

The philanthropic behavior of the Romanian Diaspora

A comparative analysis of the giving of the Romanian communities living in the US, UK, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Spain¹

Zoltán Levente Fejes (Research Center for Civil Society), Bogdan Mihai Radu (Babes-Bolyai University/Research Center for Civil Society Center for the Study of Democracy), Szilárd Bartok (Research Center for Civil Society), Maria Olariu (Center for the Study of Democracy)

Abstract

This study examines how Romanians living in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Spain engage in philanthropic activities, and compares their giving patterns with those of donors in Romania. It examines the frequency of diaspora members' donations, the causes of their support, the factors that motivate their generosity, and the barriers that limit sustained engagement. The research included a mixed-methods design that combines a quantitative survey of 1,861 respondents aged 18–55 with qualitative interviews and focus groups involving 44 participants across major diaspora cities such as Chicago, London, Berlin, Brussels, Barcelona, and Milan. By integrating these data with existing studies on giving and migration, the study offers a multidimensional perspective on Romanian transnational philanthropy. Findings reveal a strong culture of giving among diaspora members, influenced by factors such as income, trust, and emotional connection to Romania. Differences between host countries reflect local economic and cultural contexts, yet common themes include a preference for NGOs and social causes, as well as the importance of transparency and perceived impact in sustaining donor engagement. The study contributes to understanding how migration reshapes philanthropic practices and highlights the need for tailored strategies to foster long-term connections between diaspora donors and home-country initiatives. In doing so, it

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broadens current perspectives on transnational civic engagement and the evolving forms of solidarity within migrant communities.

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1. Introduction

The main goal of this study is to investigate the individual donation behavior of the Romanian diaspora living in the US, UK, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Spain, and, where possible, compare it with that of Romanian donors. The study aims to determine whom and how much the diaspora gives, how and why diaspora groups give to charities, and the key drivers, obstacles, and strategies of diaspora philanthropy. Understanding diaspora philanthropy is essential in the context of such a sizable population living outside the borders, especially one that maintains significant ties with the motherland. NGOs and community leaders benefit from understanding the trends in donations, psychological factors, trust mechanisms, and expectations that influence diaspora giving. Clarity regarding goals and challenges fosters effective partnerships between diaspora groups and local NGOs, amplifying social impact.

Research questions concern donation targets, amounts, and frequency; donation methods; motivations; and barriers to giving. The study also examines country-specific patterns and characteristics, variations among countries, and comparisons to Romanian donors. The scope includes six host countries plus Romania. Limitations arise from non-random sampling, the exclusion of non-donors, and demographic constraints. Differences in questionnaire items between Romania and diaspora samples also required recoding.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Overview of the Romanian Diaspora*

Romania's diaspora is estimated to be between 3.6 and 5.7 million people, making it one of the largest in the OECD (OECD 2019; MAE 2021). Migrants are concentrated mainly in Italy, Spain, Germany, the UK, Belgium, and the United States. They represent a crucial socio-economic actor through remittances, knowledge transfer, and civic engagement (Tiuț & Teacă 2023). Migration is driven primarily by employment and family reasons, though education is an increasing factor.

Education levels differ significantly by host country. In Italy and Spain, much of the diaspora has low or intermediate levels of education, while in Belgium, Germany, and the UK, larger shares of migrants are highly educated. In the US, more than half of the Romanian community has a university or postgraduate degree. Age structures also vary, with Germany showing a larger share of migrants aged 64 and older.

Romanian migrants are overrepresented in low-skilled jobs compared to native born and other foreign-born persons in OECD countries. Employment patterns differ by country. In Italy,

Spain, and the UK, Romanians are heavily concentrated in low-skilled occupations. For men, construction and manufacturing are major sectors. For women, health services, retail trade, education, and food and beverage service activities dominate (OECD 2019).

2.2. Place of Origin

The largest shares of emigrants come from the Northeast and South Muntenia regions. Bucharest is the leading county of origin, followed by Iasi, Prahova, Timis, Bacau, and Cluj. Counties with the smallest emigrant shares include Covasna, Salaj, Tulcea, and Mehedinți.

2.3. Global Generosity Context

The CAF World Giving Index shows that despite economic and humanitarian challenges; global generosity remains strong. The global index score of 40 is among the highest since 2021, with 73 percent of adults reporting that they helped a stranger, volunteered, or donated in the past month. This underscores the relevance of exploring giving behaviours in a large Eastern European diaspora.

