

ROMANIAN MIGRATION BEFORE AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Elena Raluca Cristian¹

Alexandra Irina Dănciulescu²

Anda Veronica Dan³

Abstract

The migration phenomenon is a very complex one, with multiple causes, positive as well as negative effects for the countries and migrants involved in this process.

Migration must be approached from a political, social, cultural, religious and economic perspective, with the effects of migration having a strong impact on the national and world labour market for all states involved in this process. Metaphorically, the political and social classes of the countries that received a significant influx of immigrants perceived them as a "lifeboat" in a new stage of rebuilding the economies of the world's states. Literature shows that there is a direct, positive and strong correlation in terms of emigrant education everywhere and long- and medium-term economic growth in the migrant's country of origin. That said, there is a cause-and-effect relationship between the immigrant's motivation and the economic and social effects felt for the country of origin of the person in question.

All economies of the world feel the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic of the last two, the effects being the result of a health crisis with strong reverberations on all sectors of the economy, especially causing distortions in the labour market and labour mobility.

Keywords: *internal migration, labour force, Romanian migrants, COVID 19 pandemic*

JEL Classification: F22, F66, J11, J60.

Introduction

Charles Tiebout considers that as some countries develop an immigrant prefers some places with higher taxes that offer superior quality public services, thus compensating marginal costs with secondary benefits (a better-paid job, opportunities for promotions, a relative job safety)⁴.

Hence, Tiebout's model is still contemporary and has two behaviour patterns that apply for immigrants:⁵

¹ Assistant lecturer, Romanian-American University Bucharest, cristian.elena.raluca@profesor.rau.ro

² Assistant lecturer, Romanian-American University Bucharest, danciulescu.alexandra.irina@profesor.rau.ro.

³ Assistant lecturer, Romanian-American University Bucharest, dan.anda.veronica@profesor.rau.ro

⁴ Tiebout, Charles (1956), *A pure Theory of Local Expenditures*, "Journal of Political Economy" 64, pp. 418-424.

⁵ *Idem.*

- the demand for building new houses may increase in time, for the immigrant communities;
- the demand for building houses may decrease for those who do not want to improve their lives, thus being forced to leave the region.
- In his paper: "Migration and the wage and unemployment gaps between urban and non-urban sectors: A dynamic general equilibrium reinterpretation of the Harris–Todaro equilibrium", Chul-In Lee states that the classical Theory of Labour migration is based on five hypotheses:
 - international migration of workers is caused by differences in the rates of economic growth of different countries;
 - eliminating disparities between countries will put an end to changes in the labour market and, implicitly, of migration;
 - The labour market is the main mechanism responsible for changes in population movements;
 - the role of governments is to control the phenomenon of migration, namely inflows and outflows;
 - the international flow of human capital responds differently to the growing number of immigrants.⁶

1. Peculiarities of the Romanians' migration before the Covid-19 pandemic

The trans-nationalization of "migrants' lives" has led to the identification of patterns of migrant assimilation. Immigrants have to simultaneously move and engage between two or more societies (communities) in which they live and of which they are a part. Therefore it is more difficult to make a clear distinction between the two terms already established in the literature "origin" and "destination" or between other extremely widely used terms "temporary", "permanent", and 'return'.⁷

We have to mention the changes in the countries of destination for immigrants, when talking of contemporary migration. Part of the countries of southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal), which until a few decades ago were countries of emigration, have relatively recently become the preferred destinations of a considerable number of immigrants. Moreover, the important countries of origin of migrants from the migration system from Eastern to Western Europe (Poland, Romania), whose populations have become massively connected in recent decades to migratory flows, tend to become countries of emigration.⁸

For Romania, the evolution of the migration phenomenon splits into two stages: the predominantly "illegal" migration of Romanians before 1989, which continued for

⁶ Chul-In, Lee (2008), *Migration and the wage and unemployment gaps between urban and non – urban sectors: A dynamic general equilibrium reinterpretation of the Harris – Todaro equilibrium*, Labour Economics 15, Science Direct, pp. 1423-1434.

