

The Housing of Immigrants in Romania

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ABSTRACT

Few migrants visit and stay in Romania. However, this situation is prone to change with Romania's imminent joining the Schengen treaty and the critical labor force shortages. It is not a surprise that Romanian institutions are trying to prepare and train for accommodating workers coming from other regions of the world. This paper describes the current housing and status of immigrants in Romania including the perception and the living conditions of immigrants from Romania. Tentatively, I will show that overall living conditions are good but somewhat worse than the locals. Finally, I associate the living conditions to predictors identified in other studies such as income and type of activity performed in the host country. The study is exploratory and intends to reveal information on how immigrants report on their living status in Romania.

Introduction

Immigration in Romania is not a recent phenomenon. It started out with the 1970ies and 1980ies migration of students from Syria, Jordan, Libya and Iraq. They were coming to study medicine, engineering in construction and petrol exploitation. The image of the immigrant at that time was that of a person that can afford to pay rent, had access to forbidden Western European products

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and had the means to have a higher standard of living than the local population.

Housing was traditionally an essential element of the Romanian communist state, stressing equal rights of workers to access housing with a large-scale program of housing for low-income families (Borcea 2016). Even if equal rights were ensuring neutrality, still some people received worse quality flats than others. This is reflected after 1989, when communist flat prices started varying enormously due to location, but also the quality of the built. Similar patterns are to be found in other Eastern European countries. The communist regime's policies yielded a post-communist society of house owners. More than 90% percent of citizens in Romania live in apartment owned by themselves or a family member. High rates of house ownership are shared by other communist countries such as Albania, Bulgaria and Poland.

Post-communist social housing programs underrepresented ethnic minorities in the house ownership segment. Roma are discriminated against access to social housing due to conditions that restrict their access to a house (Rughinis 2004). The extent to which minorities and immigrants have entered the homeownership segment is used as an indicator of integration (Alba and Logan 1992). Homeownership is one of the best indicators, even better than labor market access and income. The housing career that culminates into house ownership is a long-term process that might have a different outlook for immigrants. Aside sociodemographic determinants, various life changing events, such as career advancement, marriage or inheritance, increase the chances for home ownership (Sinning 2010).

In this study, house ownership and the size of living quarters are taken as a starting point for the analysis of the differences in immigrant housing in Romania. The aim of this paper is to display the differences in housing between immigrants and locals by taking into account socio-demographics. I use a survey that provides a snapshot of immigrant household conditions. The study is looking at differences per se, with the locals, and between two immigrant populations: immigrants that are students and those that came to Romania for other reasons. The research question is how do living conditions of immigrants differ from the locals. Due to the limited information provided by the survey, I cannot dwell on the personal experiences of immigrants when

looking for rent or to buy a house, although that will be a potential pathway for future research.

The paper is structured as follows: after an introductory section and a sketchy canvassing of previous research on housing and immigration, I continue with general overview of immigrant living conditions in Europe. This is followed with an empirical analysis of the residential patterns of different immigrant groups in Romania. Finally, I analyse the differences in housing conditions among students and other immigrants. The paper ends with a concluding summary and discussion.

Housing and Immigrants. Literature Review

Although exceptions do occur, the pervasive description of the asylum seeker immigrant social housing embeds ghettoization and poor management choices with immigrants portrayed as passive actors. They are placed in refugee centers, work barracks or ethnic neighborhoods. Immigrants from Newcastle, the UK and Bremen, Germany choose to buy property in ethnic neighborhoods (Hackett 2015) or they are forced to live in communal living. Although communal living was used in their home country, immigrants use it to save costs. For Ghanaians and Somalis, religion is the main criterion for the housing decision and the acquisition of house related loans (Mensah and Williams 2013).