2.4. National Differences in Philanthropy

Giving cultures vary significantly across the countries included in the study. The United States ranks among the highest globally in philanthropy, with individual giving exceeding 370 billion dollars annually. The UK has a long tradition of charitable giving, with about 70 percent of adults donating. Germany shows rising giving among younger adults. Belgium's giving focuses on health, humanitarian aid, and social justice. In Spain, nonprofits rely heavily on government funding, though individual participation remains steady. Italy shows declining donor participation, with donors primarily supporting medical research, humanitarian aid, and poverty relief. Romania ranks low globally, although 52 percent of urban adults made a donation in the past year (Fejes 2023).

2.5. Previous Studies on Philanthropy in the Diaspora

Few studies address philanthropy in the Romanian diaspora. Research in Țara Făgărașului identified employment, economic conditions, and education as drivers of migration and found that lack of information, low trust, and limited time are major barriers to philanthropic engagement (Cibian et al. 2019). Research conducted by the Romanian United Fund showed that donors in the US are motivated by helping others, moral principles, and perceived need, while barriers include low wages and lack of information (Scarlat 2022). These studies support the need for a broader comparative examination.

3. Methodology

The quantitative component of the study included 1,861 completed online questionnaires among Romanians aged 25 to 55 with at least secondary education living in the six diaspora countries. Questions covered past donations, frequency, type, amounts, motivations, preferred methods, and perceived barriers. The qualitative component consisted of 44 participants in focus groups and individual interviews conducted between May and July 2024.

Comparative analysis used data from the 2023 Individual Giving in Romania study (Fejes 2023). Quantitative analysis focused on statistically reliable segments with sample sizes above 100. Qualitative analysis used thematic coding to identify recurring themes and contextualize quantitative findings.

Table 1. Sample size by country

| Country | Sample size |
|---------|-------------|
| USA | 318 |
| UK | 300 |
| Germany | 312 |
| Belgium | 307 |
| Spain | 307 |
| Italy | 317 |

