Who speaks for the Romanian diaspora in the UK? Anatomy of a report that mislays its own community

By Adrian Cherciu, 3 July 2026

One-page summary, and why I wrote it

The subject. In June 2026, ACORD UK, founded in 2025, and Bournemouth University published *The Romanian Diaspora's Contributions to the British Economy and Society*, endorsed by both countries' ambassadors and billed as the first comprehensive account of the Romanian diaspora in the UK. My critique tests it against its own standards: apolitical, evidence-based, rigorous. It fails all three within a day of hostile reading. Every claim below is sourced in the full critique.

What the critique finds.

- The headline population claim double-counts. "Over 1.3 million Romanians granted status" counts grants, not people: the report's own figures yield roughly 1.06 million unique grantees, against a census count of 557,554. The report never runs its own correction.
- The fiscal headline sets £2.399bn of Income Tax and National Insurance against two legacy benefits draining to zero by design, omitting Universal Credit and every expenditure item a net fiscal method requires.
- The flagship employment superlative is an unadjusted artefact: an 80.4% rate for a population 78% aged 20 to 49, never age-standardised, drawn from combined Romanian and Bulgarian data.
- The history has a hole more than a century wide. Documented Romanian presence runs fourteen decades, from Moses Gaster's expulsion in 1885 to King Michael's English exile; the report gives the king one clause. A register I ran from 2006 to 2019 held 112 profiles, fifteen of this critique's figures and two future authors of the report among them.
- The report omits every dataset its opponents use: the annulled 2024 Romanian election and the 70 to 75 per cent diaspora vote for George Simion; imprisonment near 130 per 100,000 against a national 143, far below parity once age structure counts; the trafficking-victim figures; the 73 per cent post-Brexit collapse in Romanian student numbers.
- Its authors hold no mandate from the community they claim to advise; no conflicts register, no limitations section, no verifiable peer review.
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What the report gets right. Its NHS chapter is careful, its COVID-19 agriculture study honest, its data-gap complaints legitimate. The critique concedes each, because a critique that concedes nothing is advocacy too.

Why I wrote it. I have lived in Britain for 25 years. I built some of the community's early infrastructure, the websites, guides and the register above, and campaigned for Romanian working rights through the 2007-2013 restriction years. I want this community documented, celebrated and defended, which is why the report alarms me: weak claims collapse under scrutiny and take true ones with them. I applied the test its opponents will apply. Better a friend runs it first. My interests are declared inside the critique.

What should happen next. Commission the census cross-tabulation of birth country by passports held, so the naturalised majority stops vanishing from the data. Adopt a real net fiscal method or drop fiscal headlines. Give any successor report the hard chapters, elections, imprisonment, hate crime, written by people the community mandated, interests declared.

The full critique follows, with sources for every claim on this page.

The critique in full

In June 2026, the Advisory Council on Romanian Diaspora in the UK (ACORD UK) and Bournemouth University published *The Romanian Diaspora's Contributions to the British Economy and Society*, endorsed inside its own covers by the Romanian ambassador to London and the British ambassador to Bucharest. The British ambassador calls it the first comprehensive account of the Romanian diaspora in the UK, and declares that we now have, for the first time, the hard data to prove the community's contribution. Both claims are wrong, and the ways in which they are wrong reveal a document with four structural failures. It claims to represent a community it never consulted. It measures that community with instruments that systematically delete its most successful members. It presents a history that begins, for all practical purposes, in 2014, erasing fourteen decades of Romanian presence in Britain and the seven hardest years of the modern community's life. And it refuses to look at any event, dataset or episode that complicates the celebration, which leaves it unable to do the one job it sets itself: countering the hostile narrative.

None of this means the report is worthless. Its NHS chapter is careful. Its COVID-19 agriculture case study is honest about exploitation. Several of its data-gap complaints are legitimate. But a report that positions itself as the evidence base for government policy on half a million people has to be judged by academic standards, and by those standards it fails. What follows sets out where, and why it matters.

1. The representative claim

ACORD UK was founded in 2025. The report describes it as an independent, apolitical organisation, then states two paragraphs later that it exists to advance the interests of the Romanian community. Those two descriptions cannot both hold. Interest advocacy is a legitimate activity. Disinterested research is a legitimate activity. An organisation must choose which one it is doing in a given document, and this document never chooses.

The deeper problem is the phrase "advisory council". Political theory has a precise vocabulary for what ACORD is doing. Michael Saward calls it the representative claim: an actor stands up and asserts that it speaks for a constituency, and the claim only acquires legitimacy if the constituency, not merely the audience, accepts it. The audience here is two governments, whose ambassadors supply the endorsements. The constituency is 550,000 or more people who were never surveyed, never balloted, and never consulted through any methodology the report discloses. There is no membership figure. There is no account of community consultation. There is no evidence that the dozens of organisations, churches, weekend schools, media outlets and networks the report itself inventories were asked to review, contribute to, or endorse the claims made on their behalf.

A body of ten accomplished professionals is entitled to publish research. It is not entitled, on the strength of a 2025 founding date and a self-chosen name, to present itself as the community's advisory voice, and a rigorous report would have acknowledged that distinction in a single honest paragraph. This one does not.

Nor does the report explain how its ten contributors were chosen, and selection is itself a representative act. A media chapter produced with no visible involvement from veterans of the BBC's own Romanian broadcasts, and an entrepreneurship chapter whose author credentials, like its company examples, are asserted rather than evidenced, are editorial choices. The executive summary offers "leading experts in their fields" as a substitute for methodology, with no way for any reader to test the claim. A body advising governments in a community's name owes readers the basis of its choices, and this one supplies none.

The firstness claim compounds the problem. The report's own footnotes refute it. Ruxandra Trandafoiu, one of the report's authors, published *Diaspora Online: Identity Politics and Romanian Migrants* in 2013. The University of Nottingham Rights Lab published detailed studies of Romanian and Bulgarian workers in UK agriculture in 2021. The Migration Observatory has produced briefings on this population for over a decade. The Foreign Office itself ran a blog series titled *Romanian stories in Britain* in 2015, written by the then British ambassador to Romania. Community organisations compiled directories, guides, and registers of Romanian public figures in Britain years before ACORD existed. A first comprehensive account this is not. It is a synthesis, arriving late, of ground prepared by others, and it nowhere says so.