A 2002 report on the housing problems faced by immigrants and refugees in British Columbia, Canada pointed out that they were housed in "over-crowded, unaffordable, substandard, "dirty", unpleasant and poorly maintained accommodations" (Mattu 2002). Real estate agencies pass immigrants from one office to another, landlords discriminate based on religion and large families are refused accommodation due to their size. The cycle of deprivation affects most immigrants due to the lack of knowledge of the local culture, denied educational achievements, lack of legal information regarding rights and obligations of landlords, limited rent opportunities and minimum wage employment. Many felt at risk of homelessness due to the limited terms of sponsorship schemes and others complained that there is a lack of services offered after the detained refugees are released. In Toronto, the highest cost house market, homelessness affects refugees and immigrants.

Among the homeless, these are the categories that are affected mostly by affordability. Especially immigrant women without a legal status, are frequently moved from shelter to shelter. They have to accept this situation as they had informal living arrangements with their family. Once these were annulled, the women have to rely on the housing offered by the local authorities (Paradis et al. 2009). Immigrant children in Italy are affected by a vicious circle. The increase in price of real estate constrained immigrant families to rent small homes, far from their relatives, making childcare more difficult to provide. By comparison, Italian families are able to provide a large house close to relatives (Barban and Dalla-Zuanna 2010). In the United States, census data from 1910 to 2000 shows a gradual decline of desegregation until the 1960ies.

The grim picture emerging from Europe, Canada and the United States is not applicable to Australia. Chua and Miller (2009) show that the differences in house ownership between the natives and immigrants is mediated by the length of stay. It is not a surprise that newcomer immigrants do not own homes. After five years, tenure choice and house ownership do not differ between locals and immigrants (Chua and Miller 2009).

Immigration has several spillover effects on housing policies affecting locals such as the house acquiring process and the rhythm of construction activity. A study in Spain revealed that from 2000 to 2010, immigration was the reason for a quarter of the price increases and half of the construction related work (Gonzales and Ortega 2013).

Housing policies are studied in relationship to integration. Housing conditions influence integration and reversely, integration can affect the process of acquiring a house, what Turner and Hedman (2014) call housing careers. Three factors reduce the housing career gap: a university degree, urban living and a longer stay in Sweden. Immigrants have a particularly difficult track of house acquirement. Other predictors, such as residential mobility, are demographic (Rossi 1995). Residential segregation and integration of an ethnic minority are not linked straightforward. Residential segregation has a negative effect on integration. Bolt, Ozueken and Phillips (2010) point out that, in time, the differences between ethnic groups and the local groups start to wash away, affecting the housing market. Moreover, the evidence on the negative effects of segregation are not convincing and ethnic

mixing might not lead to more integration, as is assumed in research covering ghettoization (Bolt, Ozueken and Phillips 2010).

Migrant homeownership is restricted to very few and it is the most wanted form of residential mobility. For most families it is the only large financial investment they will ever make. Family and career resources, the number of income earners in one family and having a child are crucial factor that influence the decision to buy a house (Abramsson et al. 2002; Dieleman and Everaers 1994; Feijten et al. 2003).

Migrant homeownership is a component of economic success and integration in the host country. They are less likely to own homes than their natives. Ethnic identity plays an important role in the choice of tenure. Resemblance to locals that facilitates assimilation has a cumulative effect on obtaining and maintaining a residence (Friedman and Rosenbaum 2004). A strong commitment to the culture of the country of origin coupled with a separate local identity facilitates the exit from ethnic residential enclaves (Johnson et al. 2006). Compared to the residentially and ethnically marginalized, immigrants with strong host country ethnic identity are more likely to be homeowners controlling for duration of stay and socio-economic status (Constant, Roberts and Zimmermann 2009).

The number of studies on housing of immigrants is virtually inexistent in Romania. Romania is the country with the lowest number of immigrants in the EU (see Table 1). More immigrants come to Romania every year. Since 2017, the number of third country nationals coming to live in Romania has doubled. I explore the opinions and situation of the immigrant and refugee households. This is necessary as this phenomenon was never approached. Immigrants in Romania live in dissimilar conditions as the natives. The majority are students coming to obtain a EU recognized degree. They do not own a house and live in smaller flats, but benefit the same level of access to utilities as the locals. My suspicion is that immigrants encounter many of the hurdles encountered by asylum seekers in Canada, Europe or the United States. The institutional infrastructure accommodating immigrants is inexistent. With the exception of the General Inspectorate for Immigration that grants, retracts and evaluates the right for residence, there are no other state institutions that take care of the integration of immigrants. Hence, immigrants coming to Romania will face difficulties regarding renting or

buying a house. The March 2018 Eurobarometer for Romania showed that 59% of Romanians have a negative feeling towards migrants outside the EU. The feelings of hostility are recent. In May 2015 only 34% had the same negative feeling.

