



ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ  
ȘCOALA DE STUDII AVANSATE A ACADEMIEI ROMÂNE  
DEPARTAMENTUL ȘTIINȚE ECONOMICE, SOCIALE ȘI JURIDICE

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# DOCTORAL THESIS

**Abstract**

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**Student:** Vlad I. Roșca

Bucharest, 2023



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### VULNERABLE MIGRANTS IN ROMANIA. AN ANALYSIS OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE

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# Cuprins

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## **Abstract**

Although it is (and, most likely, will remain) a country of emigration, with over five million Romanians living outside the country's borders, in recent years, Romania has begun to receive, in its turn, as a host country, all more migrants. Incoming migration in Romania thus gains volume and, implicitly, produces social transformations. Moreover, the entire migration phenomenon, including both departure (outgoing) migration and arrival (incoming) migration, is transforming the Romanian society. This research uses the sociological theories of globalization, respectively of social transformations to explain some of the (structural, but not only) changes that migration produces in society. In the section devoted to the literature review, the researches of Polanyi (1944/2001) and Castels (2010) are discussed, according to which social transformations produce fundamental changes in a society, other than the changes that naturally occur in everyday life. It can be deduced from this, that migration is a large-scale phenomenon, which adds a layer of complexity to social changes.

According to data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5.7 million Romanians lived outside the country's borders in 2022 (Mihai, 2022), but unofficial figures go up to eight or even nine million. The demographic structure of Romania is thus deeply affected. Fertility, birth rate, mortality, or the age structure of the population change. The aging of the domestic population, but also the mass departure of Romanians abroad, make the domestic labor force recruitment pool decrease. Quantitatively, the labor force in Romania is shrinking, and qualitatively, it is getting older. Not only is the domestic labor force getting older, but unemployment among NEET youth aged between 16 and 24 rose to 15% in 2019, above the European average of 10.5%, while, in the in rural areas, the share even reached 30.7% (Cace et al., 2021; Neagu, 2020). Thus, employability is additionally affected from the exact end that should contribute to improving the unfavorable situation. In addition to these demographic aspects, the mechanisms of the global market also intervene, placing Romanian companies in competition with companies from abroad, including from countries where Romanians choose to go to work. As the demand for labor of Romanian employers are increasing, and the domestic population cannot satisfy them due to the mentioned reasons, the Romanian Government has gradually increased the annual quota of third-country national workers who can be admitted onto the Romanian labor market, from 5,500 in 2015, 2016

and 2017, to 100,000 in 2022 and 2023. Romania is, thus, becoming more and more a destination labor force from outside of the country's borders.

In such conditions, it should not be surprising that the number of foreign citizens settled in Romania has also constantly increased in the last decades. Official data on the number of foreign citizens settled in Romania differ, however, depending on the source. The latest national data, according to the 2022 population and housing census, show that the resident population on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 born in another country was of 386,480, while the International Organization for Migration shows that, in fact, in 2020 there were 705,000 foreign citizens living in Romania. With a resident population of about 19 million, the ILO estimate would put the proportion of foreign nationals in the total population at about 3.71%, a share similar to that met in the last decade of the 19th century. Going by the IOM estimate and taking into account that, between 2020 and 2022, the annual quota of third country nationals admitted for labor on the Romanian market has been constantly increased, we can appreciate that, at the moment, the number of migrants settled in Romania is approaching one million.

Incoming migration in Romania is, thus, a current topic, especially that of third-country nationals. Paradoxical or not, the public restrictions imposed by the governments worldwide to combat the Covid-19 pandemic have led to an increase in incoming migration, a fact demonstrated by the evolution of the number of migrants arriving in Romania during the pandemic period (2020-2022), as well as by the quotas of foreign workers approved for the same interval.

The Covid-19 pandemic in Romania did not lead to the reluctance of migrants; on the contrary, they chose to come to Romania to take advantage of the educational or occupational opportunities here, in relation to their country of origin. The pull factors and push factors in international migration need to be discussed here. Labor demand constituted a pull factor during the pandemic. Subject to the restrictions, many employers had to fire employees or send them into technical unemployment. Other employees didn't show up for work due to Covid-19 contamination. To continue their operations, companies needed labor, and as the domestic problems persisted, the solution was to recruit labor from overseas. On the other hand, push factors led many migrants to leave their native countries and choose Romania even in the midst of a pandemic, due to the lack of prospects in a native society much more affected by the effects of Covid-19 than Romania. As will be read in this thesis, Jagdish and Raviraj left Bangladesh because



the educational services there were suspended for an indefinite period due to the pandemic. Since such rejection factors have an important role in the decision to migrate to Romania, the thesis relies on the sociological theory of globalization to draw attention to the fact that Romania is part of an interconnected global system, in which social, economic, cultural factors etc. can cause population migration from one region to another.