2. The citizenship blind spot: how the data delete the successful

Here is the report's most consequential measurement failure, and it is one the report glimpses once and then abandons.

Almost every headline dataset in the document is defined by nationality. HMRC payroll data: Romanian nationals. NHS workforce data: Romanian nationality recorded in the Electronic Staff Record. EU Settlement Scheme data: Romanian nationals. Professional registers: nationality captured at registration. Now consider what naturalisation does to a person in these datasets. The day a Romanian-born resident becomes a British citizen, she vanishes from every one of them. Her payroll record moves to the British column. Her NHS record moves to the British column. Her company directorship reads British at Companies House.

The report itself states that around 100,000 Romanians acquired British citizenship over the last decade. Home Office statistics show Romanian was the second most common EU nationality granted British citizenship in 2023, with 6,335 grants, behind only Italian. And naturalisation is not a random sample of the community. It requires at least five years of residence, settled status, application fees running well over a thousand pounds per adult, an English language requirement and the Life in the UK test. The people who clear those hurdles skew settled, established, employed, home-owning and high-earning. In other words, the nationality-based datasets do not lose Romanians at random. They lose, every single year, a slice drawn disproportionately from the top of the distribution: the consultants, the directors, the founders, the senior engineers, the people who arrived in 2001 or 2007, built careers and businesses, and took citizenship a decade ago.

Think about what this does to the report's own numbers.

Payroll. Romanian payrolled employments fell from 400,100 in December 2019 to 349,700 in December 2025. The report calls this stabilisation. It never decomposes the fall into genuine departures versus naturalisation, even though naturalisation alone, at the report's own figure of roughly 100,000 over a decade, could account for a large share of it. A count that mechanically shrinks as its subjects succeed is not a count of decline. The report treats it as one, or rather refuses to analyse it at all.

Median pay. The report compares Romanian median monthly pay of £2,427 with the UK median of £2,555 and presents near-parity as an achievement. The comparison is biased downwards. Long-tenured, high-earning Romanians exit the Romanian PAYE series through naturalisation, which drags the measured median below the true earnings of the Romania-born population. The real convergence story is stronger than the one told, and the report lacks the method to see it.

The NHS. The recorded Romanian workforce in NHS England more than doubled in nine years, from 3,098 in June 2016 to 6,575 in June 2025. That figure is a floor, not a count. Every Romanian-born nurse or doctor who naturalised has left the series while continuing to treat patients. The growth rate is suppressed by the same outflow. The report's NHS chapter, its most careful, never mentions this.

Entrepreneurship. Chapter 6 does notice the problem, once. It describes a £58m construction group whose founders appear at Companies House as British because they naturalised, and calls this the clearest illustration of the central problem. It is. And then the insight is quarantined in that chapter. It is never applied to the payroll series, the pay comparison, the NHS series, the fiscal estimate, or the headline population narrative. A systematic bias affecting every nationality dataset in the document is treated as one chapter's anecdote.

The illustrative cases are not hypothetical. Sir George Iacobescu, born in Bucharest, spent three decades building Canary Wharf, one of the largest development projects in British history, and was knighted for it. He appears in no dataset of Romanian nationals. Nelly Miricioiu sang leading roles at Covent Garden for decades. Alina Cojocaru ranks among the finest ballerinas Britain has hosted. Dana Denis-Smith, Romanian-born, spent a decade as a journalist before qualifying at Linklaters, founded Obelisk Support and the First 100 Years project, holds an OBE, and was elected this year to the Law Society of England and Wales's presidential ladder: deputy vice president from October, president in 2027, the eighth woman to hold the office. The nationality lens the report relies on renders every

naturalised member of the community statistically nonexistent, and then the report proceeds to describe the community's professional profile using the residue.

The second generation deepens the hole. Children born in the UK to settled Romanian parents are British citizens from birth. They appear in no nationality dataset and no country-of-birth dataset. The category's most famous member is a household name: Emma Raducanu, daughter of a Romanian father, won the 2021 US Open at eighteen as the first qualifier in history to take a Grand Slam title, and was voted BBC Sports Personality of the Year. She exists in no Romanian dataset and on no page of the report. The report claims, without a source, that second-generation Romanians achieve high educational attainment, three chapters after conceding that no clean data on Romanian-speaking pupils exist and that attainment research is thin and outdated. Both statements cannot be true, and only one of them is honest.

There was a straightforward fix available. Census 2021 recorded passports held alongside country of birth. A cross-tabulation of Romania-born residents by passport held would quantify the naturalised cohort directly. The report even prints the two headline figures side by side (538,840 Romania-born; 550,298 Romanian passport holders) without performing the analysis that would begin to separate the populations. For a document whose flagship recommendation is better data harmonisation, failing to run the one available harmonisation is difficult to excuse.

3. Counting failures the report performs on itself

The naturalisation blind spot shrinks the community's measured achievements. The report's other headline moves inflate its measured size, and the tension between the two goes unremarked.

Grants are not people. The Key Findings state that the 2021 Census figure of 557,554 Romania-born residents is likely an underestimate because over 1.3 million Romanians hold some form of EUSS status. The report's own Chapter 1 figures dismantle this. Settled grants (660,763) plus pre-settled grants (724,515) total 1,385,278 grants, of which 324,740 settled grants went to people already counted in the pre-settled column. Unique persons ever granted status: roughly 1.06 million. From that figure subtract everyone who has since left the UK or died, because cumulative status counts never shrink. The report prints the correcting numbers and never performs the correction, and its own Figure 2 warns that these measures are not additive, one page after the Key Findings treat them as if they were.

The departure question is not speculative. ONS long-term migration statistics for the year ending December 2025 identify Romanian as the single most common EU nationality emigrating from the UK, almost all of them EUSS status holders. A report on this community that never engages with outflow, churn, or return migration is describing a photograph and calling it a film.