Table 1. *The number of immigrants in Europe in 2017 according to Eurostat*

Immigration by citizenship, 2017

	Total immigrants		Nationals		Total		Non-nationals				Stateless	
							Citizens of other EU Member States		Citizens of non-member countries			
	(thousand)	(thousand)	(%)	(thousand)	(%)	(thousand)	(%)	(thousand)	(%)	(thousand)	(%)	
Belgium	126.7	17.5	13.8	108.5	85.6	60.2	47.5	48.3	38.1	0.0	0.0	
Bulgaria	25.6	13.1	51.0	12.5	48.9	0.6	2.5	11.8	46.2	0.0	0.2	
Czechia	51.8	4.5	8.7	47.3	91.3	16.6	32.0	30.7	59.3	0.0	0.0	
Denmark	68.6	19.5	28.5	49.0	71.5	25.6	37.3	23.1	33.6	0.4	0.6	
Germany ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾	917.1	124.4	13.6	788.9	86.0	395.0	43.1	391.5	42.7	2.4	0.3	
Estonia	17.6	8.5	48.5	9.1	51.4	4.6	25.9	4.5	25.5	0.0	0.0	
Ireland	78.5	26.4	33.7	51.2	65.2	28.5	36.3	22.7	28.9	0.0	0.0	
Greece	112.2	31.7	28.3	80.5	71.7	17.2	15.3	63.3	56.4	0.0	0.0	
Spain	532.1	78.2	14.7	454.0	85.3	139.4	28.2	314.2	59.1	0.3	0.1	
France	370.0	128.0	34.6	242.0	65.4	74.5	20.1	167.5	45.3	0.0	0.0	
Croatia	15.6	7.9	50.9	7.6	49.1	2.2	14.1	5.4	35.0	0.0	0.0	
Italy	343.4	42.4	12.3	301.1	87.7	61.1	17.8	240.0	69.9	0.0	0.0	
Cyprus	21.3	4.0	18.6	17.4	81.4	9.3	43.7	8.0	37.7	0.0	0.0	
Latvia	9.9	4.8	48.2	5.1	51.7	0.7	7.5	4.4	44.1	0.0	0.1	
Lithuania	20.4	10.2	49.9	10.2	50.1	0.7	3.4	9.5	46.5	0.0	0.2	
Luxembourg	24.4	1.2	4.9	23.2	95.0	16.7	68.3	6.5	26.6	0.0	0.0	
Hungary	68.1	31.6	46.4	36.4	53.5	11.2	16.4	25.3	37.1	0.0	0.0	
Malta	21.7	1.5	6.8	20.2	93.2	11.7	54.2	8.5	39.0	0.0	0.0	
Netherlands	189.6	44.6	23.5	143.7	75.8	72.6	38.3	68.6	36.2	2.5	1.3	
Austria	111.8	9.7	8.7	102.0	91.2	64.4	57.6	37.4	33.4	0.3	0.3	
Poland ⁽³⁾⁽⁴⁾	209.4	132.8	63.4	76.6	36.6	22.7	10.8	53.8	25.7	0.1	0.0	
Portugal ⁽⁵⁾	36.6	20.2	55.3	16.4	44.7	7.6	20.8	8.8	24.0	0.0	0.0	
Romania ⁽⁶⁾	177.4	146.3	82.5	26.8	15.1	9.2	5.2	17.5	9.9	0.1	0.1	
Slovenia	18.8	3.3	17.5	15.5	82.5	3.3	17.6	12.2	64.9	0.0	0.0	
Slovakia	7.2	4.3	59.5	2.9	40.5	2.3	32.4	0.6	8.1	0.0	0.0	
Finland	31.8	8.1	25.4	23.1	72.6	6.5	20.3	16.5	51.8	0.2	0.5	
Sweden	144.5	19.5	13.5	124.4	86.1	30.0	20.7	90.0	62.3	4.5	3.1	
United Kingdom	644.2	80.9	12.6	563.4	87.4	242.7	37.7	320.7	49.8	0.0	0.0	
Iceland	12.1	2.5	20.3	9.7	79.7	8.4	69.3	1.3	10.4	0.0	0.0	
Liechtenstein	0.6	0.2	25.9	0.5	74.1	0.2	38.1	0.2	36.0	0.0	0.0	
Norway	53.4	6.8	12.7	46.6	87.3	20.0	37.4	26.0	48.8	0.6	1.1	
Switzerland	143.4	23.8	16.6	119.5	83.4	82.5	57.6	37.0	25.8	0.0	0.0	

