

ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS' INTEGRATION IN ROMANIA*

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Abstract: Migration study is among the favorite domains for social sciences research, given the magnitude of the phenomenon and the complex consequences of massive movements of people across the globe. Romania is nevertheless an emigration country, with millions of citizens living abroad, in the last 30 years. Immigration represents a new challenging trend for the Romanian society and institutions called to deal with such issues. Seen sometimes as a burden for the social systems, other times as a solution for the lack of workforce or the population aging, immigrants arouse different types of reactions from host societies, as tolerance, acceptance, rejection or opposition.

Considering the above-mentioned aspects, this paper aims to explore Romanians' attitudes towards immigration and immigrants, using survey data from a study assessing immigrants' integration from a triangulating perspective. Thus, data from public institutions, immigrants and Romanian citizens were collected through the CRCMIS project.

Results show that the participants in this study have tolerant attitudes regarding immigrants, consider that they do not have a negative impact regarding the Romanian cultural or economic life and see Romania as a welcoming host for foreigners.

Keywords: Attitudes, Culture, Economy, Immigrants, Integration.

INTRODUCTION – THE CONTEXT

Immigration is a phenomenon increasing in Romania, an East European country confronted with massive emigration for the last thirty years¹. Romanians' massive departure abroad was intensively studied² being one of the major

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¹ Anatolie Coșciug, *Measuring integration in new countries of immigration*, in “Social Change Review” 16, 1–2, 2018, pp. 93–121, retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.2478/scr-2018-0003>, on 20.01.2021; Anatolie Coșciug (coord), *Migrație și integrare într-o țară de emigrație. Indexul Integrării Imigranților în România 2021*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2021.

² Dumitru Sandu, *Lumile sociale ale migrației românești în străinătate*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2010; Alexandra Porumbescu, Livia Pogan, *Social change, migration and work-life balance*, in “Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques”, no. 60/2018, Craiova, Universitaria

processes that characterized the post-communist Romanian society³. Brain-drain, lack of work force, separated families, depopulated areas, reduced contribution to the national budget, are the most frequently analyzed effects of such population movements, captured both by research lenses⁴ and general public discussions.

Migratory flows of the last years brought a new trend regarding Romania, as the share of immigrants is growing, reaching 2.4% in 2019⁵. Immigrants' integration appears thus as a new challenge for Romanian institutions and society, without a solid and long-term experience of receiving foreigners, as traditional favorite destinations of migrants, like USA, Canada or west-European countries.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Integration of immigrants is a construct targeting a complex, dynamic process, situated at the intersection of individual-level and country-level factors, both structural and cultural⁶. Although studied intense in the last half of century, a general accepted definition of the concept is not available yet, researchers operationalizing integration in various ways. Attitudes towards immigrants and immigration capture the cultural dimension of the country-level aspects that impact immigrants' integration.

International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)⁷, World Values Survey (WVS)⁸, European Social Survey (ESS)⁹ and Eurobarometer are the main survey projects that provide data regarding attitudes towards immigrant and

Publishing, pp. 16–26, retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/social-change-migration-work-life-balance/docview/2161032333/se-2?accountid=8083>, on 10.05.2021.

³ Bogdan Voicu, *Penuria pseudo-modernă a postcomunismului românesc*, Iași, Expert Projects Publishing, 2005.

⁴ Alexandra Porumbescu, *Normative provisions and legal procedures concerning the arrival of refugees in Romania*, in “Sociology and Social Work Review”, vol. 3, no. 2/2019, pp. 57–65; Remus G. Anghel and Anotolie Cosciug, *Socioeconomic effects of migration: Patterns, mechanisms and effects of return migration to Romania*, in “RCCMS Working Paper Series”, 1, 2017 pp. 1–19, retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326266414_Socioeconomic_effects_of_migration_Patterns_mechanisms_and_effects_of_return_migration_to_Romania, on 02.06.2021.

⁵ United Nation. Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), *Twenty countries or areas of origin with the largest diaspora populations (millions)*, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimatesgraphs.asp?4g4>, on 20.11.2020.

⁶ Livia Pogan, *Mapping integration. Understanding immigration*, in “Sociology and Social Work Review, International Society for projects in Education and Research”, vol. 4(2), 2020 pp. 79–86, retrieved from <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/socwkv4&div=21&id=&page=>, on 21.04.2021.

