi Mózes" Târgu Secuiesc	21	353	81%	8	83	19%	436	85%	6%
"Váradi József" Secondary School Sfântu Gheorghe	38	934	84%	9	179	16%	1113	67%	21%
Secondary School Hăghig	3	22	6%	18	320	94%	342	19%	45%
Secondary School No. 1 Zăbala	24	353	81%	7	81	19%	434	64%	18%
Special Secondary School Sfântu Gheorghe	33	251	83%	6	52	17%	303	67%	21%
TOTAL	426	7596	65%	278	4903	35%	12499		

In the school year 2023–2024 there were, as we can see, 26 mixed educational institutions in Covasna County, comprising 426 classes with Hungarian language teaching – 7596 pupils, and 278 classes with Romanian language teaching – 4903 pupils.

In Covasna County, **Hungarian-only schools** grew significantly after the turbulent times following the revolution in Romania, both in terms of numbers and in terms of resources, mainly due to external funding. After 1989, these institutions were reorganized in such a way that Hungarian pupils were separated from Romanian pupils and Hungarian-only schools were formed.

Compared to Romanian schools in the area, they are less crowded and better equipped. In Hungarian (also) Hungarian-language schools, the provision of classrooms, sports halls and computers is above the Transylvanian average. In these schools, 17.7 pupils form a class, compared to the Transylvanian average of 18.8. In terms of sports halls and sports fields, 166 pupils can use a sports hall in Hungarian-language schools, compared to the Transylvanian average of 211 pupils. In terms of computer facilities, on average 12 pupils have access to a computer in Transylvanian (also) Hungarian-language schools.

Data processed by Erdélystat do not include equipment used by the administration and teachers. The counties of Covasna, Harghita and Mureş have a significantly better situation (10 pupils/computer) than the other areas of Transylvania, as this indicator is 13.8 in regions with dispersed population (e.g., Banat) and 13.5 in Northern Transylvania.

As regards the IT infrastructure of schools (also) teaching in Hungarian, it can be said that almost 10% of schools did not have internet access in the 2018/2019 school year, especially in rural schools (11.8%) and small towns (4.8%), affecting 1.4% of all pupils in Transylvania studying in Hungarian and 3.5% of pupils attending rural schools (MTI – May 6)¹⁰².

In the following, I will highlight statistical data on the structure of **exclusively Hungarian schools in Covasna County**.

Name of unit	Hungarian language		LOCAL ETHNICITIES	
	Class	Students	%HU	%RO
National High School “Nagy Mózes” Târgu Secuiesc	31	753	85%	6%
“Székely Mikó” National High School Sfântu Gheorghe	48	1204	69%	19%
“Cimbora” Kindergarten Baraolt	9	194	87%	3%
Economic High School “Berde Áron” Sfântu Gheorghe	16	394	69%	19%

¹⁰² Edupedu Staff, „Școlile maghiare din Transilvania sunt mai puțin aglomerate și mai bine dotate decât media din România – MTI” [“Hungarian schools in Transylvania are less crowded and better equipped than the average in Romania”], in *Edupedu*, May 7, 2021, Available at: <https://www.edupedu.ro/mti-scolilemaghiaredintransilvania-sunt-mai-putin-aglomerate-si-mai-bine-dotate-decat-media-din-romania/>, Accessed on March 10, 2025.

Name of unit	Hungarian language		LOCAL ETHNICITIES	
	Class	Students	%HU	%RO
Pedagogical High School "Bod Péter" Târgu Secuiesc	15	335	85%	6%
"Baróti Szabó Dávid" Technological High School Baraolt	18	397	87%	3%
Technical High School "Gábor Áron" Târgu Secuiesc	22	533	85%	6%
Reformed Theological High School "Dr. Csiha Kálmán" Târgu Secuiesc	15	332	85%	6%
Reformed Theological High School Sfântu Gheorghe	21	508	69%	19%
High School "Mikes Kelemen" Sfântu Gheorghe	41	1051	69%	19%
Secondary School Antos János Reci	14	253	94%	3%
Secondary School "Apor István István" Sânzieni	29	527	92%	1%
Secondary School "Bálint Gábor" Catalina	19	267	90%	2%
Secondary School "Bartha Károly" Boroşneu Mare	22	368	90%	2%
Secondary School "Bem József" Lemnia	12	171	93%	2%
Secondary School Bibó József Brateş	11	118	95%	2%
Secondary School "Borbáth Károly" Vârgheş	9	131	92%	0.60%
Secondary School "Czetz János János" Ghidfalău	13	134	90%	2%
Secondary School "Darkó Jenő" Dalnic	8	108	98%	0%
Secondary School "Dr. Gelei József" Arcuş	9	115	98%	5%
Secondary School Fejér Ákos Micfalău	11	150	93%	2%
Secondary School "Gaál Mózes" Baraolt	39	654	87%	3%
Secondary School "Henter Károly" Bodoc	17	245	90%	3%
Secondary School "Horn Dávid" Comandău	7	65	89%	8%
Secondary School "Jancsó Benedek" Ghelintă	34	608	92%	1%
Secondary School "Kálnoky Ludmilla" Valea Crişului	14	234	92%	1%