Note: The individual values do not add up to the total due to rounding and the exclusion of the 'unknown' citizenship group from the table.

(*) Break in series.

(†) Estimate.

(‡) Provisional.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: migr_imm1ctz)

General Context

In the European Union, the number of migrants, that are third nationals, has increased. In 2015, 4% of the households included a third country national. Housing conditions are important. Their quality and structure affect children's school performance and the quality of work and family support (European Commission 2016; OECD 2015). The legal environment regarding housing is hostile to immigrants. As a migrant, it is more difficult to get a

house loan or to rent a place (European Commission 2016), thus they dwell in overcrowded residences. Housing is a fundamental right to be enjoyed by migrants and non-migrants. Each country within the EU is in charge of ensuring decent housing. With the help of the Commission and the European Investment Bank, programs were designed to help, especially refugees, to receive housing.

In most European countries, the majority of immigrants live in the big cities. The neighborhoods with immigrants are poor and with faulty public services. In several Western European cities, the newcomers settle to poor, polluted and segregated areas. Policies designed to reduce segregation focus on improving the infrastructure and on the diversified allocation of social housing (Bosswick and Heckman 2006). Ghettoization, engendered in big cities, hinders integration of immigrants. Local authorities target discrimination by growth in public investments in schools and infrastructure. PISA and OECD recommend language classes in all areas with a high percentage of persons with migrant background.

The OECD measures housing through five indicators. These are house ownership, the proportion of tenants with reduced rent, overcrowding, the proportion of immigrants that have substandard poor dwellings and the proportion of immigrants that pay more than 40% of their income to rent. Integration is affected by family structure. Household with endogamous families (both spouses are immigrants) are more difficult to integrate compared to exogamous households (one of the spouses is not a migrant). The realist assessment of the housing condition of immigrants is hard (The Council of Europe 1998). Research results are confined to snapshot case studies which makes the tracking of integration difficult. Comparisons are rarely made. Ideally, one can measure the effect of a housing policy with a before-and-after research design. The Council of Europe reports and funding focus on equality in housing. This includes the access to houses that are close to schools. On the other hand, many migrants complain from discrimination from house owners, that either refuse immigrants or request increased rents for risks associated with renting flats to migrants. Equal access does not guarantee integration. Immigrants may very well have similar living conditions and access to health care with locals, but language barriers and not knowing rights increase the housing gap and encourage segregation.

A 2015 OECD report concludes that the increase of integration problems is not associated to the increase of the number of immigrants. Countries with many immigrants have better integration policies. The proportion of immigrants with jobs is similar to the proportion of locals with jobs. 25% have graduated a university and non-active immigrants are twice more willing to find a job. At the same time, immigrants find it difficult to apply for loans and social housing programs that inevitably leads to ghettoization and housing segregation.

This paper uses the OECD and European Commission indicators for housing. These are correlated with World Bank development and quality of life indices. The variables included for housing conditions are the composition of the household, ownership, housing and utility costs as proportion of overall costs, overcrowding and living conditions. Additionally, the survey includes questions on rent support coming from the civil society and state institutions.