⁷ For further information, see <https://www.gesis.org/en/issp/modules/issp-modules-by-topic/national-identity>

⁸ For further information, see <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp?CMSID=QuestDevelopment&CMSID=QuestDevelopment>

⁹ For further information, see <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/themes.html?t=immigration>

immigration¹⁰, allowing researchers to follow changes over time and differences between countries. Such longitudinal and comparative approaches foster their value as important data sources regarding locals' attitudes towards immigration. This umbrella-concept can refer to diverse attitudes, from support, tolerance, indifference, to opposition and rejection, regarding different types of migrants. Furthermore, opinions regarding particular categories of immigrants and policies mitigating immigrants are targeted by this survey projects¹¹.

Prejudice was often put in relation with attitudes towards immigrants in the scholar literature¹², embodied by two main concepts: economic threats and symbolic threats. Threats perception is associated with more restrictive attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. While material or economic ones are seen as a result of competition for scarce, tangible resources, the symbolic ones refer to cultural aspects, values, beliefs, symbols valuable for the majority group. A working definition for threat perceptions is provided by the team elaborating the Round 7 Question Module Design Template of the European Social Survey: "anticipating of negative consequences related to the arrival and presence of immigrants in a country"¹³. Scarcity hypothesis comes to explain material threats, as the ones related to overcrowded social services, lack of job opportunities, economic pressure.

Obviously, different socioeconomic contexts and different types of migrants determine different types of reactions. For example, it is expected that work migrants are perceived as an economic threat, because they represent a competition regarding jobs, no matter their religion or culture, while immigrants from a Muslim country are expected to be seen as a threaten at symbolic level, for European, Christian or Catholic countries.

Another theoretical benchmark is the contact hypothesis, assuming that positive interactions with migrants reduce opposition or rejection, while on contrary, previous negative contacts are expected to increase negative attitudes towards immigrants and immigration.

METHODOLOGY

This article presents a part of the research undertaken through the CRCMIS Project, financed by FAMI/ 19.03.01.01 program, between February 2020 –

¹⁰ Alin M. Ceobanu, Xavier Escandell, *Comparative analyses of public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration using multinational survey data: a review of theories and research*, in "Annual Review of Sociology", 36, 2010, p. 315, retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228294253_Comparative_Analyses_of_Public_Attitudes_Toward_Immigrants_and_Immigration_Using_Multinational_Survey_Data_A_Review_of_Theories_and_Research, on 10.01.2021.

¹¹ European Social Survey, *Round 7 Module on Attitudes towards Immigration and their Antecedents – Question Design Final Module in Template*, London, Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University London, 2015, p. 4.

¹² Alin M. Ceobanu, Xavier Escandell, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

¹³ European Social Survey, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

January 2021¹⁴. The aim of the project is to investigate immigrants' integration in Romania. The methodology used fosters understanding the phenomenon, triangulating the data employed in the analysis. Specifically, the data sources are the immigrants, the Romanian population and institutions that have attributions concerning immigration¹⁵. In the present study data collected from the Romanian population are presented. For the local population an online survey was available and approximately 1300 valid answers were collected.

Respondents' demographics show a balanced distribution in terms of gender, residence (rural/urban), some of them living abroad at the time of the research. The survey aimed to capture Romanian's perceptions and opinions concerning different types of immigrants – beneficiaries of international protection, refugees, Europeans/non-Europeans, low skilled or high skilled, more or less educated, for example. Several dimensions were explored, as rights that should be granted for different categories of immigrants, their impact regarding the economic, social and cultural domains, the necessity of social policies aiming to facilitate their integration in Romania and others.

RESULTS

Responses distribution show a minor difference between female and male respondents, as women represented 53,2% of the total participants in the study of Romanians attitudes towards immigrants and their integration in Romania.

Approximately 61% of the respondents live in urban areas and 44 percent of them attended tertiary education, while a third declared as the highest level of education the high school. Such distribution of the demographic characteristics educated, urban, was put in relation with more tolerant attitudes regarding immigration in previous studies (Coenders, Lubbers and Scheepers, 2003)¹⁶.

In terms of type of employer, more than half of the respondents work in the private sector, a third of them in the public one, and the others for non-governmental organizations or mixt employers (public and private capital), as seen in Figure 2.