The fiscal claim. The report's Chapter 3 takeaway asserts that Romanians' fiscal contributions considerably exceed benefit entitlements. What the chapter actually shows is £2.399bn in Income Tax and National Insurance for 2019/20 set against £184m in tax credits and £172m in Child Benefit. That comparison omits Universal Credit entirely, and the report itself explains that claimants were migrating from tax credits to Universal Credit in exactly that period, which is why HMRC discontinued the series. The benefit side of the ledger was draining to zero by administrative design while the tax side was fully counted. It also omits housing support, health and education costs, and every other item in a net fiscal calculation of the kind the Migration Advisory Committee and others have published methodologies for. The defensible claim, that direct tax receipts dwarfed two legacy family payments in one pre-pandemic year, is real and useful. The claim as written will be taken apart by the first hostile analyst who reads it, and the community will pay the reputational cost of the overreach.

The proxy problem. The report's most repeated superlative, that Romanians are the most economically active migrant group, rests on an EU2 figure combining Romania and Bulgaria, and on an 80.4% employment rate that is never age-standardised. A population in which 78% of people are aged 20 to 49

will post high employment and negligible retirement against any population containing pensioners, as a matter of arithmetic rather than virtue. The claim might survive age-standardisation in weakened form. The report never runs the test, and promotes the unadjusted figure from a caveated chapter statistic to an uncaveated identity claim in the Foreword.

Curated absences. Section 2.6 reports 2,435 Romanian students in UK higher education in 2024-25 as a neutral fact. The context: enrolment stood at 10,830 in 2019-20, when Romania ranked fifth among EU sending countries, and at 8,915 as recently as 2021-22. The post-Brexit collapse in fees eligibility and loan access cut the number by 73% in three years. Presenting the wreckage as a stock figure, uncited, in a contributions report, is not analysis. It is curation. The same section counts Romania's professors and researchers in Britain at 2,000 on the authority of unnamed Romanian foreign-policy reporting, when HESA publishes academic staff nationality data every year, and the section names not a single working Romanian scientist, not even Sandu Popescu, the Romanian-born Bristol physicist and Fellow of the Royal Society whose scheme enabled one of the first experimental demonstrations of quantum teleportation and whose name is attached to an entire class of quantum correlations. The same technique governs the bilateral trade section, where £10.3bn of state-to-state trade is presented under diaspora key findings with no causal mechanism connecting the diaspora to the trade, and the claim that Birmingham hosts the largest Romanian community outside London, derived from EUSS application counts directly beneath the report's own warning that EUSS applications do not measure resident populations. The census, printed on the same page, shows Harrow at 21,082 residents and Birmingham at 12,238.

Anonymity without a stated reason. The report's entrepreneurship chapter presents its flagship examples namelessly: a social-housing specialist, a Birmingham food wholesaler, a £58m construction group, each described in detail, none named. Anonymity in research is legitimate when it is declared and reasoned, sources at risk, subjects who asked for privacy, a stated editorial policy. The chapter declares nothing, so the reader cannot tell protection from evasion, and the practical effect is uniform either way: not one example can be checked, and the chapter's evidential weight rests entirely on trust in authors whose credentials the report asserts rather than evidences. And the chapter never runs the one analysis its own subject invites: established Romanian contractors act as training grounds whose managers leave to found the next generation of firms, a genealogy traceable through Companies House officer histories, employment records and company biographies, and exactly the study a report on Romanian entrepreneurship should have commissioned in place of anonymised anecdotes.

4. Eight decades before the datasets: the history the report skips

The report's historical narrative gives Queen Marie of Romania four paragraphs, King Charles III's affection for Transylvania three, and King Michael I exactly one subordinate clause, a passing note that royal relations stayed warm after his forced abdication in 1947. Between that abdication and Romania's EU accession in 2007, the report has almost nothing to say, beyond a single parenthesis noting that Ion Rațiu founded a cultural association in 1965. Sixty years of Romanian life in Britain, and the most consequential UK-Romania story of the twentieth century, compressed into a bracket and a clause.

And the erasure reaches back past the bracket's opening edge. Romania's first great export of minds to Britain came in the late 1800s, driven out by the antisemitic persecution the Romanian state then practised. Moses Gaster, expelled from Romania in 1885 for protesting the treatment of Jews, became Hakham of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation, the senior Sephardi rabbinic office in Britain, held it for three decades, presided over the Folklore Society, and hosted at his London home, in February 1917, a conference that helped set in motion what became the Balfour Declaration. Solomon Schechter, born in Focșani, taught rabbinics at Cambridge and from 1896 retrieved the Cairo Genizah, nearly two hundred thousand manuscript fragments that remain the largest such collection on earth, held at Cambridge to this day under his name. David Mitrany, born in Bucharest, reached England before the First World War, wrote for the Manchester Guardian, trained at the London School of Economics and founded functionalism, the theory of international cooperation that later shaped the institutional logic of

European integration. And the engineers came with the scholars. Henri Coandă, later the namesake of the aerodynamic effect, served as chief designer at the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company, the Bristol planemaker, from 1912; George Constantinescu, the Romanian engineer who founded the theory of sonics, spent his working life in Britain, where his fire-control gear synchronised the guns of British fighter aircraft through the First World War. Hold that Mitrany thought still: the intellectual architecture of the union whose 2007 enlargement created this diaspora was partly drafted by a Romanian in London.

The same wave's grandchildren reach into the present. Jack Bercowitch, a Romanian Jew, arrived in London in 1900 aged sixteen, worked as a gas fitter, became a furrier and opened a shop; his grandson John Bercow served as Speaker of the House of Commons from 2009 to 2019, the first Jewish holder of the office, presiding over the chamber through the entire Brexit crisis that redefined every Romanian's legal status in Britain. Peter Solley, another grandson of Romanians, played keyboards for Procol Harum and Whitesnake and produced Motörhead's Grammy-nominated 1916. None of these men, from the Hakham to the Speaker, appears anywhere in the report.

