

## **D 4.4 Overview of contextual and institutional factors. Romania**

### **1. Introduction – the presence of the topic in the public debate, the importance attached to it**

In spite of the huge dimension of the emigration phenomenon (estimated 3.5 million at circa 10 million active population), policy makers in Romania have not paid much attention to its impact on the national labour market, focusing instead on the situation of children left behind and on the extent to which the rights of Romanian immigrants have been observed in their destination countries. As a consequence, the media discourse used to focus on the situation of children left behind in Romania and on legal aspects of working abroad (including risks and abuses, such as slavery, trafficking in human beings, black labour market etc.), as well as on behaviours of Romanian citizens abroad that negatively affect the image of Romania/Romanians.

Since the last electoral campaigns in 2014 and 2016, in the conditions of increased interest of politicians for voters from abroad, but also as a result of some political parties putting forward the theme of an emerging lack of labour force on the Romanian labour market, both political and media discourses have changed. More emphasis has been put on positive stories about Romanian emigrants (e.g. Romanian immigrants having rescued Italian people from Amatrice during the earthquake from 2016; Romanian baker fighting with terrorists in London and hiding people at risk in the bakery), while continuing expressing concern for the rights of Romanian workers in the EU.

In response to the change of political discourse in the sense of encouraging Romanian emigrants to return to their home country (along with targeted policy measures), the media has been paying much more attention to difficulties faced by Romanian emigrants in their destination countries (including the foreseen consequences of the Brexit) as well as to the proposed policy measures aiming at encouraging them to return. Examples of good practice in business start up in Romania by former emigrants are also being presented by the Romanian media, especially TV channels.

Nevertheless, the right to free movement within the EU has remained on the top of the agenda in both political and media discourses; the main focus of public debates on the Brexit is actually on its impact on the situation of Romanians living and working in the UK. However, one may notice more concern and understanding for the consequences that East-West labour force migration has for the receiving countries (e.g. the recent discussions between the President of Romania and the President of France, during which the theme of “social dumping” was raised by the French president and acknowledged by the Romanian president as relevant and requiring further attention from both parties, have been largely presented by all main TV channels).

### **2. Climate and context of departure**

While trying to explain why so many Romanians left their country (and often their families) for working abroad, most of the research based literature puts the emphasis on the economic context of departure. The predominance of economic reasons in the decision to migrate was confirmed by Center for Urban and Regional Sociology - CURS own researches on migration (Abraham et al, 2014), which used both quantitative and qualitative methods. In spite of what some economic indicators reveal, for many Romanians the transition from the socialist economy to the market economy did not bring more and

better opportunities but rather the opposite. As Alexandru (2012) noted, "International migration has been closely linked with the transition process in Romania. Some of the first migrants have been commuters, laid off industrial workers or former internal migrants whose lifestyle, social and economic status has been significantly changed by migration. Many workers lost their jobs when large enterprises were restructured and construction sites closed. The drop in the number of employees by almost 50% in the last 20 years is one of the clearest figures evidencing the impact of transition. After 1989, most of the large state companies had to be restructured and the number of job opportunities dropped considerably. Neamț county and others in the North-Eastern part of Romania had an unemployment rate above the national average, the highest peaks being registered in the 90s." (Alexandru, 2012: 142)

The resulting economic structure in Romania could not provide jobs for the available labour force, so that large categories of both qualified and (especially) unqualified workers have become redundant. Besides, the facilities for domestic mobility of the labour force have also diminished, which made it more difficult finding a job.

As CURS researches show, as a particularity, Romanian migrants to Italy work mainly in the trade and home care fields but the migrants to Spain use to work mainly in construction and agriculture. About a third of this labour force didn't get formal/official work contracts using to work without work contracts and on short times intervals.

The motivation to work abroad is in accordance with push-pulls pattern. The push factors are mainly related to sending countries and they lead to a negative pressure. The pull factors are provided mainly by receiving countries and they conduct to a positive selection and pressure. They are associated with higher standards of life.

The economic factor is the main reason of migration. This means the difference between the incomes in the sending countries and receiving countries and the lack of employing opportunities, mainly in rural areas and small towns in Romania.

As a general trend one can say that a vulnerable and active population of Romania, with low education and with low incomes left Romania. Most of them are married and have children (half of them succeeded in years to bring the children with them in the destination countries (Abraham et al, 2014).

In this economic context migration is often seen as a life strategy, or even as a survival strategy (Comaneci, 2011), and this is not only an individual perception but tends to become a collective perception at the level of communities severely affected by economic downturn. Girigen (2011) thinks that one may speak about a social pleasure that functions as a push factor at least in the case of young people, who see the emigrant as a success model, with better perspectives to find a life partner (wife). (Girigen, 2012: 187).

Not only group mentalities and behaviours among men have changed. The migration experience of women, shared with their mates during holidays or at definitive return in their communities of origin, have induced changes in the traditional perception of family roles, thus generating some barriers in women' migration. In time, also as a result of changes in the legal framework and of the changes in the

structure of labour force demand in the destination countries, the share of female migrants has increased significantly during the last ten years.