However, labor, studies, family reunification etc. are just the reasons that attract migrants to Romania. Once here, migrants need to be included in an existing social fabric that should allow them to lead a decent life. Therefore, the main objective of this thesis is to analyze the social inclusion mechanisms of third-country nationals in Romania; this will happen by conceptualizing social inclusion through two tools: the wellbeing of migrants and the various forms of their social access. For the operationalization of the research, following items are used to conceptualize the forms of access: access to medical services, access to the labor market, access to education, respectively access to commercial services. The items for the operationalization of wellbeing are corroborated with those of the forms of access, namely: health status, financial situation/stability, social relationships and the perception of a meaning in life. Increasing wellbeing and improving access thus become imperative to achieve the "*rapid inclusion*" called upon by the European Commission.

Three secondary objectives derive from the main objective. Certain chapters of the thesis are reserved for each of them. In chronological order, the first secondary objective aims to build the theoretical framework on the basis of which the analysis of access and inclusion can be supported. The first two chapters of the thesis are dedicated to this attempt. The first chapter is concerned with the conceptual clarifications of migration. From the very beginning of the chapter, the idea is argued that international migration is one of the main factors of social transformations in the globalized world in which we live. This programmatic idea opens the bridge between the social phenomenon of migration (in practice) and the major sociological theories that influence it (described in the second chapter). Returning, however, to the first chapter, it is worth pointing out that its necessity is given by the impossibility of presenting an all-encompassing definition of migration. Being such a complex phenomenon, with so many possible forms of manifestation, migration can be understood and defined from a multitude of perspectives. The role of the first chapter is to try to arrange these perspectives as logically as possible, so as to provide the necessary

basis for understanding migration in order to continue with the scientific approaches in the thesis. In a first phase, a brief etymological analysis of the Latin "*migrare*" or "*migratio*" is made. This is followed by a presentation of the eight types of migrants identified by Castles (2000), with further clarifications for each group. After this, the types and the theories of migration are presented. The theories of migration occupy the central position of the first chapter, having a particular relevance for the rest of the thesis. Moreover, at the end of the thesis, after the actual data analysis of the inclusion, we return to the theories, trying to test them based on the testimonies obtained from the oral history interviews: which theories apply better than others in the real context presented by migrants in the oral history interviews. Thus, an attempt is made to identify those theories that seem to have more applicability in contemporary migration. The first chapter ends with a brief attempt to link migration to the three main sociological paradigms: symbolic interactionism, functionalism and conflict theory.

The second chapter is dedicated to major sociological theories with impact upon migration. Given its complexity, migration might be understood through a multitude of sociological theories. It is not the purpose of this thesis to present all such theories. Instead, two theories are chosen that will be the basis for the development of the conceptual model: the theory of globalization and the theory of social transformations. International migration is a supranational phenomenon that produces structural transformations in society. Castles (2018) believes that modern international migration is a result of the neoliberal globalization that allows relatively easy movements across borders. Thus, the theory of globalization and that of social transformations were considered appropriate for this thesis. For a better understanding of how these theories influence migration, the second chapter provides a brief quantitative analysis of migration from and to Romania (based on official data), from which we learn that, at the time of writing, between six and nine million Romanians lived abroad, while approximately seven hundred thousand to one million foreign citizens lived in Romania. Based on these figures, the thesis puts forward the idea that Romania has, in turn, entered the morass of international migration. If, not long ago, Romania was considered a predominantly emigration country, the figures show that, gradually, Romania is starting to become a destination for immigration as well. The figures indicate an exponential increase in the number of foreign citizens arriving in Romania after EU-wide measures taken as a result of the refugee crisis in 2015.