4. Findings

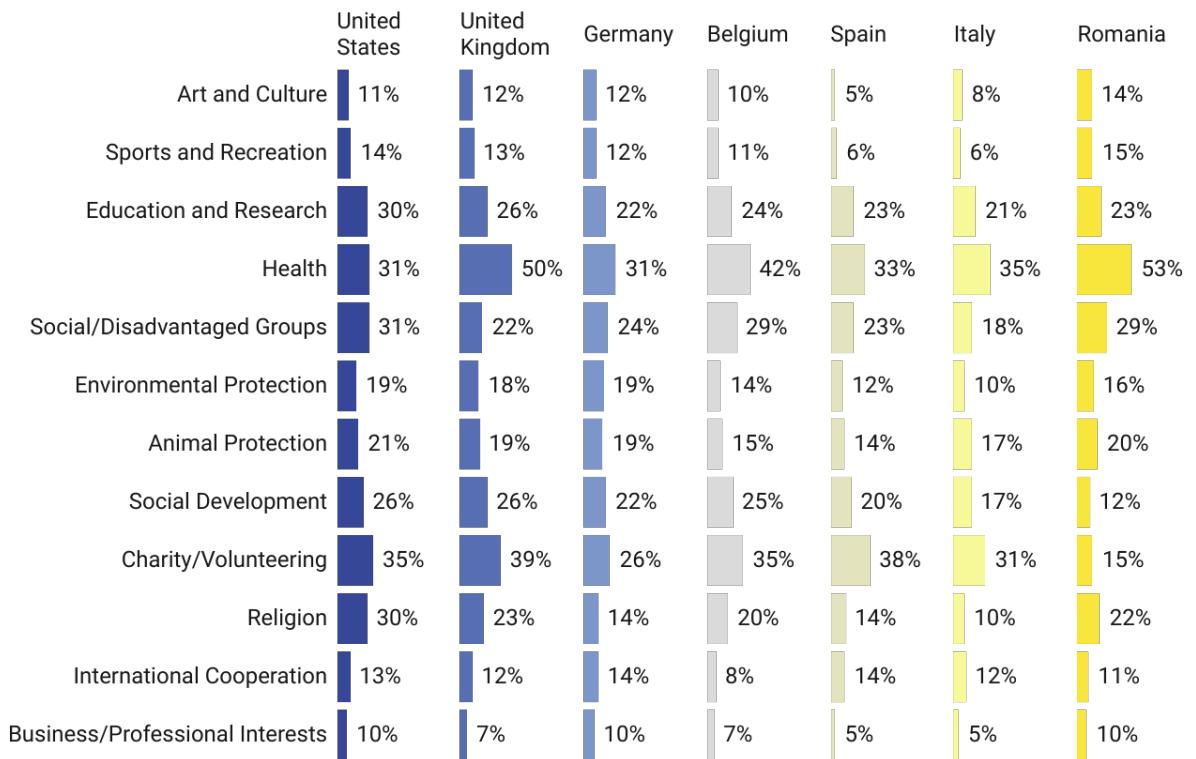
4.1. Philanthropic Engagement Levels

The diaspora's philanthropic engagement is high, with 72 percent of respondents donating in the past year or intending to donate. Key finding: The average annual donation is 780 euros—substantially higher than Romania's 61 euros. Nearly half donate between two and four times per year. Donors give about 868 euros annually, lapsed donors 686 euros, and intenders 410 euros. The preferred methods of donation provide additional insight beyond understanding donor motivation. Direct payments, such as online transfers, card payments, and cash donations, are most common. Donors favor digitized and direct donation methods. Lapsed donors are more likely to use SMS giving, event tickets, and workplace mechanisms, often associated with smaller amounts. Cash remains prevalent in the US, Spain, Belgium, and the UK.

4.2. Key Areas of Support

Most donors support causes in their country of residence. Notably, 36 percent also support Romanian causes, with the US diaspora being the most likely to donate to Romania. Main finding: Donors prioritize health, charity/volunteering, education and research, social services, and social development. NGOs and foundations are the primary beneficiaries, followed by individuals in need and hospitals. Religious giving is highest in the US and lowest in Spain and Italy.

Figure 1. Causes Supported by Country of Residence



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To understand what motivates diaspora giving, it is helpful to review insights from scientific literature. Eight key mechanisms drive charitable giving: awareness of need, solicitation of donations, costs and benefits, altruism, reputation, psychological benefits, values, and donation efficacy (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2010; Wiepking & Bekkers, 2011, 2012). These mechanisms interact differently depending on the donor, organization, and context. Donations are often driven by multiple motivations at once. Analysis of diaspora donors shows that trust, efficacy, and benefits are the primary drivers of donations. Key finding: In Spain, donation efficacy is highest (63.5 percent), followed closely by trust (62 percent) and psychological benefits (43 percent). Trust is crucial everywhere. In Spain, knowing the organization is as important as trusting it, while in the US, Belgium, and Germany, interpersonal trust is more significant. Institutional trust is more relevant in the UK, Spain, and Italy.

Efficacy-based motivations are significant, including the belief in one's ability to help or contribute to change. Compassion and moral duty are also common. While solicitation and recommendations are less influential in the diaspora, they are more relevant in Romania, where donors often rely on interpersonal trust networks.

Patterns of trust vary: Interpersonal trust is highest among donors in the US, Belgium, and Germany. Institutional trust, by contrast, is higher in Spain and Italy, while German and UK donors rely more on trust in the individual soliciting donations. Romanian donors have the lowest institutional trust and prefer recommendations from close contacts. Qualitative data

consistently show that trust is essential for motivating engagement across contexts.

Emotional connection with Romania, while quantitatively minor, emerges more strongly in qualitative interviews. US-based donors, for example, often articulate intensified nostalgic ties associated with their longer time abroad.

4.3. Socio-Economic Characteristics and Donation Behaviour

To explore correlations between socio-demographic factors and giving, the study examined education, income, age, and gender. Education was grouped into three categories to harmonize Romania and diaspora data: high school, university, and postgraduate. Across all countries except Spain, the highest share of donors has postgraduate education.

Higher education usually correlates with higher donation amounts, except in Italy, Spain, and the UK, where university graduates donate less than those with lower educational attainment, likely due to income constraints. Age-related giving patterns also differ in the US, Belgium, and Italy, younger respondents donate less, whereas in Spain and Germany, younger groups are more active donors. In Romania, both middle-aged and younger groups are the main donors. Gender differences remain small overall, but men donate slightly more in Romania and the US.

Income shows the strongest correlation with giving. Main finding: Across diaspora countries, higher income generally corresponds to more frequent or higher donations—although significance appears primarily in Spain. The UK and Germany have the highest donation rates among top-income groups, but also substantial giving among lower-income groups. Spain's top income bracket includes the highest share of donors, while Belgium and Italy have fewer donors in the top brackets. In the US, non-donors appear in both the lowest and the highest income brackets.

