

Introduction to the Special Issue: Debating Immigration in a Country of Emigration

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For a long time, Romania was considered a country of emigration (Ulrich et al. 2011; United Nations 2017). This status has emerged in the past twenty years due to the steady migration of Romanian citizens mainly towards Western Europe, which involved more than 3.5 million people in longer or shorter migration projects (Sandu 2010; Anghel et al. 2016; Ciobanu 2015). It generated massive loss of human resources and brain drain as well as generating population losses in many regions of the country (Vlase 2013; Ciobanu 2010; Moroşanu 2016; Anghel and Horváth 2009). With real prospects of depopulation, of economic stagnation, brain drain and with a very tangible potential of destabilizing the pension and overall social security systems, migration has started to be addressed in the past few years as a process that will generate more difficulties than opportunities even in the short and medium term (Levitz and Pop-Eleches 2010; Roman and Voicu 2010; Cosciug 2013).

For the moment, the main solutions to balance and revert population losses are represented by the return of some of the migrants, and the arrival of migrants from abroad. The Romanian government was, so far, slow in enabling policies pertaining to the return of Romanian citizens' as well as immigration of foreign citizens. However, both processes have started to be increasingly addressed in the past years by policy makers (Vlase and Croitoru 2019; Coşciug et al. 2018). Despite the fact that return migration and immigration are driven by different sets of causes, in Romania, both are

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increasingly considered by many stakeholders as “the solution” to the country’s depopulation and labor market deficits (Lăzărescu et al. 2016; Coşciug et al. 2019). This special issue embarks on this agenda in discussing challenges posed by immigration and return migration in Romania. It classifies Romania no longer as a country of emigration mainly, but as a country of emigration changing into a country with a mixed migratory regime: emigration of Romanian nationals, transit migration, and immigration of an increasingly diverse population. In this vein, this subject is timely as this change of status is occurring in a context shaped by a *laissez-faire* type of migration policies and where labor immigration is in its incipient stage.

All papers share and develop discourses and analyses of “integration”, the integration of immigrants arriving in Romania and the “re-integration” of returnees, including how re-integration policies employed by the Romanian state are regarded by returnees themselves. In this sense, “integration” is used in this special issue more as a way to address challenges that migrants and returnees face in a new country of immigration than as mere an analytic concept across various types of migrants and returnees. This rather *laissez-faire* use of the term has yet another meaning. In Romania, immigrants are registered as foreign-born and in this respect, the category covers both second-generation, migrants in transit through Romania, and immigrants from and outside the EU. If the analytical concept is definitively needed for analyzing immigrants’ adaptation and socio-economic integration, it actually makes little sense for those who are transiting Romania towards Western Europe but register in Romania, as well as for return migrants whose “integration” could be seen as a re-adaptation than an integration in a foreign society.

As of right now, there is no official data on return, and it is very difficult to estimate the magnitude of the process. It is even less difficult to uncover the difficulties returnees face and set up coherent policies of return. Thus, studies conducted in different periods of time and stages of the Romanian migration unfolded different rates of return, from 50% of the number of emigrants to only 30% of households with migrants having also returnees (Anghel et al. 2016; Anghel and Coşciug 2018). On the other hand, a number of studies on return started to be conducted, signaling that return may be a

sustained process, at least in the more developed regions of the country (Anghel and Coşciug 2018). Different from data on return, there is data on foreign-born. Today, in Romania there are 370,000 people born outside Romania who are registered, making about 2% of the total Romanian population (United Nations 2017). This data is, though, disputable as we actually don't know how many of these people actually live in Romania. As Moldovan citizens and some Ukrainian citizens are able to obtain Romanian citizenship very quickly, being Romanian ethnics, many opt for this solution in order to acquire an EU citizenship and to further migrate to the richer West-European countries. Besides, another important category consists of people born in Western Europe who are registered in Romania. This again poses interpretation challenges as many are actually children of Romanian emigrants born in Western Europe who only register in Romania but live in Western Europe. In any case, in spite of the data limitation, immigration towards Romania is a process that is on track and is becoming visible not only on the streets of main Romanian cities, but also in public discourses and policies. Given that the process is at the moment in its incipient stage, it is a great asset to elaborate in time concepts and methods to analyze how migrants fare in Romania.

In this special issue, the article of Şerban Monica and Alin Croitoru deals with return and reintegration policies looking at what sort of policies returnees aim for themselves and thus what understanding of re-integration they share. The article reveals that even when return policies are positively evaluated by Romanian returnees, not all of them support the idea of having policies for bringing back and re-integrating Romanian migrants. Some simply reject the idea, while others are rather skeptical about the state's capacity of implementing them.

The rest of papers are devoted to immigrants' integration in Romania, third country nationals, asylum seekers and EU migrants. Research was carried out within a project that analyzed challenges of immigration and integration of immigrants in Romania by constructing an immigration index, the Romanian Immigrant Integration Index (IIIR). It was developed in 2017 and was utilized in two successive years.

Different dimensions of integration were tackled, and the following three papers address some of them, such as the labor market and housing. The

article by Ovidiu Oltean and Georgiana Găvruş analyzes immigrants' labor market integration from a multi-dimensional perspective, mapping out patterns of integration as well as the experiences and challenges faced by the newcomers in their attempt to obtain a satisfactory employment status. Using data from the two surveys from 2017 and 2018 and aggregate data gathered from Romanian public institutions, they argue that the immigrant population tends to rather contribute than reduce the existent polarization and inequality that is widening on the Romanian labor market and society. In the following paper, Toma Burean uses a 2018 survey to display the perception and the living conditions in Romania. Immigrants' overall living conditions are considered fair but somewhat below than locals living in comparable settings, thus indicating possible discriminatory practices on the housing market.

The following article, of Coşciug Anatolie, uses survey data collected from immigrants' in Romania in order to develop a framework for measuring immigrants' integration in new countries of immigration. The integration framework (the Integration Score) is composed of 6 dimensions and 24 indicators of integration (with 4 indicators for every dimension). In order to empirically test the validity and internal consistency of the Integration Score, the article uses data of a sample of 645 respondents collected in 2018. The empirical tests prove the validity and internal consistency of the proposed integration framework. One of the implications of this study is that it can shed a new light on how we can analyze integration in societies with minimal institutional support.

These papers thus address different aspects of "integration" in the Romanian society: that of Romanian citizens returning "home", and of immigrants arriving in the country. As we are in the incipient phase of these processes in Romanian society, and debates on immigration have only started to emerge, papers included in this special issue build a first effort to analyze and systematize how immigrants and returnees adapt in Romania, a country of strong emigration, and what are some of the specificities of integration processes in this context.

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