Now take the king, because his story contains, in one life, the war record, the Windsor ties, the betrayal, the English exile and the origin of the migration this report tries to count.

On 23 August 1944, Michael, aged 22, summoned Marshal Ion Antonescu to the palace, had him arrested when he refused to break with Germany, and announced Romania's switch to the Allied side that evening. Germany lost the Ploiești oilfields, its principal source of crude oil, and its Balkan front collapsed. The assessment his obituaries repeated, and which the City of London later placed on formal record, is that the coup shortened the European war by at least six months and saved hundreds of thousands of lives. Both emerging superpowers decorated the young king: Truman with the Legion of Merit, Stalin with the Soviet Order of Victory, of which Michael died the last surviving holder. Tens of thousands of Romanian soldiers then fell fighting the Wehrmacht through Transylvania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

What Romania received in return was decided seven weeks later, and not at Yalta, where popular memory places it. In Moscow in October 1944, Churchill wrote out on a half-sheet of paper a division of south-eastern Europe: 90 per cent Soviet predominance in Romania, against 90 per cent British predominance in Greece. Stalin ticked the paper with a blue pencil. Churchill, by his own memoir account, called it the naughty document and offered to burn it, lest posterity think matters so fateful to millions had been settled so casually. Stalin told him to keep it. Yalta, four months on, added a declaration promising free elections which the Soviets ignored within weeks: in early 1945 Stalin's deputy foreign minister Vyshinsky arrived in Bucharest and forced Michael, by ultimatum, to install the communist-led Groza government. The November 1946 election was rigged. Greece got the British intervention the half-sheet promised. Romania got the other side of the page.

The Windsor thread runs straight through this. Michael was a great-great-grandson of Queen Victoria and a third cousin of Elizabeth II; his mother, Helen of Greece, was Prince Philip's first cousin. As a teenage prince in the late 1930s he received the Royal Victorian Order in the grade of Grand Cross, the British sovereign's personal order of chivalry. In November 1947 he travelled to London for Elizabeth and Philip's wedding, and at the celebrations met Princess Anne of Bourbon-Parma, his future wife. Barely six weeks later, back in Bucharest, he was handed a pre-typed abdication and, by his account, told that a thousand of his countrymen held by the regime would be shot if he refused. He signed, was stripped of citizenship and property, and left with almost nothing. Philip later stood godfather to Michael's daughter and heir, Margareta.

Britain repaid him formally, if late. In April 2011 he attended Prince William's wedding and, the following day, signed London's Freedom Book at Guildhall; two weeks later a sixty-strong City of London delegation travelled to Bucharest to confer on him the Freedom of the City of London, an honour whose recipients include Nelson Mandela. Sir Gavyn Arthur, a former Lord Mayor, told him the 1944 coup stood as "one of the greatest achievements of any monarch" and that many in the room owed him their existence. At Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee lunch at Windsor Castle in 2012, the official photograph

placed Michael at the Queen's right hand. In November that year, London marked his seventy-five years as a holder of the Royal Victorian Order, longer than any other king, with a service in the Order's own chapel led by the Queen's chaplain, at which his coat of arms was installed, the first foreign sovereign so honoured, and a dinner attended by the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester on the Queen's behalf.

The exile that followed ran through England, which is exactly why it belongs in this report. For six years, until 1956, the family lived at Bramshill House in Hampshire and at Ayot St Lawrence in Hertfordshire, where the man who had turned Romania against Hitler ran a market garden and raised chickens to support his family. He later worked as a test pilot for the company that became Learjet, founded an electronics firm in Geneva and worked for a brokerage. He said the West had "dropped me like a hot potato".

The final act closes the loop on this report's own subject. On Christmas Day 1990, Michael landed in Bucharest on a Danish diplomatic passport with a 24-hour visa; the post-communist authorities stopped him and put him back on a plane. His 1992 visit drew around a million people onto the streets of Bucharest, after which the government barred him again. Citizenship returned only in 1997, and he spent the years that followed touring Western capitals to campaign for Romania's admission to NATO, achieved in 2004, and to the EU, achieved in 2007. The 2007 accession is the event that created the modern Romanian diaspora in Britain. The man who lobbied for it, a cousin of the British sovereign who once farmed chickens in England, receives one clause in the diaspora's flagship report. When he died in December 2017, tens of thousands filled Revolution Square and the Prince of Wales attended the state funeral. On the centenary of his birth in November 2021, his daughter Margareta, received by Elizabeth II at Windsor the previous day, dedicated a bronze bust of him in London; among the guests stood Sir George Iacobescu and Nelly Miricioiu, two naturalised Romanians whom this report's nationality datasets cannot see.

The chain from that October 1944 half-sheet to the arrivals hall at Luton is short, and British policymakers reading a report on Romanian migration deserve to have it spelled out. The percentages agreement delivered Romania to four decades of communism, the last of them Ceaușescu's austerity of the 1980s, which exported the country's food while its people queued for rations and left its institutions and economy in ruins by 1989. The wreckage of the transition decade did the rest. Mass Romanian migration to Britain is, in meaningful part, downstream of a division of Europe a British prime minister sketched in Stalin's office. The report's Background chapter concedes that historical legacies contributed to waves of emigration, and declines to name a single one of the events. A document written to help British authorities understand why half a million Romanians live in Britain owes them the actual answer, including Britain's part in it.

Nor was the king the first Romanian to choose Britain over dictatorship. In 1940, Viorel Tilea, Romania's envoy to London, chose exile rather than serve the regime taking power at home, and founded a free Romanian movement in the city. Vera Atkins, born in Galați, became the intelligence officer of SOE's French section, despatching agents into occupied France from Baker Street and spending the years after the war tracing the fates of those who did not return; Britain appointed her CBE. The BBC Romanian Service began broadcasting in 1939 and ran until 2008, nearly seven decades in which London was one of the few places on earth transmitting uncensored news into Romania, staffed by exiles. Miron Grindea arrived in London in 1939 and edited the ADAM International Review from the city for over four decades, a one-man literary bridge between Romania and the English-speaking republic of letters.