4.4. Barriers to Donations

Lack of Transparency is the most cited reason for stopping donations, mentioned by 47.7 percent of respondents. Main finding: This concern is most pronounced in Italy, Spain, the UK, and Belgium, and cuts across age and gender groups. US and German donors are less concerned about reporting requirements. In the US, legal issues are more important, while in the UK, changing priorities matter more. Visible impact is less of a barrier in Italy than in other countries.

Comparing blue-collar and white-collar workers, white-collar workers donate more frequently in every country except Spain. However, blue-collar workers show much higher intent to donate, especially in the US and Germany. White-collar workers still represent the majority of donors across all countries.

5. Donor Profiles

Across the six diaspora countries, donors share a similar socio-demographic profile: most

are men aged 36 to 45 with university degrees. They usually have medium to high incomes, though those in Italy and Spain tend to earn less. These characteristics align with donors in Romania and highlight the importance of socio-economic stability for sustained philanthropy. Lapsed donors tend to be younger men aged 25 to 35 with lower or unstable incomes. Although many hold university degrees, financial insecurity limits their ability to give consistently. Intenders, mostly women aged 36 to 45 with lower incomes, express willingness to donate but face constraints that prevent engagement.

Spain has more female donors, while Italy has more with only a high school education. In the US and UK, even lapsed donors are often from higher-income groups. These variations show local economic conditions shape donor makeup, yet the overall profile remains broadly consistent.

Donor characteristics closely match motivations and barriers. Middle-aged, financially stable donors prioritize trust, transparency, and impact, reinforcing engagement. Younger and lower-income donors, despite positive attitudes, are more likely to lapse

Table 2. Donors - Donated in the last 12 months and will donate in the future

| Country/SES | Age | Gender | Income | Education |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|--------|--------------------------|
| United States | 36-45 | Male (58%) | High | University |
| United Kingdom | 36-45 | Male (53%) | High | University |
| Germany | 25-35 & 36-45 | Male (55%) | High | University |
| Belgium | 36-45 | Male (52%) | High | University |
| Spain | 36-45 | Female (51%) | Low | University |
| Italy | 36-45 | Male (51%) | Low | University & High school |

6. Comparative Country Analysis

Comparing philanthropic behaviour across the six diaspora countries highlights how socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, and labour market structures shape giving. While certain patterns remain consistent, such as the centrality of NGOs and the importance of trust, each country displays distinct features that reflect the lived realities of Romanian migrants in those environments.

6.1. United States

Romanian migrants in the United States demonstrate the highest average donation levels, supported by higher household incomes and a strong philanthropic culture within American society. The US context is characterised by tax incentives, widespread nonprofit infrastructures, regular solicitation, and a cultural emphasis on voluntarism. Donors in the US display strong interpersonal trust in fundraisers, community leaders, and representatives of organisations. Religious giving is more common here than in all other diaspora countries, partly due to the organisational role of churches for Romanian communities. Long term

migrants often develop stronger emotional ties to Romania, reflected in higher levels of giving directed toward homeland causes. However, legal considerations and compliance requirements are also more salient barriers in the US than elsewhere.

6.2. United Kingdom

In the UK, donation amounts are moderate, and donors rely heavily on digital giving tools, reflecting the country's advanced online fundraising ecosystem. Institutional trust is relatively high, and donors prefer NGOs and hospitals. UK based donors emphasise the importance of clear communication and visible impact. Younger donors are active but donate smaller amounts. Giving to Romania is relatively stable even among longer term migrants, reflecting the UK's balanced labour market opportunities and diverse civic landscape.

6.3. Germany

Germany has one of the most structured civic environments, which shapes Romanian diaspora giving. Donation amounts are high, second only to the US. Germans prioritise transparency, ethical conduct, and well-established nonprofit organisations, and Romanian migrants adapt to these expectations. Support for families in difficulty and schools is also relatively strong. Donors have higher confidence that their contributions make a substantial difference. Religious giving is moderate, and interpersonal trust is more influential than institutional trust, echoing patterns in the US and Belgium.

6.4. Belgium

Belgian donors exhibit similar patterns to German donors but with slightly lower levels of engagement. Belgium's Romanian community includes many highly educated migrants working in European institutions and multinational organisations. Donation amounts are relatively high, and donors often contribute to multiple causes. Interpersonal trust plays a strong role. Family based or community-initiated campaigns receive substantial support, while institutional causes attract donors who seek structured programmes and long term outcomes. Giving to Romania remains notable among long term migrants.