The possibility to pay rent, house ownership and access to bank loans for a house can indicate the level of immigrant integration. In most countries, including Romania, owners' hostility impedes immigrants to find decent rents (Charsley et al. 2016). Restrictive legislation can forbid foreigners to own a house or to access a bank loan. This results in a gap in house ownership between immigrants and non-immigrants (Amuedo-Dorantes and Mundra 2013).

The next section will unfold the methodology used for the immigrant survey in Romania. This is followed by a presentation of a general European context. Finally, the survey results are displayed. I compare students to non-students living conditions to find that most working immigrants have a higher standard of living and are part of the corporate migration.

Methodology

The survey of immigrants in Romania had to address challenges common to the investigation of a group that is difficult to link to a domicile. This made sampling impossible. An online survey, coupled with face to face interviewing, in-class survey completion and the snowball technique garnered as many responses as possible. Institutions managing refugee

centers, NGOs, companies and other institutions that assist and/or employ of third country nationals and asylum seekers were contacted. The immigrant survey included 520 respondents. Their nationalities varied quite widely.

Table 2. *The immigrants included in the study by region and country of origin (highest percentages)*

Country	Proportion in percentages (absolute numbers are in parentheses)
EU	6.6% (34)
Third country nationals	80.5% (419)
Israel	9.4% (49)
Syria	7.1% (37)
Philippines	6.5% (34)
Moldova	6.2% (32)
Ukraine	4.8% (25)

N=520 National Immigrants Survey 2017 CSCM

Table 3. *General Inspectorate of Immigration Report on the Number of Immigrants in Romania in 2017 (these figures do not include asylum seekers and refugees)*

Country	No of immigrants
Moldova	16% (10222)
Turkey	14.7% (9255)
China	11.92% (7507)
Israel	5.04% (3174)
Syria	4.75% (2994)
USA	3.47% (2189)

N=62,926 immigrants and 3924 refugees and asylum seekers

Immigrants from Israel make up 9.4% of the survey followed by Syria (7.1%), Moldova (6.2) and the Philippines (6.5%). The Immigration General Inspectorate 2017 data on immigrants reports that immigrants from Moldova (16%) and Turkey (14.7%) are the most numerous. Syrians make up 58% of refugees and 5% of immigrants that arrived for other reasons. In 2017, 62,926

immigrants and 3,924 refugees and asylum seekers were registered. Israelites make up 5% of the sample of registered migrants in Romania. 11.92% of the immigrants were from China compared to 1% in the survey. To partially adjust these balances, country weights were assigned.

There were very few questions pertaining to living conditions. Due to the needed shortness of the survey, these questions focused on descriptive components of households. The questions that were included followed indicators used in the OECD immigrant surveys. Respondents were asked about the size of their dwellings, number of rooms, the number of the household occupants, the size of income dedicated to household related expenses, whether they own, rent or they stay with their family. Further on, a battery of questions used by the World Bank to depict the possession of a modern style of living included having running water, private bathroom, own room, toilet in the house, sewage system, kitchen, TV, fridge, computer, smartphone, land line, internet, air conditioning and electricity.

The next section will display the general European context of the living conditions of immigrants followed by the presentation and discussion of the analysis of the survey.