In addition to the analysis of the two major sociological theories, the second chapter is also interspersed with short declarative episodes extracted from oral history testimonies that justify the theories or complement them. Regarding the theory of social transformations, its interpenetration with the help of other sociological theories is also relativized: modernization, progress or urbanization are also brought into discussion. From here, a theoretical discussion of the interpenetration between social transformation and modernity, with applicability to Romania, is launched. The discussion is led in the direction of the theory of "*multiple modernities*", more precisely looking at the link between migration and modernization in Romanian society. The idea of the historical disparity (at Lucian Boia and Bogdan Murgescu) or of the remanent structural asymmetry (at Stelian Tănase) is being analyzed, but also Vintilă Mihăilescu's counterargument to it by choice of the ideal of comparison. Following the confrontation of these ideas stemming from the Romanian schools of social history and anthropology, the rhetoric between "*delay*"/"*disparity*" and "*recovery of gaps*" (at the first three authors) and the process of "*becoming*"/"*making*" (at the last; not precisely translatable in English) is deliberately left open, so that this rhetoric can allow the launch of some critical opinions in the last two chapters of the thesis: can or should international migration help to recover the delays accumulated over time, or is it more appropriate for it to be seen as a factor in the making of the Romanian society?

The second secondary objective is to design a methodological framework that shall allow the collection and analysis of data. The third chapter is dedicated to this objective. The importance of this objective derives from the methodological innovation employed, namely the use of oral history as a data collection tool. Oral history is a tool specific to historical or folklore research, but less often used in sociological research. Given the choice of oral history for this thesis, it is also necessary to establish a methodological framework that allows its use without problems. The role of oral history is to collect information – often in a raw state – about the history of individuals or of an event, a specific context. The thesis starts from the idea that migration itself – moving from the country of birth to Romania – is a major event (perhaps even a turning point) in the life of any person who experiences it. The role of oral history is to capture this moment as perceived by the migrant. Since each migrant has his or her own history, the participants in the oral history interviews were invited to present their migration experiences. In order to be able to conceptualize from the diversity of evocations gathered with the help of oral history, grounded theory was used

as a second methodological tool. This assumes a constructivist approach in which new meanings and new theories are developed from oral history testimonies.

The third chapter highlights, in detail, the particularities of using oral history and grounded theory in sociological research, then moves on to present the operative aspects of the research: sampling, the period in which the data was collected, the techniques used etc. A subsection of the methodology chapter is intended to illustrate the importance of collaborative research in qualitative studies. Collaborative research highlights the role played by the respondents in the creation of empirical meanings. Despite a set of semi-structured questions that had the role of giving some direction, the oral history discussions in this research were allowed to flow freely, in the direction given by the participants. Thus, the participants were legitimized as experts (being, in fact, the ones who went through the experience of migration, and not the researcher) who contribute to the transformation of empirical information into scientific knowledge. The last part of the third chapter briefly presents the biographical sketches of the twenty-one participants in the oral history research. The sketches are intended to give a short presentation of the personalities of the participants and their migration routes, so as to help to a better understanding of the fourth chapter, (analysis and discussion), in which the migrants' testimonies shall be presented in relation to the research topics studied. The real names of the participants were replaced by pseudonyms to protect their identity, as were their addresses (only the most important municipal or county town near the residency was presented). The sketches were constructed using the self-presentations of the migrants in the oral history interviews. Thus, before going through the fourth chapter of the thesis, the reader has the opportunity to familiarize himself or herself with the personalities of those who, through their testimonies, will give color to the research project on the social inclusion of migrants in Romania.

Finally, the third secondary objective aims at the actual analysis of the inclusion of migrants in Romania, starting from the empirical testimonies obtained from the oral histories. The fourth chapter is dedicated to this objective and begins with a presentation of the applied research project, in which inclusion is conceptualized as an outcome of the relationship between wellbeing and access. Once the conceptual presentation is finished, the fourth chapter continues with the analysis of wellbeing and access: access to medical services, access to the labor market, access to education, access to commercial services, as well as the social participation of migrants in the

communities of residence. Migrants' testimonies are used for analysis and for creating scientific meanings with the help of grounded theory. As the oral histories show, the forms of access bring with them various challenges and opportunities, which are analyzed in detail in sub-chapters where necessary.