⁷ Hein de Haas (2010), *Migration and Development: A theoretical perspective*, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, Vol 44 (I), p. 21.

⁸ Anghel, Remus, Gabriel.; Horvath, Istvan, (2009), *Teorii ale migrației și migrația românească*, articol publicat în cartea: Sociologia migrației. Teorii și studii de caz românești, Iași, 2009.

a long time until 2000, and the second stage, visibly more balanced from a legal and institutional point of view, after Romania's accession to the EU (figures 1 and 2).

Migration, seen as a phenomenon, entails a multitude of negative effects for the families left at home by immigrants (divorces, trafficking in human beings and minor children, delinquency, crime, prostitution) as well as for the countries involved, respectively negative effects are also felt for the countries destination receiving the foreign labour force. All these effects in turn lead to a series of social, political, religious consequences with strong reverberations on immigrant groups, affected by discrimination in the country of origin (racism, social violence, xenophobia).⁹

From the perspective of the complex phenomenon of migration (permanent or temporary migration for work), we identify three distinct stages in the recent social history of Romania¹⁰:

- first stage: 1990-1995, with an emigration rate of 3 ‰ - The first wave of Romanian migration;
- second stage: 1996-2001, with an emigration rate of 7 ‰ - The second wave of Romanian migration;
- third stage: 2002-2006, with an emigration rate of 28 ‰ - The third wave of Romanian migration.

The fourth wave of Romanian migration, starting with 2007, refers to a social migration phenomenon that has special characteristics, significant both in terms of analysis and macrosocial effects, compared to the first three waves of Romanian migration.¹¹

Labour migration to European countries accelerated by the accession of former communist countries to the European Union and the liberalization of access to the labour market in 2014. This migration has a circular nature: citizens practice a type of cross-border mobility between the country of origin and one or several countries of destination, in a dialectic of "here" and "there" and in multiple regimes of "remote action". Secondly, this type of intra-EU migration takes place in a specific transnational situation, which defines, among other things, through the "Community framework" in terms of policies (including migration policies), citizenship and social practices.¹²

It is well known that, according to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INSR and Eurostat), Romanians' preferences for European immigration countries are: Italy, Spain, Germany, France, Great Britain and Austria.

⁹ Feraru, Petronela, Daniela (2010), *Migration and Economic Development Comparativ Study: Romania – Italy*, Revistă Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională, Anul 2, Nr. 5, p. 65.

¹⁰ Dumitru, Sandu Sandu, D. (coord.) (2006), *Locuirea temporară în străinătate. Migrația economică a românilor: 1990-2006*, Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă, București, p. 52.

¹¹ *Idem*.

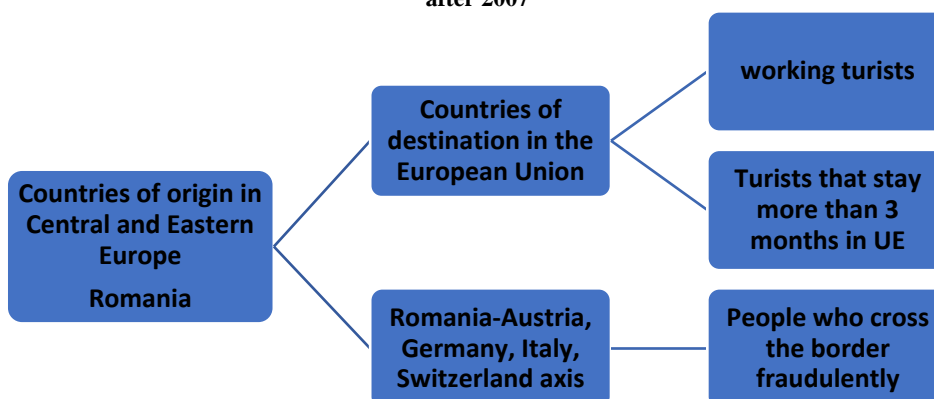
¹² Beciu, Camelia., Lazăr, Mirela, (2014), *Migrația forței de muncă în contextual crizei economice. Redefinirea mediatică a unei probleme publice*, Revista română de sociologie, Serie Nouă, Anul XXV, Nr. 3-4, p. 234.