Name of unit	Hungarian language		LOCAL ETHNICITIES	
	Class	Students	%HU	%RO
Secondary School "Kelemen Didák" Mereni	9	112	96%	1%
Secondary School "Kicsi Antal" Turia	18	333	94%	1%
Secondary School "Konsza Samu" Băţanii Mari	21	372	79%	1%
Secondary School "Kriza János" Aita Mare	12	151	91%	8%
Secondary School "Kun Kocsárd" Ojdula	16	300	84%	4%
Secondary School László Lukács Ilien	8	99	79%	14%
Secondary School "Mikes Ármin" Bixad	12	179	91%	3%
Secondary School "Molnár Józsiás" Târgu Secuiesc	28	431	85%	6%
Secondary School "Nagy Mózes" Estelnic	10	128	91%	1%
Secondary School "Néri Szent Fülöp" Sfântu Gheorghe	25	530	69%	19%
Secondary School "Orbán Balázs" Moacşa	8	93	94%	2%
Secondary School "Petőfi Sándor" Târgu Secuiesc	20	431	85%	6%
Secondary School "Tökés József" Malnaş	11	116	88%	5%
Secondary School "Trefăn Leonárd" Poian	13	177	96%	0.50%
Secondary School "Végh Antal" Cernat	26	438	96%	1%
TOTAL	741	13739		

Analyzing the data provided by the Covasna County School Inspectorate¹⁰³, we observe that there are 40 educational institutions in the county with Hungarian-only teaching, totaling 741 classes and 13739 pupils. Thus, in Covasna County in the school year 2023–2024, Covasna County had 31271 pupils, 21335 of them in Hungarian language classes (68%) and 9936 (32%) in Romanian language classes. We note that one third of the pupils studied in classes taught in Romanian, the county having a Romanian community totaling 23%; the remaining 73.2% were Hungarians and 5.1% Roma. Of these 32%, 16% studied in schools taught exclusively in Romanian and 16% in mixed schools.

¹⁰³ Reply address of the Covasna County School Inspectorate no. 12 R.S. /28.06.2024.

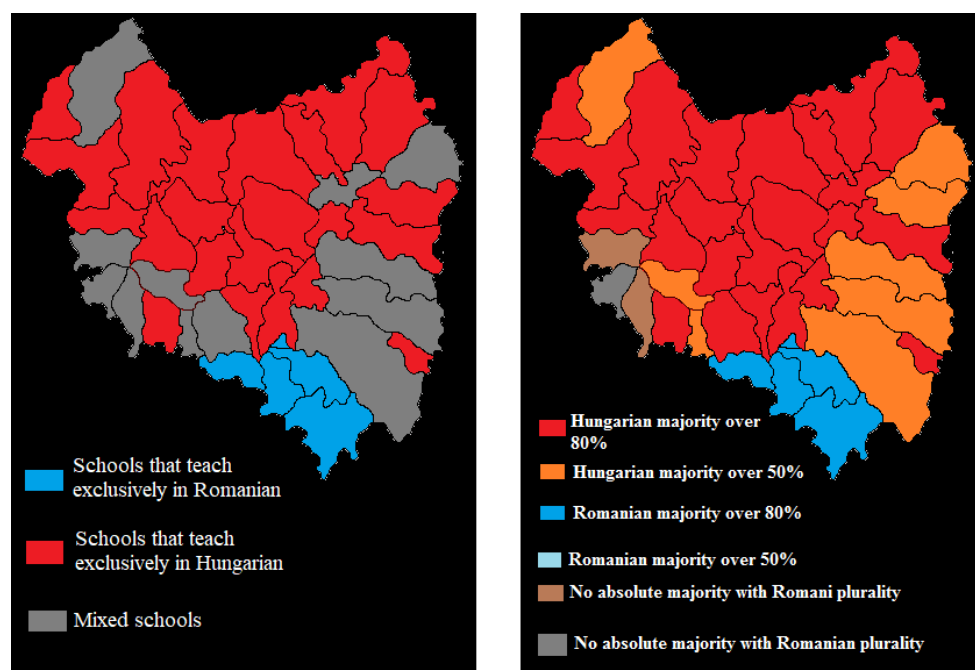


Fig. 1 – Map of types of schools next to the ethnic map of Covasna County.