Ion Rațiu deserves far more than a parenthesis. He arrived in London in 1940 as a young diplomat, refused to serve the new regime, and spent the next half-century building the institutional spine of the exile: the Cultural Association of Romanians in England in 1965, the Ratiu Family Foundation in 1979, the leadership of the World Union of Free Romanians from the mid-1980s. In 1990 he went home, stood for president, took a little over 4 per cent against Ion Iliescu, and gave Romanian democracy its most quoted definition of tolerance, a promise to fight to his last breath for your right to disagree with him. His son Nicolae chairs the foundations that the ACORD report lists by founding date, stripped of the story.

The exile of 1947 and after scattered Romania's professional and aristocratic classes westward, and Britain received its share. Șerban Cantacuzino, whose mother settled in England with her children in 1939, went through Winchester and Cambridge, became executive editor of the Architectural Review, served as secretary of the Royal Fine Art Commission for more than a decade, took a CBE in 1988, and founded Pro Patrimonio, the national trust for Romania's built heritage, from London. Princess Marina Sturdza, carried out of Romania at the age of three in the year after the King's forced abdication, spent decades as a deputy president of the British Romanian Chamber of Commerce and a patron of UK-founded charities working in Romania. Anne-Marie Martin, whose family fled Romania when she was six and settled in Britain in 1972, rose through British business institutions and was profiled by the British ambassador to Romania himself in the Foreign Office's own 2015 series on Romanian stories in Britain, a series whose fourth instalment handed its platform to Emi Gal, the Bucharest-born founder of the London advertising-technology firm Brainient. The British state, in other words, was documenting these biographies, from chamber leadership to technology founding, a decade before ACORD existed and a decade before ACORD's technology chapter presented the ground as under-researched.

The arts ran through the same channel, and one Bucharest piano teacher, Florica Musicescu, whose pupils included Dinu Lipatti, sent three of them into British musical life. Mindru Katz, Bucharest-born, recorded the Emperor Concerto under Barbirolli in 1959 and played the Proms in September 1964. Radu Lupu, trained by Musicescu in Bucharest and by Heinrich Neuhaus in Moscow, won the Leeds International Piano Competition in 1969, made his Proms debut at the Royal Albert Hall on 25 August 1970, playing Brahms's first concerto with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, returned to the Proms seven more times between 1971 and 1996, and made London his home for decades while critics ranked him among the greatest pianists alive. When the 2016 New Year Honours appointed him CBE for services to music, a prominent critic argued in the British press that the honour undersold him and a knighthood was owed.

The third Musicescu pupil is the one the report's own publishers walk past. Constantin Silvestri had led Romania's three principal orchestras before leaving for the West, and made his UK debut at the Royal Albert Hall in 1957. In 1961 he took over the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and, in eight years, turned a provincial ensemble into an orchestra of international standing, taking it to the Edinburgh Festival and on its first European tour, and cutting recordings still in print today. He became a British citizen in 1967, one more Romanian who vanished from the Romanian column at the moment of his greatest contribution, died of cancer in 1969, and lies buried in St Peter's churchyard, Bournemouth, under an epitaph reading "an outstanding musician and a remarkable man". A historical marker to him stands in the town centre. Nor was he Bournemouth's only Romanian podium. Nicolae Moldoveanu, trained at the Royal Academy of Music under, among others, George Hurst, the conductor who had steadied the orchestra after Silvestri's death, served the Bournemouth orchestras as Arts Council Young Conductor from 1994 and as Resident Conductor from 1996. A report on Romanian contributions to Britain, co-published by Bournemouth University, contains neither conductor's name.

The erasure runs into the present, and it compounds. In April 2026, the pianist Alexandra Dariescu, who came to Britain at seventeen on the scholarship that bears Silvestri's name, announced her forthcoming Proms debut, scheduled for 5 August 2026 with the Hallé, as making her only the second Romanian pianist in the festival's history, after Lupu. The Proms performance archive says otherwise: Katz played there in 1964, and she will be at least the third. She did not invent the error; she inherited it, and the institutions positioned to catch it amplified it instead. Within a day of her announcement, the Romanian Cultural Institute in London, the state body charged with promoting Romanian culture in Britain, celebrated her as "following in the footsteps of the legendary Radu Lupu", the lineage told with Katz nowhere in it. Katz has been forgotten so completely that the claim passed unchallenged at every level, and a claim nobody can falsify is exactly what erasure produces. It is the cultural twin of what naturalisation does to the report's datasets. Of the musicians in this chain, the ACORD report names only Dariescu, the one still visible.

Every thread in this section then converges in one woman the report also fails to name. Maria Björnson, born in Paris in 1949, grew up in London as Maria Prodan, daughter of Mia Prodan de Kisbunn, a Romanian diplomat stranded stateless by the communist takeover, whose employment at Romania's Paris embassy ended with King Michael's forced abdication, and whose brother spent twenty years in the Gulag. Mia reached London in 1950, penniless, tubercular, with a baby in her arms. Ion Rațiu and his English wife Elisabeth took the child in for two years while her mother recovered, and again in her teenage years. Mia cleaned floors at the BBC until her languages were noticed, then spent 1952 to 1963 broadcasting to Romania on the BBC's Romanian service. The daughter, descended on the Romanian side from the director of the Romanian National Theatre and from Maria Cuțarida-Crătunescu, the first woman in Romania to practise medicine, became a theatre designer, rated by a late-1980s survey of her peers as Britain's most inspired.

In 1986 she designed the sets and costumes of The Phantom of the Opera, its half-mask and its falling chandelier included, the visual identity of what is routinely described as the most financially successful stage production in history, and took the Tony Awards for both set and costume design. She had been stateless her whole life; only in 1987, over her mother's objection, did she take British citizenship, because Mia wanted them both to remain stateless in protest at the Ceaușescu regime. She gave tens of thousands of pounds to Romanian charities, funded Romanian writers, and died in London in 2002, buried at Kensal Green beside her mother. Consider what the datasets make of her: never Romania-born, never a Romanian national, stateless and then British, a Norwegian surname over a Romanian childhood in the Rațiu household. Every instrument the ACORD report relies on records her as nothing at all, and the report, faithful to its instruments, says nothing about her.