¹⁴ Further information about the projects and results of the research are available on <http://migrationcenter.ro/wp/the-romanian-immigrants-integration-index/>.

¹⁵ In depth analysis of the data from immigrants, public institutions and Romanian population can be found in "Migrație și integrare într-o țară de emigrație. Indexul Integrării Imigranților în România 2021", coordonated by Anatolie Cosciug, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2021.

¹⁶ Marcel Coenders, Marcel Lubbers, Peer Scheepers, *Majorities' attitudes towards minorities in (former) Candidate Countries of the European Union: Results from the Eurobarometer in Candidate Countries 2003*, in "Report 3 for the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia" Ref. No. 2003/04/01, retrieved from https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/150-report-3.pdf, on 20.12.2020

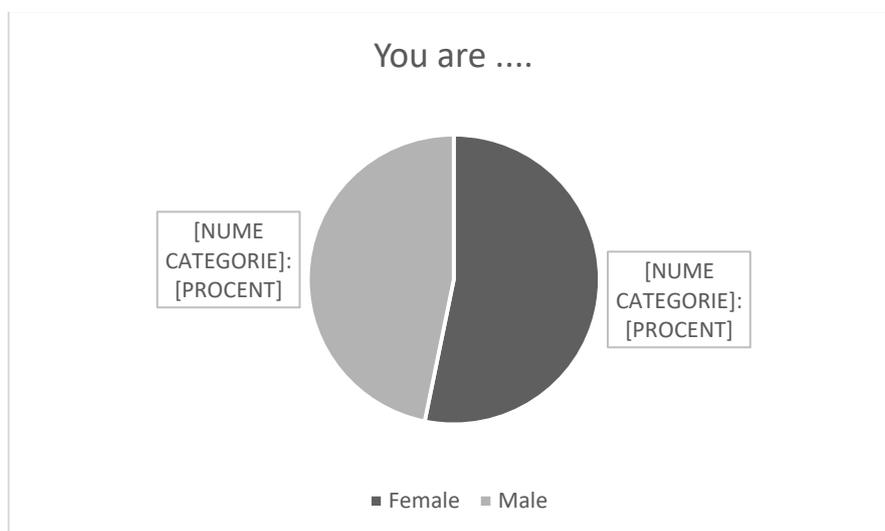


Fig. 1. Distribution of participants by sex (CRCMIS Project, 2020)¹⁷.

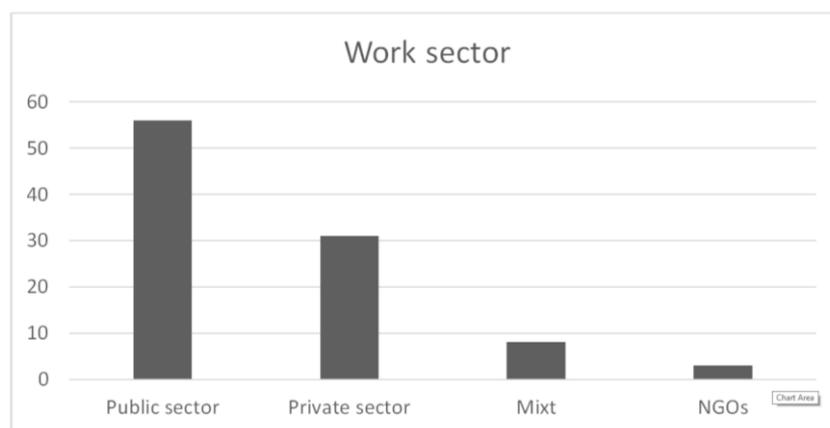


Fig. 2. Distribution of participants by work sector (CRCMIS Project, 2020)¹⁸.

After the analysis of some socio-demographic features of the respondents, the attention can be shifted to opinions and attitudes towards immigrants and immigration in Romania. From a cultural perspective, a third of the participants in this study are undecided whether immigrants help enriching the Romanian culture. Almost three out of ten persons consider that immigrants have a positive impact on

¹⁷ For further information, see <http://migrationcenter.ro/wp/the-romanian-immigrants-integration-index/>.