Figure 1. Temporary legal migration in Europe before Romania's accession to the European Union



Source: Taken from *The Romanian Journal of European Studies*, No.4/2005¹³

Figure 2. Migration from Romania to the European Union after 2007



Source: Taken from *The Romanian Journal of European Studies*, No.4/2005¹⁴

Romanian migration in Europe has a history that began long before its expansion, with a consistent presence in various European countries, especially those located in the Mediterranean basin. In fact, during the pre-accession to the European Union, Romania experienced the largest mass migration of its citizens. Romania, like other Eastern countries, entered the migration overview after the fall of the communist bloc. Due to the collapse of the industrial system, the decrease of wages for most of the population and the galloping increase of the inflation during 1990-1992, consistent flows of Romanian citizens left Romania.¹⁵

¹³ Taken from *The Romanian Journal of European Studies*, No. 4/2005.

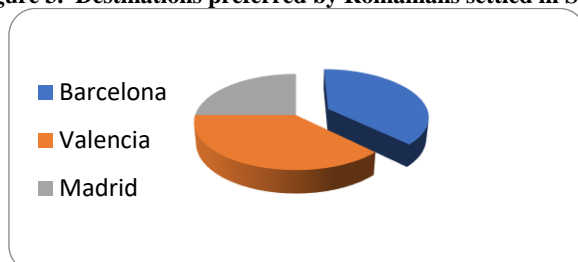
¹⁴ Taken from *The Romanian Journal of European Studies*, No. 4/2005.

¹⁵ Belea, Simion, (2012), *Imigranții români din Italia: între înrădăcinare și întoarcere*, Journal: Buletin Științific, Seria A, Issue 1, p. 22.

The most important destination cities for Romanians in Spain, where the most important Romanian communities or diaspora are located are: Barcelona, Madrid and Valencia.

A possible explanation for the choice of these cities would be the fact that the three are the most important industrial, commercial, cultural centres of Spain, cities with a tourist and industrial potential where finding a job is relatively easy. In general, foreign emigrants prefer to settle in large cities or in the metropolises of the destination countries where there are really financial / professional opportunities, where finding a job is relatively easy.

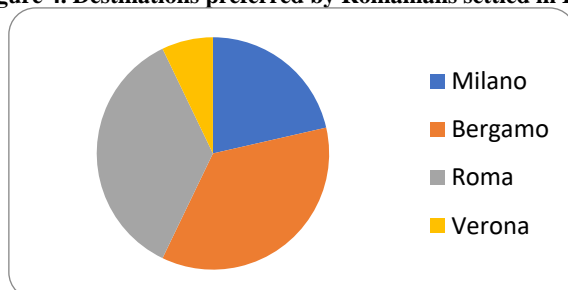
Figure 3. Destinations preferred by Romanians settled in Spain



Source: Authors' own contribution according to INSR statistic

Regarding the situation of Romanians in Italy, the cities preferred by Romanians are: Rome, Bergamo, Milan and Verona; the explanation is quite similar to that found in the case of Spain. Italy has experienced industrial and commercial growth and development in the north over the last 50 years, and the main cities that fall here are: Milan - Turin - Bergamo (Lombardy region) and the main cultural and economic city in the center, Rome. , to the detriment of the southern part of Italy with the cities of Naples, Sicily or the region of Calabria, where agriculture, respectively viticulture and fish farming remain the main important sectors of the economy.