In order to better understand the context of school organization in this region, it is important to remember that after the events of December 1989, by decisions of the central public administration, some schools were reorganized, classes were either abolished or moved, so that currently the National College “Mihai Viteazul” Sfântu Gheorghe; with Hungarian language the National High School “Szekely-Miko” Sfântu Gheorghe; “Mikes Kelemen” Theoretical High School Sf. Gheorghe; “Nagy Mozes” National High School Târgu Secuiesc and in other cases, such as the “Berde Áron” Sfântu Gheorghe Economic High School, a newly established institution, it did not include classes taught in Romanian. In the case of technological educational institutions, especially in the case of the economics high school, we can see how the chances of some Romanian students to study economics and to follow a career in this field are severely limited, as they are forced either to move to another city (*e.g.*, Braşov) or to change their preferences, giving up this career.

As a particular analysis regarding the situation of classes and the number of pupils in Sfântu Gheorghe municipality, we observe that in the county’s capital, Romanian pupils study in 115 classes, both in exclusively Romanian and mixed schools, with a total of 2221 pupils (21%), while Hungarian pupils study in 356 classes with a total of 7651 pupils (79%). The demographic proportion is similar to these percentages, with 21% Romanians and 78% Hungarians living in the city.

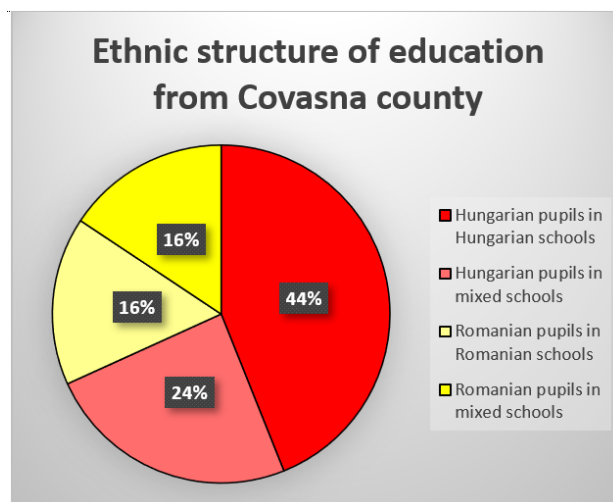


Fig. 2 – Types of schools in Covasna County expressed in percentages.

Although the school structure from a linguistic point of view seems proportional, when it comes to the number of students and classes, the pressing problems remain the lack of teachers who choose in ever decreasing numbers to settle in these counties, the number of students decreasing from year to year and the lack of facilities and modernization of buildings in which Romanian schools operate¹⁰⁴. One such case is the National High School “Mihai Viteazu” in Sfântu Gheorghe whose modernization has already been dragging on for several years, the first deadline for completion being October 2021, but because it does not have enough classrooms available due to renovations, the institution’s activity has been divided into five different buildings in the city¹⁰⁵. Due to the delay in the work on the boarding school building, students from other localities studying at the CNMV, who needed accommodation, are also suffering. They, too, are shared in boarding schools in other schools in the city.

4. SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF THE FIGURES PRESENTED

The analysis of the statistical data presented in the previous chapter allows an in-depth understanding of the demographic and educational dynamics of the

¹⁰⁴ Cătălin Dumitru, „Harghita si Covasna – doua zone crepusculare pentru limba română” [“Harghita and Covasna – two crepuscular areas for the Romanian language”], in *Curentul*, September 14, 2001, Available at: <https://www.curentul.info/actualitate/harghitasicovasnadouazonecrepusculare-pentru-limba-romana/>, Accessed on March 19, 2025.

¹⁰⁵ Iulia Drăghici-Taras, „CNMV se împarte în cinci clădiri, din cauza întârzierilor la lucrările de renovare” [“CNMV splits into five buildings due to renovation delays”], in *Covasna Media*, October 14, 2022, Available at: <https://covasnamedia.ro/educatieactualitate/cnmvseimparte-in-cinci-cladiri-din-cauza-intarzierilor-la-lucrările-de-renovare>, Accessed on March 19, 2025.

Romanian community in Covasna County. In the context of an accentuated educational segregation after 1990 and of a significant disproportionality in terms of access to resources and school infrastructure, the figures reflect the complex socio-cultural reality, which is deeply unbalanced to the disadvantage of the Romanian community. The synthetic elements of analysis presented below highlight the concrete effects of the ethnic policies applied in the last decades, supported by sociological theories and in-depth studies on marginalization, stigmatization and the subtle mechanisms of ethnic and cultural assimilation, thus providing a detailed picture of the present and future identity challenges and risks for the Romanian population in this area:

a) Ethnic disproportionality in access to educational resources

Hungarian-only schools benefit from superior infrastructure (sports halls, computers), indicating an unequal distribution of educational resources, politically and financially supported from outside and locally by the RMDSZ and the Hungarian government. Thus, there is a significant difference between Hungarian and Romanian schools, which are underfunded and overcrowded.