The analysis reveals some more successful, other less successful aspects of migrant inclusion in Romania. Some results worth pointing out are:

- Lack of correlation of (public) policies between the national and subnational (local) levels;
- Strong centralization of the administration around Bucharest or around the county capital cities;
- Difficulty in forming close friendships with Romanian citizens, even if, in general, Romanians are perceived by migrants as friendly and kind;
- Dependence between psychological health and inclusion in / exclusion from social networks (the existence of some effects of social relations on health status);
- The existence of a link between the level of stress and the degree of social participation in the destination country;
- The social determinants that influence the health status of migrants can be inherited from the country of origin, perpetuating themselves in the country of destination, or they can exist only in the country of destination;
- The existence of a psychopathological link between childhood / adolescence / family life in the country of origin and the post-emigration state of health;
- The existence of a link between the level of socio-economic development at the local level in the country of destination and the health status of migrants;
- Difficult access to family medicine, especially due to the lack of adequate information regarding the rights of migrants. As a result, the appearance or worsening of diseases that could have been detected and treated in time;
- Difficulty accessing the labor market due to non-recognition of qualifications or experiences acquired in the country of origin;
- The importance of origin and destination language skills in facilitating access to the labor market;

- Facilitated access to the labor market thanks to companies with foreign capital operating in Romania, especially contact and support centers or business process outsourcings;
- Facilitated social inclusion of migrants and eased transfer from the educational system to the labor market in cities with university centers;
- Easy access to commercial services, amid the cultural blurring induced by global hyper-commercialization and digitization;
- Lack of differences between migrants and the native population in terms of access to commercial services; the use, with preponderance, of either convenience stores or large peri-urban commercial centers, same as for the local population;
- The importance of knowing Romanian for overcoming communication barriers and faster social inclusion.

These are just some of the research results, presented here briefly, but detailed throughout the thesis. Apart from them, some other key ideas might also be worth pointing out. The migrants who participated in the oral history research were aged between 20 and 55, came from eighteen different countries and had been in Romania from less than a year to more than 22 years. This wide demographic profile allowed a better understanding of the migration context in Romania. Of particular importance was the the period already spent in Romania. Perhaps this should not be surprising considering that the research tool used was oral history, which becomes increasingly relevant the wider the migration experience is, thus making the testimonies even richer. However, the testimonies of those who have recently arrived in the country, as well as the ones of those who have been here for a longer time, were at least as important. In the case of the former, the importance consisted in reporting some facts about the destination society such as they were before the acculturation process intervened, hence a perhaps rougher, more objective presentation of the facts. In the case of the latter, the experiences accumulated in Romania helped them capture some fine details. Moreover, the testimonies of such latter migrants helped to capture the modernization process of the Romanian society over time, an important aspect for the practical implementation of the theory of social transformations previously discussed. From the testimonies of migrants who have been in Romania for a longer time, it was found that, although not everything is perfect, the situation seems to be better than a couple of decades ago, not only with respect to migrants, but in general, highlighting a progress of the Romanian society.

Another aspect worth mentioning is that the oral histories have revealed the role informal networks play in migrants' access, wellbeing and, as a result, in their social inclusion. Where the formal framework fail, hope for migrants often comes from informal networks. Thus, it was found that informal networks play particularly important roles in access to the labor market, in access to medical services, or in learning the Romanian language and that, without them, the inclusion of migrants would be more difficult.

It should also be stated that, just as many Romanians take the path of Western Europe for better professional or educational opportunities, so too many citizens east of Romania (especially from the Republic of Moldova or from the Asian or African continents) arrive in Romania in search of similar opportunities. Not few of the participants mentioned that they chose Romania in order to have access to an educational system superior to that in their country of origin. It can be stated, therefore, that, in general, the direction in international migration is towards the west, perceived as more promising in relation to the country of origin.

Last but not least, reading between the lines, it was also possible to ascertain the importance that digitization has in facilitating the inclusion of migrants. Equipped with state-of-the-art digital technologies (hardware and software), migrants are part of an interconnected world that helps them adapt more easily. The Internet and the applications developed around it allow migrants to keep in touch with family and friends in their native countries (being able to easily communicate through applications such as Zoom or WhatsApp), to orientate themselves at more ease in an unknown place (using GPS navigation apps such as Waze or GoogleMaps), to communicate more easily with the local population when there is no match between known languages (using voice or text translation applications such as Google Translate), or to make payments using the card or online banking applications, without having to enter into complex dialogues with vendors, which could put them in difficulty.

The results confirm that the sociological theories of globalization and social transformations have a major impact on international migration and that, in particular, the theories related to the initiation of migration find a high applicability in the studied context.