Figure 4. Destinations preferred by Romanians settled in Italy



Source: Authors' own contribution to INSR statistics

In order to have an overview of the Romanians' preferences for the destination countries, we can specify that in general, the Romanians from the Muntenia area prefer to emigrate to Great Britain, Germany, France and Austria. Those from Banat and Transylvania have a preference for countries such as Germany, Switzerland, Austria

and Hungary and Romanians from Dobrogea generally prefer to emigrate to countries such as Turkey (thanks to the Turkish community), Germany and Austria.

As regards the place of origin of Romanian emigrants settled in Italy and Spain, the situation is relatively homogeneous, due to the fact that they come largely from the same area or locality of Romania, especially from the counties of North-East and South-East, Moldova region.

From Vrancea County there are many Romanian emigrants settled in Italy, who come from all the important communes of the county (Câmpuri, Soveja, Vizantea, Răcoasa, Suraia, Urechești, Garoafa).

On the other hand, for those who chose Spain (as the destination country), Galați County is the one that predominates with the cities of Tecuci and the municipality of the same name; as well as the cities of Bacău and Iași.

As already mentioned, the region of Moldova is known for the fact that many Romanians have chosen Italy and Spain as their main countries of emigration. In general, the Romanians from the northern counties of the region of Moldova (Suceava, Botoșani, Neamț, Vaslui and Iași) choose mainly Spain, Italy being chosen especially by the Romanians from the counties: Vrancea, Bacău, Galați, Iași and Vaslui.

In 2019, the balance of Romania's international migration by changing the usual residence (for at least 12 months) was -30.6 thousand people, with 28.5 thousand people less than in 2018 when the balance of international migration was -59, one thousand people, respectively with 31.3 thousand people less than in 2015 (with a balance of international migration of 61.9 thousand people).¹⁶

2. Romanian migration during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Until 2020, as we have shown, the tendency of Romanians was to immigrate mainly to European Union countries in search of a decent living, a secure income; with the Covid-19 pandemic, the problem data has changed.

According to official data provided by INSR, migration shows a change on the map of Romania in two directions: the first consists of a demographic movement from the urban area - in the rural area and the second from abroad (outside Romania's borders to the emigrant's place of origin (urban or rural area).

For the year 2020, according to the data provided by INSR, 116,000 Romanians have moved from urban to rural areas, in this situation we can speak of an internal migration between counties or within the same county, on the urban-rural chain.

The Covid-19 pandemic accentuated the migration trend between urban and rural areas, significantly reducing the reverse flow from rural to urban areas. In 2020, according to official INSR statistics, there were only less than 78,000 Romanians who moved from villages to cities, their number being 14% lower in 2019. The net difference between the two flows is close to 38,000 people.

Regarding the migratory flow from Romania to Abroad (European Union), a number of 193,000 Romanians emigrated in 2020, with 37,000 fewer people than in 2019.

¹⁶ Raport INSR (2020), *Proiectarea populației României pe regiuni de dezvoltare și județe la orizontul anului 2070*, Institutul Național de Statistică, p. 19.

According to INSR, 60% of 112,000 people are between the ages of 20-45, the age range considered on the labour market, as that of available people fit for work and active, in different fields of activity.

Sociology professor Dumitru Sandu considers that "for 2020 and 2019, Romania has to deal with a decrease in the number of emigrants by about 40,000 people. The bulk of external migration is given by long-term temporary migration" (interview given in The Financial-September issue, 2021)¹⁷.

Professor Dumitru Sandu also said (in an interview with MediaFax, July issue, 2021)¹⁸ that "the migration from urban to rural areas in our country increased in the context of the pandemic. That shows that those who have a predominantly good financial condition migrated to rural areas, because of Covid, and due to severe restrictions imposed on people during the state of emergency and alert".

Internal migration from Romania began to intensify in 1997, this being considered the record year after the revolution (1990), where the largest number of Romanians (500,000 people) were registered who moved from the urban to the rural area.