b) Accelerated demographic decline and school segregation

Although Covasna County has a Romanian community of about 23%, and there are many areas of cultural interference, only 16% of Romanian pupils attend Romanian-only schools. This reflects an intense socio-political and cultural pressure, which encourages either the migration of Romanian pupils to other counties or the renunciation of the Romanian linguistic identity by enrolling children in Hungarian schools, forcing assimilation.

c) Institutional isolation and marginalization of Romanian schools

In the county seat of Covasna, Sfântu Gheorghe, Romanian pupils have only 115 classes compared to 356 for Hungarian pupils. Out of these 115 classes, 59 are in exclusively Romanian schools, these being only two (National College “Mihai Viteazul” and Technological High School “Constantin Brâncuși”) and the remaining 56 classes in mixed schools. At the same time, Hungarian pupils in Sfântu Gheorghe have a total of 356 classes, of which 151 in exclusively Hungarian schools. The average proportion of Hungarian pupils in mixed schools is 80.27%. These figures clearly denote the local segregation policy, whereby Romanian pupils have been artificially concentrated in a few units, while Hungarian pupils have diversified access to numerous school units.

d) Pressures on Romanian identity and community

According to the data analysis and previous sociological studies, school segregation is not just an administrative choice, but part of a broader policy of supporting the “Hungarian ethnic reproduction rate”¹⁰⁶. This policy leads to the stigmatization of the Romanian community and to the creation of a social climate that contributes to the migration of young Romanians, which amplifies the Romanian demographic and community decline.

e) Accelerated linguistic and cultural assimilation

The strong phenomenon of “ethnic subsumption” is reflected in the fact that many mixed families in the county choose to register their children as Hungarian, even if one of the parents is Romanian. This indicates the constant cultural pressure on the Romanian population, which faces stigmatization and gradual loss of its own linguistic and cultural identity.

f) Vulnerability of Romanian schools in rural communities

The rural communities with Romanian population (Barcani, Dobârlău, Valea Mare) are in a fragile situation, reflected in the constantly decreasing number of pupils. The demographic decline and the lack of support from central and local authorities lead to the imminent risk of the closure of Romanian schools, thus aggravating the decline of Romanian communities.

g) Latent inter-ethnic tensions and school segregation

The current educational structure maintains and even accentuates latent inter-ethnic tensions. The mixed schools, although numerically important, are numerically dominated by Hungarian classes, marginalizing the Romanian classes as numerically and logistically minority.

h) Implications for the future of the local Romanian community

Demographic and sociological data suggest that, if current policies continue, the Romanian community in Covasna will suffer a significant decline both numerically and culturally. The long-term impact includes a drastic reduction in the Romanian presence and influence in the region, with direct consequences for the preservation of community identity and cohesion.

¹⁰⁶ Radu Baltasiu, *Slăbirea comunității românești din Harghita-Covasna*, [“The weakening of the Romanian community in Harghita-Covasna”], Bucharest, Ethnological Publishing House, 2013, p. 11.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The challenges of the pre-university education system in Covasna County are not only caused by the general demographic decline existing in Romania as a whole, but also by a particular situation of the region: an accelerated and deliberate decline caused by the processes of Hungarianization, marginalization and institutional and social discrimination against the Romanian community and the Romanian language. Official statistical data confirm the disproportionate decrease in the Romanian school population in comparison with the Hungarian population, which reflects a systematic policy of eroding Romanian education and, implicitly, Romanian identity in the area¹⁰⁷. Hungarian schools benefit from more consistent local community support, the involvement of local authorities, mostly run by ethnic Hungarians, in equipping these schools, financial support from Hungary for some Hungarian institutions, while Romanian schools rely more on the support of the central government and county level institutions (Prefecture, School Inspectorate).

One of the most pressing problems remains the lack of teachers willing to settle in Covasna County. The phenomenon is accentuated in scientific disciplines such as mathematics, physics, computer science and foreign languages, where it has become increasingly difficult to attract Romanian tenured teachers. In their absence, Romanian departments sometimes survive with substitute teachers brought in from long distances or with classes taught by teachers from other specialties. This situation affects the quality of education and, indirectly, the motivation of Romanian families to stay in the area: when there are no teachers in some key subjects, parents wonder whether it would not be better for their children to continue their studies in a city outside the county, such as Brasov or Bucharest, where the educational offer is richer.

In conclusion, in Covasna County, Romanian-language education is maintained by a small number of schools dedicated exclusively to this community and by sections scattered in mixed schools, while Hungarian-language education dominates numerically and institutionally. There is a fragile balance where both communities retain the right to education in their mother tongue, but with notable quantitative differences and distinct challenges: the Romanian minority struggles to maintain its identity and school network in an environment where it is numerically inferior, while the local Hungarian majority seeks to develop its own educational institutions autonomously, while ensuring that they are an integral part of the national education system.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

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