The contribution of the thesis to the scientific literature is important primarily because it studies Romanian migration from a perspective less addressed: that of the arrival of migrants in our country. Romanian migration research is focused, predominantly, on the departure of

Romanians abroad, while the studies on the arrival of foreign citizens (especially third country nationals) in Romania is disproportionate both qualitatively and quantitatively in relation to studies dedicated to the outgoing migration from Romania (this should not be surprising, since, as shown, the number of Romanians leaving is undeniably higher than that of foreigners coming to Romania). At the same time, however, recent data indicate a rapid increase in the volume of inbound migration to Romania. In this context, the present thesis can also be a signal given to the scientific community to direct more of its attention to incoming migration. This thesis does not capture (nor did it even intend to try to capture) everything that the migration into Romania means. The phenomenon is far too complex to be captured by a single research. All this thesis does is to reveal some of the aspects related to the social inclusion of migrants in Romania and, therefore, their life here: What exactly makes them vulnerable and what else helps them to adapt more easily? What factors increase their risk of social exclusion and what other factors contribute to their better inclusion?

A second important contribution of the thesis is the attempt to popularize oral history as a sociological research tool, with particular applicability in migration studies. Strictly from a sociological point of view, this approach can fit into a path opened in the '80s by Zoltán Rostás within the Bucharest Sociological School Bucharest (*Școala Sociologică de la București*), but too little used in the years that followed. The oral history experiments of Zoltán Rostás or Sorin Mitulescu focused on the Romanian sociological school in various stages of its existence, from the monographic campaigns of Dimitrie Gusti to the 70s period of Miron Constantinescu. However, as welcome as the previous attempts may be, oral history deserves to have its horizons broadened. In this thesis, oral history was used to study arrival migration in Romania and to analyze social inclusion patterns of third country nationals in Romania. The oral history used here did not focus on a particular macro-historical moment, but on the personal histories of the migrants, in relation to both the country of origin and the country of destination. Thus, the collected personal stories were loaded with emotions: emotions given by leaving the country of origin and the native home, nostalgia for parents or friends who remained there, emotions given by arriving in a completely new society, by meeting a life partner in Romania, the birth and upbringing of children here, the studies done with Romanian colleagues, then emotions of anger due to the impossibility of making friends among Romanians or the way in which, in some situations, the migrants were treated, and,



at the same time, various forms of manifestation of joy, thanks as well to the fairytale nature of Romania.

Although, through the research project, the thesis aims to study the inclusion of migrants in Romania through wellbeing and access to services, the oral history discussions were not limited to asking the participants for their opinions on these aspects. On the contrary, in the interviews, the participants were asked to present memories from childhood or adolescence, about their parents or the extended family in the country of origin, about their home, about childhood games, about hobbies, about school years, about vacations, about entertainment, about different social or cultural customs at home etc. The role of these questions was to create a context for the participants to perceive their migration experience in relation to their pre-migration experience. What emerged from this was that, often, the participants problematized inclusion, wellbeing or access at a comparative level between the experience in the country of origin and the experience in Romania. Achieving this comparative level was expressly pursued under the conditions in which the thesis was built around the sociological theories of globalization and social transformation: the inclusion of migrants in Romania is not merely analyzed *per se*, but against the background of a substrate in which Romania is placed in the perception of the migrant who participates in the oral history interview in a global system in which it is compared with the situation in the country of origin or even with the entire migratory experience of the individual. Being let to flow in the direction given by the participants (despite some predetermined semi-structured questions), it can be said that the interviews had a somewhat popular form, not necessarily academic, hence resulting in certain multicultural quirks or canons, some of them finding their place in this thesis, others being left aside for, perhaps, other secondary research (the way Romanians treat their elderly compared to the customs in the country of origin; public transport in Romania compared to that at home; the medical services here compared to there etc.).

The analysis of the results proposes an image of the "*becoming*" of Romania (as claimed by Vintilă Mihăilescu?) into a country of incoming migration. This development will probably be only partial, as it is expected that the outflow of Romanians will continue to be higher than the inflow of foreigners, but, even so, Romanian society can no longer lie to itself that it is not attractive for foreigners: as the results show of this research, for various reasons, it is. As such, the results of this thesis can also be useful to political or administrative decision-makers in making

appropriate decisions to facilitate the inclusion of migrants in Romania. However, not only public institutions, but also the civic society should reflect more carefully on the educational, commercial, medical or professional access opportunities for immigrants, all the more so as the Romanian economy tends to have an increasing need for labor force from abroad.

**Keywords:** international migration, social inclusion, wellbeing, access, oral history

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