Although the feminization of migration flows had already become a significant phenomenon in Europe by the end of the 1980s, it is only in recent years that women from Romania have begun to leave for the West in increasing numbers. According to estimates by CURS (the Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology) based on a sample survey of 1,199 family units, female migration flows appear to have doubled in just 3 years (between 2001 and 2004), going from 16.7 per cent to 31 per cent of total out-migration from Romania. (Piperna, 2011: 189)

In consideration of the prevalent role in this regard of the changes in the climate of reception, we will come back with this issue within the next section.

At institutional level the legislative framework regarding international mobility has played an important role. As Lazarioiu and Alexandru (2005) noted, the fall of the communist regime in Romania has brought an end to Ceausescu's restrictive migration policy. Once the Romanian nationals regained the right to free movement, the changing of the obsolete migration legislation became a must. Projects to accede to the EU required a constant adaptation of the legal framework to the European standards. Thus, first initiatives to create adequate provisions were carried out in the early 1990 and enforced during the last three years due to the high political ambitions of the government to conclude negotiations by 2005 and join EU in 2007. The visa free regime introduced in Romania in January 2002 by Schengen member states indicated again the necessity to step up efforts to align the regulations and migration procedures with Chapter 2 "Free movement of people" and Chapter 24 "Co-operation in the field of Justice and Home Affairs" of the *acquis communautaire* (Lazarioiu & Alexandru, 2005: 5). A range of institutions have been set up or have been given responsibilities in overseeing the observance of legal norms ruling the migration. We refer below to the most relevant from the perspective of active engagement and effectiveness.

As already envisaged in the previous overview report, Romanian migrants to work abroad use also institutional channels (public and private). This is an institutional factor (determinant) which covers about 10% of the Romanian migrants and its role has been increasing in importance during the last 10 years.

The main Romanian institution involved in this activity is ANOFM (National Agency for Employment of the Labour Force), which is member of EURES, a European network that publicly offers employment services, coordinated by European Commission. Through its EURES department the Agency provides information and advice for prospective migrants and helps potential employers in recruiting the labour force they need.

The data provided by ANOFM Romanian (2017)\_show that, in 2016, almost 19,000 people looking for a job in European countries contacted experts from EURES Romania in order to obtain information about finding a job. More than 4,800 vacancies were received from European employers and promoted by EURES Romania in 2016 (on its website [www.eures.anofm.ro](http://www.eures.anofm.ro)). This number of jobs was higher by 18% than in 2015 (4,105 vacancies received from European employers).

As a matter of fact, in 2016, about 1,800 people found a job by accessing EURES Romania (about 70% of the persons participated in the selection process). Besides, the other jobs were found by other activities organized by ANOFM based on specific agreements between countries such as the Project with Sweden “Your first EURES job” (YFEJ) addressed to 18-35 years people.

As a trend, the number of work contracts signed by migrants increased in the last 10 years from 65 in 2007 to about 1,800 in 2016, accounting over 10,000 contracts in this period.

The main receiving countries in 2016 for employees assisted by EURES Romania were Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom. This is a very different situation compared to people who found a job by using social networks. Italy and Spain are on the first two places in this hierarchy, while the social structure of this group of migrants could be defined by their occupations (most of them work in agriculture, about 60% of them are young 18-35 years old, about 75% of them are women, and almost half of them are low educated (under high school). Over time, the weight of people with a high level of education among those who use EURES decreased. Regarding the sending regions of Romania, most of these people come from the East and South of the country, regions that are less urbanized than other parts of Romania.

However, although not quite visible in the reviewed literature, there are also private agencies that provide international labour mediation, often complementing the offer of the public agencies (e.g. while EURES Romania, in accordance with the governmental strategy, does not encourage/support migration of highly qualified people, the private agencies deal mainly with qualified and highly qualified people).

According to Lazaroiu and Alexandru (2005) labour unions have also got involved in international labour mediation.

### **3. Climate and context of reception**

The integration of Romanian migrants in the receiving countries is a multidimensional process including job finding and adaptation, housing, social, ethnical, cultural, religious and political, dimensions. The context of departure explains to a certain extent why people decide to migrate but does not tell us very much about choosing the destination countries and the sector in which jobs can be found. These depend mainly upon the economic context, the institutional settings and the legislative framework in the destination countries. Nonetheless, the experience of working and living abroad may become itself a pull factor and influences the migration patterns. “The new tendency towards migration is strongly linked to the so named circular migration „the strongest impetus to want to migrate again is the previous working experience abroad; - not only the individual experience but also the entire family's experience matters in encouraging emigration for working purpose” (Avramescu, 2009)

The general economic context may also influence the social climate of reception: “The economic crisis influences the migrational phenomenon conducting to deepening the xenophobic and racism attitudes.” (Stanculescu and Stoiciu, 2012)

However, the features of the labour market in the destination country play the most important role in determining the sector(s) in which immigrants try to find jobs, the dimensions of the immigrants groups

and even the structure by gender of those groups. As we have previously referred to, the economic evolution in Western countries, along with changes in education and behaviours on the labour market, have led to a need for exactly that kind of labour force that had become redundant in its home country. This is also the case of migrant women: "Various factors are contributing to the growth of female emigration from Romania. Firstly, there is a growing demand in Western labour markets, particularly in Southern Europe, for workers in the domestic help and personal care sector. The latest immigrant legalization drives that took place in Italy (in 2002) and Spain (in 2005) clearly show this trend. Romanian citizens ranked first and second in those countries respectively in terms of the most numerous national groups of immigrants legalized; in both cases, the majority of stay permits granted were for work in the domestic help and personal care sector. ). (Abraham et al., 2014, Piperna, 2011: 189-290) This is a significant feature of Romanian migrants, mainly in the last years, which is called "feminized migration".