6.5. Italy

Romanian migrants in Italy tend to have lower education levels, lower incomes, and less stable employment conditions. These constraints shape donation behaviour, with donors giving lower amounts on average. Despite this, institutional trust is relatively high, and donors strongly emphasise transparency and visible impact. Family and community networks remain important channels of information and solicitation. Religious giving is less common compared to the US, but support for hospitals and families in difficulty is relatively strong. Giving to Romania declines significantly with longer residence, reflecting deeper local integration and socioeconomic adaptation.

6.6. Spain

Spain shows the lowest donation amounts, due largely to lower incomes and a

younger migrant population. However, donors express strong trust in organisations and strong efficacy-based motivations, believing that their contributions can help others. Women are more likely to be donors than men, which distinguishes Spain from all other countries. Donors favour NGOs, health causes, and families in difficulty. Barriers include lack of transparency and concerns about the impact of donations. Giving to Romania is lowest in Spain and declines sharply with time.

7. The Influence of the Length of Stay on Donating Behavior

Length of stay is one of the strongest predictors of cross border giving. While new migrants often maintain strong ties to Romania, donating to causes linked to their home communities, giving to Romania decreases as migrants settle into their host societies.

In the US, long term migrants maintain relatively strong giving patterns toward Romania compared to other countries, though donations still decline over time. In the UK, the decline is modest, suggesting that UK based migrants can maintain homeland connections even while integrating locally. In Germany and Belgium, giving to Romania decreases moderately with length of stay. In Italy and Spain, the decline is steep, exceeding 20 percent. These patterns reflect differences in economic opportunities, social integration, and perceptions of Romanian institutions.

Length of stay also influences motivation. Newer migrants emphasise clear perceived need and compassion, while long term migrants emphasise efficacy, values, and psychological benefits. Transparency and ethical conduct grow increasingly important the longer migrants live abroad, indicating rising expectations shaped by exposure to host country nonprofit sectors.

8. Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Across all regions, NGOs/foundations are consistently the top recipients, followed by families in need, hospitals, and, in some contexts, religious organizations. This highlights NGOs as key beneficiaries of donations in all regions.

Belief in the power of contributions, coupled with transparent, accountable operations, underpins donation decisions. Trust is an underlying driver that transcends types of donors, with intenders and lapsed donors seeing it as central as donors. Indeed, trust seems to be more important than disposable income when deciding to support a certain cause. The centrality of trust can also be seen in the importance of transparency, in the absence of which donors withdraw.

Middle-aged donors lead in sustained giving. Given the decline in giving towards Romania correlated with the increase in time spent in the adopted country, NGOs need to adjust fundraising efforts to include younger generations of potential donors—who may be born and/or raised abroad—and who respond to different mobilization strategies than their parents. Not focusing on the younger generations carries significant risks both for NGOs and their beneficiaries.

While broad patterns hold, each diaspora community exhibits nuances shaped by the diasporan's own socio-economic "baggage," local social norms, economic conditions, and the strength of the Romanian community networks.

8.1. How significant is the philanthropic engagement of the Romanian diaspora and who are the donors?

The Romanian diaspora shows strong philanthropic engagement, with 72% identifying as active donors and about 15% each as lapsed donors and intenders. A quarter of donors give more than four times per year, reflecting the influence of host countries with stronger giving cultures and higher incomes. Donors are typically highly educated and between 35 and 45 years old, while younger respondents are more often intenders. Lapsed donors and intenders tend to have lower income and education levels.

Donation amounts vary: donors give an average of €868 annually, lapsed donors €686, and intenders €410. The highest levels, close to €1,000 per year, are found in the United States, Belgium, and Germany. In Italy and Spain, where incomes are lower, yearly giving ranges between €300 and €500. Education affects donation behavior largely through income, although many migrants remain overqualified for their jobs abroad.

Socioeconomic backgrounds also shape giving. Many migrants originate from lower-income Romanian regions, which influences both migration patterns and philanthropic habits. While host-country norms support stronger giving, first-generation migrants still carry the imprint of their origins. This context matters for fundraising strategies. Re-engaging lapsed donors is particularly effective because they already have a giving history and often pledge higher amounts than intenders, frequently exceeding €1,000 compared to under €300. Understanding these patterns helps organizations strengthen donor engagement and grow their donor base.