Romanians in the midst of a pandemic, like most Eastern European emigrants, have returned home in relatively large numbers. In March-April 2020, Eurostat statistics showed that approximately 1,300,000 Romanians returned home to the country. The returned Romanians did not return to the country because the economic situation and the standard of living in Romania have improved visibly in the last five years, but because they lost their jobs in the host country, because they were illegal workers.

On the other hand, qualified Romanian emigrants with higher education and postgraduate studies (doctors, medical staff, architects, software engineers) preferred to stay in the destination or emigration countries, because they, unlike the unskilled ones, had a legal job and secure income. In literature, for qualified emigrants with higher education/postgraduate studies, we use the phrase "*brain drain - brain migration*", now in the current pandemic context, with the return to the country of a large number of Romanian emigrants (1.3 million people) we can use the phrase "*brain gain*".

Regarding the annual flow of emigrants (those who leave their permanent residence in Romania for another state), INSR registered for 2020 a number of 21,000 people, this being the largest number recorded since 2015. Of the 21,000 people who emigrated in 2020, the year the Covid-19 Pandemic broke out, most went to Spain (4,300 people), Germany (4,200 people) and Italy (3,000 people).

According to MediaFax (August 2021), the resident population of Romania on January 1st, 2021 was 19.186.000 people, which is a decrease of 1.426.000 people compared to January 1, 2020¹⁹.

The main cause of this decrease is the negative natural growth (the number of deceased persons exceeding the number of live births by 120.273 persons).²⁰

¹⁷ <https://www.zf.ro/profesii/marea-drama-a-romaniei-pleaca-din-tara-tinerii-care-ar-trebuie-sa-isi-20249460>

¹⁸ <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/efectele-pandemiei-in-2020-s-a-dublat-fluxul-celor-ce-se-muta-in-mediul-rural-din-mediul-urban-20206493>

¹⁹ <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/populatia-rezidenta-este-in-scadere-fata-de-anul-trecut-20248684>

In 2020, regarding the migration within EU Member States, a number of measures were adopted to help combat the spread of COVID-19. This had profound effects, mainly on freedom of movement, the labour market and on the economy as a whole. In March 2020, a number of European governments, including those of Romania, Bulgaria, Austria, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Hungary and Slovenia, decided to unilaterally close borders with neighbouring EU countries, cancelling international flights, imposing restrictions on mobility deemed non-essential and imposing border controls in a desperate and urgent attempt to stop the spread of coronavirus.²¹

These measures together with those adopted at EU level, such as the temporary closure of the Union's external borders for most non-residents. Specifically, from a mobility perspective, efforts to combat COVID-19 have led to the reinstatement of border controls in the Schengen region and the suspension of any travel deemed unnecessary within the EU.²²

3. Conclusions:

The great waves of migration in the history specific to the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, offered the possibility for the states of the world to re-place on the geographical and economic map the international migratory flow.

The migration of Romanians at this moment depends on the economic evolution of Romania in relation to the economic evolution of the main destination countries of Romanians: Italy, Germany, Great Britain, Austria and France.

The Covid-19 pandemic has equally affected all sectors of the economy, especially the financial, medical and labour markets, with a particular focus on labour mobility.

The main sectors of the economy affected by the Covid-19 crisis are: production, trade, construction, HORECA sector (tourism, restaurants), food sector, medical and educational system.

Between 2000 and 2020, nearly all regions, with the exception of Northern America and Oceania, saw the size of their transnational population increase by 12 million or more. Central and Southern Asia witnessed the largest absolute increase, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean and Northern Africa and Western Asia. Most of the recent growth of migrants originating from Central and Southern Asia and Europe was attributable to labour or family-related migration²³.