The stage and the stadium tell the same story at every register. Angela Gheorghiu has headlined at the Royal Opera House since her debut there in 1992; her 1994 Traviata under Solti was judged so remarkable that the BBC cleared its television schedule to broadcast it. At the other end of the scale, the first Romanians millions of Britons could actually name were the Cheeky Girls, twin sisters from Cluj whose 2002 novelty single reached number two, and whose reception, affectionate and mocking in equal measure, is itself a document of how Britain saw Romanians before accession. In 2024, Tottenham Hotspur paid the fee that made the defender Radu Drăgușin the most expensive Romanian footballer in history. A report containing an entire chapter on soft power found room for none of this, and none of them.

Then there is the complicated case, which an honest history must include precisely because it is complicated. Octav Botnar was born in Czernowitz on the eve of the First World War, in a city that became Romanian Cernăuți when he was five. Imprisoned twice by Romanian regimes, a veteran of the French Resistance, expelled westward in 1966, he arrived in Britain and in 1970 founded Datsun UK in Worthing. He built it into Nissan UK, the most successful car importer in the country, with over 200 dealerships, and played a documented role in persuading Nissan to put its European factory in Sunderland, a plant that still employs thousands. When his daughter Camelia was killed in a car crash in the 1970s, he poured his fortune into philanthropy: the Camelia Botnar Foundation training disadvantaged young people in Sussex to this day, and millions to Great Ormond Street Hospital, which named a wing after him. In 1991 the Inland Revenue raided his company alleging enormous tax fraud; two of his executives were jailed; Botnar fled to Switzerland, paid £59 million in settlement while protesting his innocence, sued the Revenue for malicious prosecution, and died in 1998 before any court heard him. Villain, victim, builder, benefactor: historians can argue. What is beyond argument is that one of the largest Romanian-born figures in postwar British business history goes entirely unmentioned in a report about Romanian contributions to the British economy.

And one omission is personal to the report's own evidence base. Chapter 13 cites the Romanian Film Festival in London as something that "started in 2003" and grew over two decades, with a 2025 edition at the Curzon Soho and in Colchester. No founder is named. The festival was created in 2003 by Ramona Mitrică, a former cultural attaché who went on to direct the Romanian Cultural Centre, and she built it across twenty editions largely on private money and personal effort through Profusion

International, supported by community sponsors, websites and volunteers. She died in London in February 2024, weeks after the festival's twentieth anniversary edition at the Curzon Soho, and the 2025 edition the report cites is her successors carrying her festival forward. A report on the soft power of the Romanian diaspora that harvests her festival as evidence while erasing her name, twice over, as founder and as the two decades of unpaid labour behind the thing being counted, has not understood what soft power is or where the community's actually came from.

The same erasure applies across the board. The Romanian-language websites, forums and free guides that oriented tens of thousands of new arrivals through the hostile years. The volunteer-maintained registers of Romanian achievement in Britain, one of which ran from 2006 to 2019 and carried, at its 2016 rebuild, 112 profiles across ten fields, thirty of them in science and research, already listing Gaster, Mitrany, Tilea, Atkins, Coandă, Constantinescu, Silvestri, Botnar, Björnson, both Rațius, Iacobescu, Miricioiu, Cojocaru, Marinca and Dariescu, along with two future authors of the ACORD report itself. The protests, the petitions, the lobbying between 2007 and 2014. The report's Chapter 10 correctly observes that Romanian community organisations lack funding, professional structures and visibility. It never asks why an academic-diplomatic body founded in 2025, with university funding and two ambassadors' blessings, found it easier to obtain a platform in one year than the community's own organisations managed in twenty. The answer would be uncomfortable, and the question is the honest one.

Why does this matter beyond piety? Three reasons. First, the exile generation built the institutions the report harvests as evidence, and a document that lists ACARDA, the Ratiu Foundation and the Romanian Cultural Centre by date, while erasing the political exile that created them, has converted resistance history into furniture. Second, the pre-1989 presence proves the community's British roots run to the 1880s, which demolishes the framing, shared by the tabloids and, inadvertently, by this report, that Romanians in Britain are a post-2014 phenomenon. Third, British authorities reading a report about this community deserve to know that London was, for fifty years, one of the capitals of free Romania, because that is the deepest people-to-people tie the two countries have, and the report claims people-to-people ties as its central theme.

5. The locked-out years, 2007 to 2013, and the forecasting fiasco

Between 2007 and the end of 2013, Romania was inside the EU but Romanians were locked out of the UK labour market. Transitional restrictions required worker authorisation documents, confined most legal employment to quota schemes in agriculture and food processing, and left self-employment as the main open route. The report describes the consequence, a community pushed into Construction Industry Scheme self-employment, and even coins a phrase for it, forced entrepreneurial learning. What it strips out is the politics: seven years in which Romanians in Britain were, in law and in daily practice, second-class Europeans, and in which community organisations, campaigners and volunteers fought for equal working rights while almost no institution spoke for them.

The report also never examines the media war conducted against this community, despite naming the countering of negative narratives as one of its core purposes. The evidence exists and is quantified. The Migration Observatory's corpus analysis of nineteen national newspapers in the year before restrictions lifted found over 4,000 items and 2.8 million words about Romanians and Bulgarians, with the word Romanian collocating most strongly with gang, criminal, thief, squatter and beggar, and tabloid verbs of scale running to flood and flock.

The bleak joke is that British culture already knew better. In 2005 the BAFTA for best television actress went to Anamaria Marinca, a Romanian in her first screen role, for playing a trafficked Eastern European woman in Channel 4's Sex Traffic, a series that swept eight BAFTAs. Two years later she carried the Palme d'Or-winning 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days, and she went on to the National Theatre stage and a leading role in a BBC miniseries. British institutions gave their highest honours to a Romanian for

dramatising exploitation in the same decade British newsrooms monetised contempt for Romanians at industrial scale, and the report examines neither half of the equation.