8.2. Who are the beneficiaries of donations and what mechanisms do donors use?

Across all six countries (and in Romania), most donors prefer giving to NGOs or foundations, with over half choosing them over other beneficiaries. Spain and Italy show the widest margins favoring NGOs, while over 40% of donors—rising above 50% in the US and UK—also help families or individuals in need. Churches attract about a quarter of donors, ranking third after hospitals and health institutions. Support for churches is highest in the US (around 40%) and lowest in Spain and Italy, where religion is nonetheless strong among migrants. Many donors support both NGOs and churches, suggesting overlapping giving patterns that merit further study on religiosity and engagement with faith-based institutions.

Health, volunteering, and education are the most supported causes, consistently ranking above religion. Most donors give locally (79%), though 36% also support projects in Romania. Digital payments dominate—mainly online transfers and card donations—while 10–20% use direct debit. Lapsed donors favor ad-hoc methods like SMS or workplace giving, linked to

smaller, impulsive amounts. Although digital giving is rising, cash remains common except in Italy and Germany. Linking donation methods to age and education could help organizations reduce barriers and tailor fundraising strategies.

8.3. What motivates donors to engage and why do they stop engaging?

Key motivations for donating include trust, perceived efficacy, empowerment, and emotional factors such as compassion and the 'warm glow' effect. These findings underscore the necessity for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to foster trust through transparent and ethical practices. A significant proportion of respondents (83%) consider long-term commitment to a single cause important, highlighting the centrality of sustained trust. Middle-aged donors (ages 36–45), who represent the largest segment with moderate-to-high incomes, prioritize trust, demonstrable outcomes, and alignment with personal values. Nearly half of respondents (48%) identify lack of transparency as a primary reason for discontinuing support, with insufficient visible impact and ethical or legal concerns also cited. This suggests that NGOs aiming to engage diaspora donors must enhance their professionalism. To advance understanding of the psychological and motivational drivers of giving, future research should gather more granular data on donors' values and belief systems, including social values, postmaterialism, and ideology. Although the present study addressed values and institutional trust, further analysis is required to elucidate how these factors influence donation behavior and to generate actionable recommendations.

8.4. How do donors relate to the motherland?

Even after more than a decade abroad, many still see Romania as "home," feeling a moral or emotional duty to support Romanian causes, especially those in the US, less so in Europe. Yet, the longer migrants stay abroad, the more they donate locally: 79% give to causes in their country of residence, compared to 36% who support Romania, with donations to Romania declining over time. This suggests rapid integration in host countries, though the supported areas remain like those in Romania.

Diaspora donors show only slight differences in cause preferences, with marginally higher support for progressive areas like arts, environmental protection, animal welfare, or international cooperation (under 5% difference). The main exception is social development and living conditions, which attract more than twice as much support abroad (compared to 12% in Romania), likely reflecting migrants' socioeconomic experiences. Data gaps remain on second-generation migrants and their connection to Romania, but younger donors (25–35) are often lapsed or potential donors who cite financial limits—an issue that diaspora organizations should consider when designing engagement strategies.

8.5. How do diaspora donors compare to donors living in Romania?

The top reasons for donating relate to trust, efficacy, empowerment, and emotions such as warm glow and compassion, showing the importance of transparency and ethical behavior for NGOs. A large majority, 83%, believe in supporting the same cause over time, emphasizing

sustained trust.

Middle-aged donors (36–45), the largest and higher-income group, prioritize trust, visible results, and alignment with personal values. Nearly half of respondents (48%) would stop supporting a cause due to lack of transparency, and many also cite lack of visible impact or ethical and legal concerns. These expectations underline the need for greater professionalization among NGOs working with diaspora donors. Future studies should include deeper exploration of donors' values and belief systems, as these shape motivations and could provide more actionable insights.

8.6. Country Variations

The observed socio-economic variations - patterns such as having a larger proportion of older donors in Italy, or extremely high-income donors in the US - highlight how migration flows, and job markets shape the philanthropic capacity of donors. In addition, donor behavior in a specific country may be linked to the socio-economic, cultural, and religious 'baggage' that the immigrants bring with them to the 'new' country, their behavior bearing many similarities to that of Romanian donors both in terms of areas of support and entities supported.

Nevertheless, regional variations observed in the study of individual giving in Romania have relevance for fundraising practices abroad, meaning that while NGOs can rely on general patterns and characteristics when crafting their fundraising strategies, they should also be aware of their donors' backgrounds and aspirations. In addition, given the observed effect of time spent in the adopted country, NGOs should also pay attention to the country-specific philanthropic culture and economic realities when planning fundraising strategies.

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