“The number of persons living outside their country of birth or citizenship reached 281 million in 2020, up from 173 million in 2000 and 221 million in 2010. Because the number of international migrants grew faster than the global population, the share of international migrants in the total population rose from 2.8 per cent in

²⁰ <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/populatia-rezidenta-este-in-scadere-fata-de-anul-trecut-20248684>.

²¹ Buda, Daniel (2020), *Impactul pandemiei de Covid-19 asupra mobilității forței de muncă*, Revista Transilvană de Științe Administrative 1 (46), p. 17.

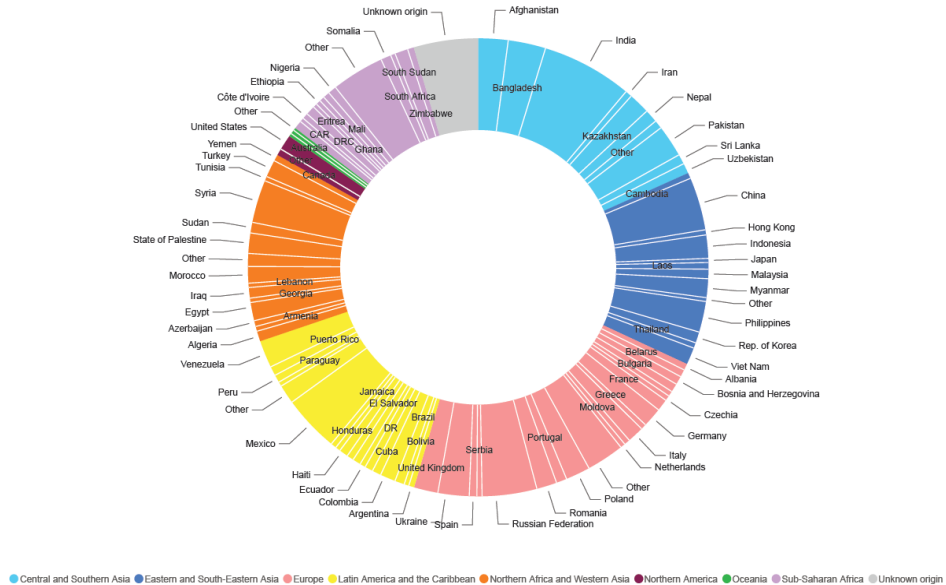
²² *Idem*, p.18

²³ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020). *International Migration 2020 Highlights* (ST/ESA/SER.A/452)

2000 to 3.2 per cent in 2010 and further to 3.6 per cent in 2020. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted all forms of human mobility, including international migration. Preliminary estimates suggest that by mid-2020 the pandemic may have reduced the growth in the stock of international migrants by around two million”.²⁴

Figure 5.

Proportionate distribution of international migrants, by region and country or area of origin, 2020



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020b). *International Migrant Stock 2020*.

Note: The names of some countries and areas have been abbreviated.

Due to the restrictions adopted by the European Union in the current COVID-19 pandemic context, we can mention that the most affected on the labour mobility market are the Romanian emigrants who are part of the most vulnerable category.

The vulnerable category of Romanian emigrants being those with secondary or high school education, many of them being unskilled in the fields in which they work (construction, agriculture, industry, hotel) in EU destination countries (Italy, Spain, France, Netherlands, Great Britain).

The future of the evolution of labour migration in the European Union remains uncertain, especially because of a number of political, social, religious and health factors regarding the continuance of pandemic restrictions, such as the imposition of the Green Certificate at work in many countries such as Italy, France, Germany and Austria.

Daniel Buda, in his article "The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Labour Mobility", considers that the European Union should in future implement an effective system of industrial, trade and investment policies. He states that these policies will

²⁴ https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/international_migration_2020_highlights_ten_key_messages.pdf

address primarily the needs of citizens part of the European Community and at the same time provide them with new professional opportunities to integrate them into the labour market and, above all, be characterized by the correct implementation of living and working conditions for foreign immigrants from all over the world.

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