And the report never audits the forecasting record of that period, which is the single most instructive policy episode available to it. The government refused to publish any official forecast of post-2014 arrivals. Into the vacuum stepped MigrationWatch, predicting 50,000 arrivals a year from Romania and Bulgaria, a figure that dominated press coverage. The opposing camp, fronted by the Migration Matters campaign, predicted a peak of 20,000 a year and accused MigrationWatch of crying wolf. On 1 January 2014, Keith Vaz MP went to Luton Airport to greet a plane from Romania that turned out to be three-quarters full of workers returning from Christmas at home, shook hands with a bemused young man named Victor Spirescu, and the day's commentary settled into mockery of the predicted flood that never came. The outcome embarrassed everyone. In the year to September 2015, over 200,000 Romanians and Bulgarians registered for National Insurance numbers, and by 2018 there were over 400,000 Romanians in Britain, a figure that exceeded even MigrationWatch's supposedly alarmist projection for the two countries combined. Spirescu, celebrity for a day, washed cars, moved into construction, and died in a road accident in England in early 2018. And within months of that January morning, the BBC had put the reckoning on primetime television: Tim Samuels' documentary The Great Big Romanian Invasion, BBC One, 2014, retraced the panic against the reality it missed. Print had got there first: Sam Knight's long report from the Marble Arch sweeps and the villages of Romania, The Roma of Park Lane, ran in British GQ's January 2014 issue, the month the controls lifted, humanising the Roma the tabloids ran as a scourge. The raw material for an honest audit of the whole episode has sat in the national broadcaster's archive and on the magazine racks for over a decade. The report used none of it.

The lesson for British authorities is direct: when the state declines to produce serious estimates, pressure groups and photo opportunities set the terms of debate, and everyone, restrictionist and liberal alike, ends up wrong. A report that wants to inform migration policy should have written that chapter. Instead, it repeats the pattern, publishing population claims built on double-counted status grants that will not survive contact with a competent critic.

6. The licensing of hostility, 2009 to 2025

The negative picture the report says it wants to correct is not an abstraction. It is a documented sequence of events, and the report engages with none of them.

In June 2009, over 100 Romanian Roma, roughly twenty families including around fifty children, were driven from their homes in South Belfast by four days of sustained attacks: windows smashed, doors kicked in, racist slogans daubed, death threats made against infants. They sheltered first in a church, which was itself then attacked, and afterwards in a leisure centre under police escort. The Northern Ireland authorities ended up paying for flights back to Romania for those who gave up on Britain entirely.

In May 2014, months after restrictions lifted, the leader of the UK Independence Party told a national radio audience that people would be right to be concerned if a group of Romanian men moved in next door, and, asked what distinguished Romanian neighbours from German ones, replied that you know what the difference is. His party then took out a full-page national newspaper advertisement defending the remarks, citing a claim that 92 per cent of ATM crime in London was committed by Romanians. The same politician, asked that year who should be allowed into Britain, answered with people who do not have HIV. This was not fringe material. It came from the man who went on to lead the largest vote share a far-right party has ever taken at a British general election, and the community it targeted, by name, was this one.

Days after the 2016 referendum, police-recorded racially and religiously aggravated offences jumped by over 40 per cent year on year, and a Romanian-run food shop in Norwich was firebombed, an attack answered by local residents raising tens of thousands of pounds for the owners, decency and menace in the same week.

And in June 2025, twelve months before this report went to print, riots erupted in Ballymena after two Romanian-speaking teenagers appeared in court. Crowds attacked the homes of Roma and Romanian residents over successive nights, families fled, some households pinned signs to their doors advertising their nationality in the hope of being spared, and a leisure centre sheltering the displaced in Larne was set on fire. Sixteen years, almost to the week, after Belfast 2009, and the report, published the following June, does not contain a sentence about it.

This is the section British authorities most needed and did not get. A community-safety chapter would have compiled the hate-crime record, the police-recorded data, the Northern Ireland pattern, and the welfare edge of the same story: Greater London's rough-sleeping database has for years recorded Romanian nationals as the largest non-UK group on the capital's streets, and in December 2017 the High Court ruled unlawful a Home Office policy of detaining and deporting EU rough sleepers, a policy that had fallen heavily on Romanians. Safeguarding, policing and cohesion policy all need this material. A report that instead offers policymakers a highlights reel has confused public relations with public service.

7. The elections the report will not discuss

The report praises Romanians in the UK for voting abroad in large numbers and credits community organisations with staffing polling stations. It omits both of the episodes that define the subject.

The first is November 2014, when thousands of Romanians queued for hours outside understaffed polling stations in London and across Western Europe and were turned away when polls closed. The scandal brought protesters onto the streets, forced the resignation of two Romanian foreign ministers within a fortnight, and swung a presidential election. It is the founding trauma of modern diaspora politics, it happened on British soil among the report's own subjects, and the report's chapter on democratic participation does not mention it.

The second is the crisis of 2024-25. Romania's Constitutional Court annulled the 2024 presidential election over a Russian-linked social media influence operation conducted substantially on TikTok. In the May 2025 rerun, George Simion took an estimated 70 to 75 per cent of the diaspora vote in the UK, Italy, Germany and Spain in the first round, on record diaspora turnout, before losing the runoff to Nicușor Dan. The report devotes a chapter to diaspora vulnerability to disinformation and a section to societal resilience in hybrid war, and never mentions the largest hostile information operation ever run against Romanian voters, nor how the community it describes actually voted when targeted by one. Worse, its Chapter 12 praises the integrity of the Romanian voting system as a source of citizens' trust in state institutions, written after that system's flagship election was annulled, then contradicts itself paragraphs later by attributing low civic engagement to deep institutional distrust.

A report willing to discuss the diaspora's political behaviour only when the behaviour flatters is not an evidence base. It is a press release with footnotes.

8. The hard cases a representative body must argue

A body claiming to represent a community must be able to argue that community's difficult cases, because opponents certainly will. The report ducks every one.