¹⁸ For further information, see <http://migrationcenter.ro/wp/the-romanian-immigrants-integration-index/>.

the Romanian culture, while approximately 26 percent do not agree with such a statement. When asked about a negative impact at cultural level, less than ten percent see such a risk and more than 6 out of ten persons do not consider that immigrants influence the Romanian culture in a negative manner. Furthermore, the question in the survey investigated opinions towards immigrants from UE countries and non-UE countries. Answers didn't show significant different perceptions regarding the two types of immigrants.

The analysis of the symbolic level was doubled by the investigation of material aspects, as economic ones, job domain, social services, for example. Thus, the statement "Immigrants are in general useful for the Romanian economy" assessed respondents' general opinion about their influence at economic level. More than half of them (55%) agree that immigrants are useful for the country's economy and almost 13 percent don't see such a positive influence. Figure 3 shows answers distribution for the five categories – totally agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree.

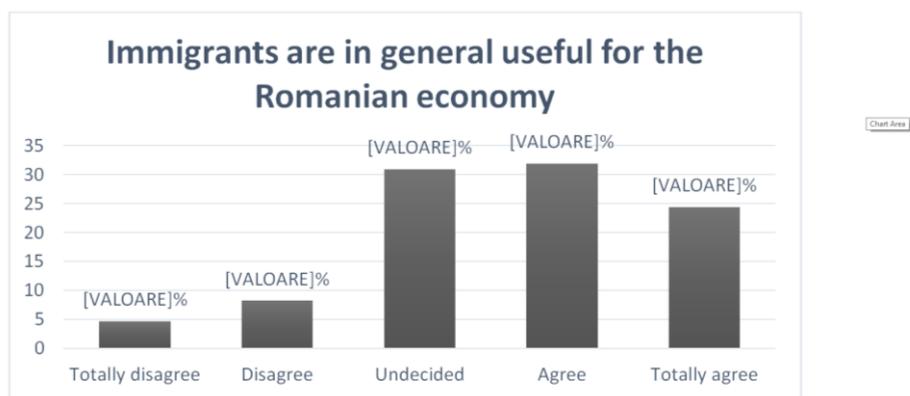


Fig. 3. Distribution of responses regarding immigrants' impact on economy (CRCMIS Project, 2020)¹⁹.

Such opinions regarding immigrants and economy seem to be in line with expectations vehiculated in the public arena that people coming especially from low-income countries may represent a viable solution for the lack of workforce, while the foreigners from developed economies are supposed to invest in Romania and thus create new opportunities for the locals. Investigating the threat component, the addressed issue was job competition, through the statement "Immigrants that come for work take Romanians' jobs". Only 6 percent of the participants consider this risk, declaring that they agree with the above statement, but more than half of the respondents do not agree with it (55%).

¹⁹ For further information, see <http://migrationcenter.ro/wp/the-romanian-immigrants-integration-index/>.

When asked if they consider that Romania is a welcoming country for immigrants, a third are undecided and four out of ten respondents see Romania as a friendly host country for migrants. The following table displays the answers distribution for the five categories of answers.

Table 1.
Distribution of responses regarding Romania as welcoming host country for immigrants (CRCMIS Project 2020)²⁰

Romania is a welcoming country for immigrants	
Totally disagree	4%
Disagree	20%
Undecided	34%
Agree	25%
Totally agree	16%

Immigrants' pressure on social, medical or educational services is sometimes vehiculated in media and researchers see it among the material threats associated with refugees, beneficiaries of international protection or other types of immigrants coming from underdeveloped economies. This variable was also explored questioning respondents' opinions regarding the statement: "Immigrants are a burden for social services, as schools or the public health systems". Participants in this study declare that they do not see immigrants as a problem, six out of ten respondents totally disagree with such an opinion. The following figure shows responses distribution:

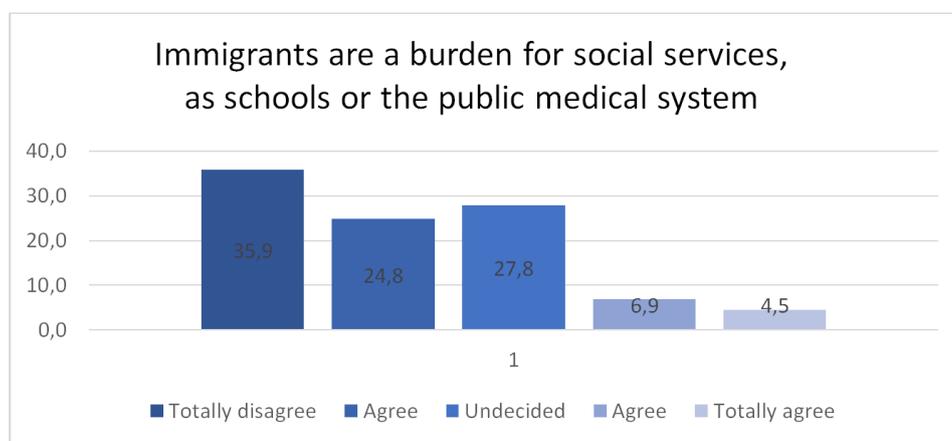


Figure 4. Distribution of responses regarding opinions concerning immigrants' impact on social services, as school or medical facilities (CRCMIS Project 2020)²¹.

²⁰ For further information, see <http://migrationcenter.ro/wp/the-romanian-immigrants-integration-index/>.

²¹ For further information, see <http://migrationcenter.ro/wp/the-romanian-immigrants-integration-index/>.

As seen in the figure above, 11% of the respondents see immigrants as a supplementary burden for social services. Such perspectives of the participants could be put in relation with relatively low migratory flows in Romania, compared to other west European countries, traditional receivers of foreigners.

DISCUSSION

Immigrants' integration is a construct frequently studied, although the literature lacks an unanimously accepted conceptualization and several methodological approaches are employed by researchers. Moreover, in practice, integrating immigrants is targeted, due to the favorable consequences at multiple levels.

Ceobanu and Escandell²² emphasize the distinction between attitudes towards immigration and attitudes towards immigrants, recalling previous studies that address the two concepts together. They draw attention on the methodological and analytical risks of not delimitating the study of opinions referring to a phenomenon from attitudes regarding persons. Furthermore, the work of Meuleman and collaborators (2009)²³ showed that debates regarding immigrants awake intense public interest, while shifting the discussion to immigration reduces the strength of such reactions. Adding to this, research states that social events are expected to influence attitudes towards immigrants and immigration²⁴.

Romania could be considered an emerging destination country for immigrants, with growing numbers in the last 15 years, as shown in a previous section, based on official data²⁵. It is thus expected that respondents may refer to immigration in general, as many of them had no previous interactions with immigrants in Romania.

Results show positive, tolerant attitudes towards immigrants and immigration of the participants in this study. Respondents do not consider immigrants can have a negative impact on Romanian culture, that they are not a competition regarding jobs and that social services are not negatively impacted.

²² Alin M. Ceobanu, Xavier Escandell, *op. cit.*, pp. 313–315.

²³ Bart Meuleman, Eldad Davidov, Jaak Billiet, *Changing attitudes toward immigration in Europe, 2002–2007: a dynamic group conflict theory approach*, in "Soc. Sci. Res", no. 38(2), pp. 352–365, 2009, retrieved from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19827179/> on 16.02.2021.

²⁴ Alin M. Ceobanu, Xavier Escandell, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

²⁵ United Nation. Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), *Twenty countries or areas of origin with the largest diaspora populations (millions)*, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimatesgraphs.asp?4g4>, on 20.11.2020.

CONCLUSIONS

Millions of people find a new home in a different country across the globe, each year²⁶. Migratory flows tackle both the origin country and the receiving ones, at structural and cultural level. Immigrants also face multiple challenges in the host society, as locals' attitudes may vary from acceptance, tolerance, to threat and xenophobic ideas and behavior.

Integrating immigrants should be understood as a dynamic, contextual process, being influenced by three level factors – micro, meso and macro. Furthermore, a smooth, successful integration of immigrants is targeted by all actors involved. The individuals have undoubtable advantages if their receiving country is a good host, destination countries may find solutions for problems as population aging, demographic decline, lack of workforce. Nevertheless, the origin country may benefit from emigrants' remittances or the social capital infusion.

Social sciences can contribute with research and valuable insights concerning actual and dynamic issues, as migration is. Building a comprehensive conceptual framework, validated by empiric studies, will foster a better knowledge in the field, with positive echoes in practice.

²⁶ Alin M. Ceobanu, Xavier Escandell, *op. cit.*, p. 310.