In the Romanian researches on integration of the migrants in the receiving countries one may find discussions about models of integration policies in different countries. For instance, Anghel R. (2012) talks about the German policy integration model focused on German's ethnic migration as privileged one or about Italian *laissez faire* model. They had advantages and disadvantages. "Many Romanian Germans came to construct an idiom of separateness from local Germans. First they complained about feelings of exclusion that they were not able to set up close ties to local Germans; some had a tendency to re-evaluate their "Romanian-ness." Back when they were living in Romania, these ethnic German migrants had a clear sense of being German, and enjoyed a high symbolic status even when they came from ethnically mixed families. In Germany however, they complained they were considered Romanians, a label that was perceived initially as a degradation of the prestige they once held. Subsequently, they emphasized the commonalities they shared among themselves because of their previous life in Romania, and from their migration experience". On the other hand, "*laissez – faire* model is seen as a set of institutional practices and a system by which migrants eventually acquires rights over the years." (Anghel, 2012: 327 - 328)

The political incorporation of ethnic Romanians working abroad is an important institutional factor. It is a characteristic of the migrant group, referring to the degree in which the groups have representatives and policy influence in the decision-making processes.

As first migrants waves settle down in destination countries, newcomers may find it easier to move up the educational and occupational levels, especially if they have residential and economic support abroad.

In Spain, since 2004, FEDROM performs various activities related to the cultural and linguistic identity of the Romanians living there, it offers legal consultancy for immigrants and has several local integration initiatives in collaboration with city halls of Madrid Community localities. It lobbies for issues related to Romanians' rights in Spain, as for example the equivalence of driving licence and recognition of working rights after Romania's accession to the EU. Related to the political integration, the federation organizes information campaigns for Romanians to inscribe themselves in the electoral census in order to be able to vote in the local elections in Spain and at the European elections (Ciornei, 2012: 51-57, 59)

“Official paths of inclusion are paralleled by informal ties and ad-hoc processes. Religious organizations play a central role not only in immigrant adaptation, but also in their political representation at local and regional levels. Transnational religious solidarity between the Catholic and the Neo-Protestant churches, and the new immigrant religious organizations respectively, contribute to their centrality in the context of immigration.

The articles show the continued relevance of ethnicity when confronted with the situation of migration and its consequences. In the receiving society, ethnic identity is transformed by the local regimes of belonging and hierarchies of ethnicity, race, and class. In the origin society, it undergoes readjustments by the import of immigrants' experience and acquired resources, or by the new social relations ensuing their departure. In all these situations, ethnicity, as consciousness of difference and subjective commonality of feeling, is fundamental for the emotional, practical, and material redefinition of the people involved”. (Culic, and Anghel, 2012: 5-6)

#### **4. Conclusion – emerging issues and gaps in the literature.**

Push-pull factors about the migration pattern are strongly linked to the specific features of the migrant work force – mainly female and from rural areas. The underemployed population in the rural areas became one of main source for migration from Romania. There are villages where every family "sent" at least one person to work outside the country. Additionally, the slow job creation in the other sectors and the difficulties faced by many young graduates or medium skilled persons in finding income sources might lead to a quite convincing explanation for general "push" migration conditions. The "pull" factors such as: mismatches between labour force demand and supply on the labour market in several EU countries (shortage of low skilled labour in agriculture, building, seasonal work in tourism; shortage of highly skilled labour like IT, doctors, engineers etc.), and demographic changes (ageing population, which asks for new jobs for health care at home) also exist. (Barsan, 2008)

The literature overview has focused mainly on scientific studies and researches, but included also some important aspects identified in the public discourse about migration and migrants, especially in the recent context of Romania facing labour force shortages in more and more sectors. This suggests an increased awareness among policy makers with regard to the contextual and institutional factors that determine or influence the migration process, which may also lead to more attention paid to social research in the matter.

An important methodological issue could be the limited representativeness of the studies used in the literature analysis. So, in the overview we used both quantitative representative researches, as CURS' Surveys or some surveys conducted at the level of few cities and some qualitative researches conducted at the level of different categories of population, such as women, doctors, students etc. That means that comparing of the data should be done with scientific caution.

A specific problem can be faced when the data collected in GEMM qualitative research will be analyzed. The statistical significance can be achieved when the GEMM data will be in accordance with the data obtained from representative surveys. The new qualitative data could be less significant when they don't correlate with other qualitative data, but GEMM data can be relevant providing new insights about the problems evaluated.

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