It recommends government capacity-building on modern slavery while never presenting the National Referral Mechanism data showing Romanians among the top five nationalities referred as potential victims, data that would strengthen its own recommendation. It never engages the foreign national offender statistics that hostile commentary is actually built on. It never presents the attainment data for Roma pupils, the community's most disadvantaged children. It offers no analysis of the roughly 413,000 Romanians still on pre-settled status, how many remain in the country, and what their attrition means. It

ignores the rough-sleeping data entirely. You cannot counter a narrative you refuse to look at. The report's blanket policy of excluding any statistic in which Romanians appear in difficulty leaves it unable to defend the community precisely where the community is attacked.

One worked example shows what engagement would have cost: almost nothing. Ministry of Justice data cited in a National Audit Office disclosure, released to a member of the public researching "criminal asylum seekers", show 10,321 foreign nationals in custody in England and Wales in June 2023, with Romanians at 7 per cent of the foreign prison population, roughly 700 people, remand included and nationality self-declared. Set against the 538,840 Romania-born residents of England and Wales at the census, that is a crude rate of roughly 130 per 100,000, at or below the general population's roughly 143, from around 86,000 prisoners in 60 million people. Now apply the report's own demographic finding. The Romanian-born population is 78 per cent aged 20 to 49 and half male, roughly double the general population's concentration in the groups that fill prisons everywhere, so a community carrying twice the demographic exposure while sitting at parity is imprisoning at far below the level its age and sex structure predicts.

The trend supplies the policy lesson. A 2013 Ministry of Justice disclosure records first receptions of Romanian nationals into prison at 1,508 in 2010, 1,990 in 2011 and 2,530 in 2012, climbing through the years when the law shut Romanians out of employed work. Receptions are a flow of new entries, not a population count, and the two measures cannot be divided into each other; what they show together is direction. Prison entries rose steeply while a small community was barred from the labour market, then a community several times larger settled at a custody rate at or below the national average once it could work lawfully. Shut a population out of legal employment and acquisitive crime follows; open the labour market and the prison figures normalise. The caveats cut the same way: custody counts include foreign nationals who never resided in Britain, and the NRM data show Romanians among the most trafficked nationalities, so some of the counted are victims prosecuted for coerced offences. And the stock is flat besides, 10,600 foreign nationals in custody in 2014, 10,321 in 2023, a decade of unchanged numbers while the Romanian resident population multiplied. That analysis took two public documents and a census table. The report, with a university behind it and a stated mission to counter hostile narratives, chose silence instead, leaving the field to the FOI requesters already mining it.

9. What a credible account would require

The elements are neither exotic nor expensive.

1. **Quantify the naturalised.** Commission the Census 2021 cross-tabulation of country of birth by passports held, and reconcile it with a decade of Home Office citizenship grants, to produce the first honest estimate of the full Romania-origin population, including the cohort every nationality dataset has deleted.
2. **Decompose the payroll decline.** Separate naturalisation outflow from emigration in the fall from 400,100 to 349,700 employments, using ONS emigration data that already identify Romanian as the leading EU nationality leaving the UK.
3. **A real fiscal method.** Net fiscal contribution using an established framework, both revenue and expenditure sides, age-adjusted, or no fiscal headline at all.
4. **A historical chapter worth the name.** From the expelled scholars of the 1880s, through Michael's coup and the percentages agreement, the exile institutions of 1939-1989, the locked-out years of 2007-2013 and the forecasting fiasco of 2014, to the settlement era, written so that policymakers understand two things: this community's British roots reach back to the 1880s, and its mass migration has British causes as well as Romanian ones.
5. **A community-safety chapter.** The hate-crime record from Belfast 2009 to Ballymena 2025, the Farage-era rhetoric that licensed it, the rough-sleeping and exploitation data, the imprisonment record with its per-capita arithmetic and receptions trend, and what police forces, councils and the Northern Ireland Executive should do with it.

6. **The elections, both of them.** The 2014 London queues and the 2024-25 crisis, with the diaspora voting data, however uncomfortable.
7. **A mandate.** A representative survey of the community, and documented consultation with the organisations, churches, schools and media that predate ACORD, before any further document claims to speak on the community's behalf.
8. **Declared interests and named reviewers.** A conflicts register, a limitations section, and peer review that can be verified. The current report has none of the three.

And all of it written by people willing to hold two true things at once: that this community has contributed enormously, and that it has also been exploited, misled, targeted and, in part, radicalised, and that it deserves an account of all of it.

Conclusion

The Romanian presence in Britain is not a twelve-year story. It is a story that runs from the scholars driven out by Romanian antisemitism in the 1880s, one to lead Britain's Sephardi Jews and one to carry the Cairo Genizah to Cambridge, from the sixteen-year-old of 1900 whose grandson would preside over the House of Commons, and from the Bucharest-born theorist whose functionalism helped shape the logic of the union that would one day carry half a million more, through the diplomats who chose London over dictatorship in 1940, through the king who shortened a war, lost his country to a half-sheet of paper and farmed chickens in England, through the exiles who kept a free Romania alive on the BBC's airwaves for seventy years, through the builders and physicians and artists who naturalised and vanished from the statistics, through the seven years of legal second-class status and the tabloid campaign that accompanied them, through Belfast and Norwich and Ballymena, to the settled families whose British-born children appear in no dataset at all. A report worthy of that story would treat the disappearance of the successful from the data as its central analytical challenge, credit the exiles and organisers who built the institutions it lists, confront the attacks it claims to counter, audit the forecasting failures it inherited, and earn, rather than assert, the right to advise governments in the community's name.

This report does none of that. It is a well-produced advocacy document with pockets of genuine care, undone by a representative claim without a mandate, a measurement framework that erases achievement, a history with a hole more than a century wide, and a policy of averting its eyes from every inconvenient number and every uncomfortable event. The community it describes deserves better. It spent most of a century proving it can build better for itself. Representation is earned. Evidence is a method.

Author's disclosure: the author founded some of the community websites, guides and registers of the 2000s described in the historical section, including the 112-profile register cited there, held in his archive.

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