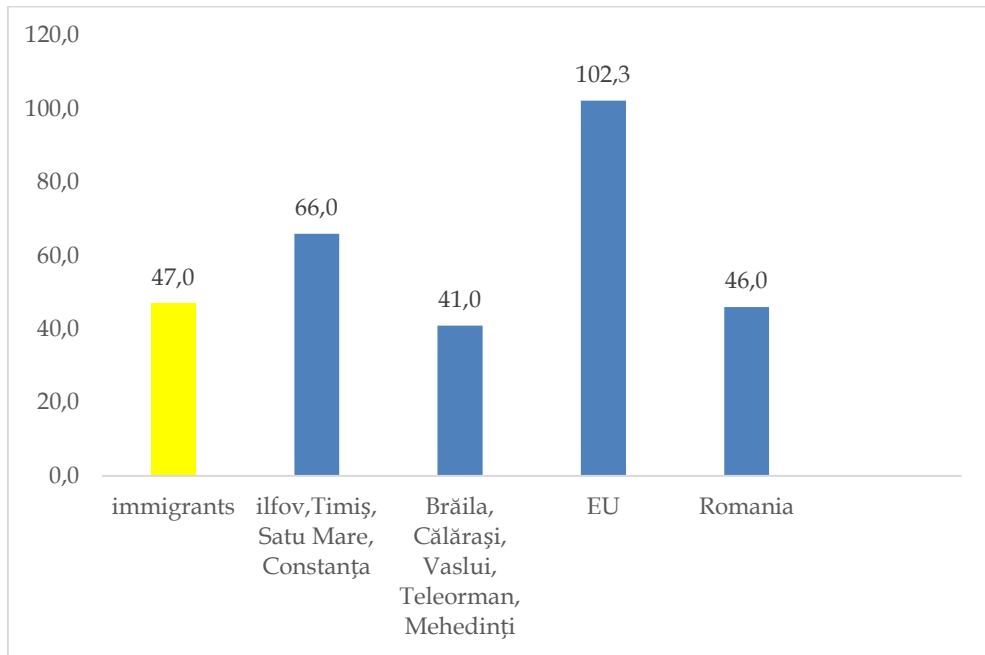
Analysis and Results

This section covers the living conditions of immigrants in comparison with the local population. Table 4 averages the size of households in various Romanian counties that are at different stages of economic development. Included are EU averages. From the selected counties most immigrants live in Ilfov and Timiș with the local population averaging 66 square meters households. This is significantly larger than an average size immigrant household. Immigrants live in houses that are similar to poorer counties. Both local and immigrant populations live in smaller houses than the EU average.

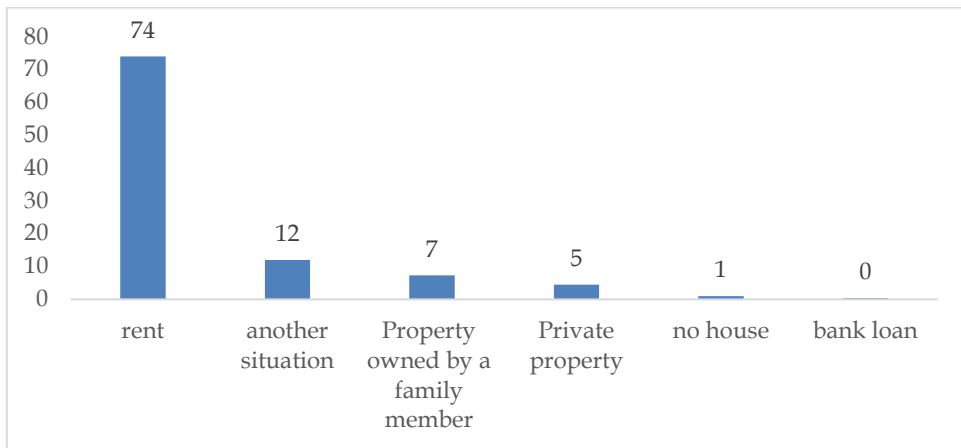
Immigrants live in two room apartments similarly to local population where the average is 2.5. Most immigrants rent their place (74%) which sets them apart from Romanians. Romania is the country with the highest percentage of house owners and smallest percentage of rent paying citizens (4.5 %). Only 12% of immigrants live in dwellings that they own an apartment

or live in one owned by the family. Only 1% declared that they are homeless and 2% that claimed that they have a bank loan for a house.

Table 4. *Average size of a household m²*



Romania is the country with the highest percentage of the population living in a household without a bathroom or shower in the house (31%). 33% of households do not have a toilet in the house and 49% do not have any plumbing system. These types of households are mostly in the rural parts of Romania. Urban dwellings offer a radically different standard of living. 97% have running water, 94% have indoor plumbing, 38% are connected to public gas system and 99% have electricity.

Table 5. *Type of immigrant household %*

78% of the surveyed immigrants live in urban areas. Most (63%) live in Cluj, Bucharest, Braşov, Iaşi, Sibiu and Timișoara. It is no surprise that immigrants share similar living conditions with the local population (Table 4).

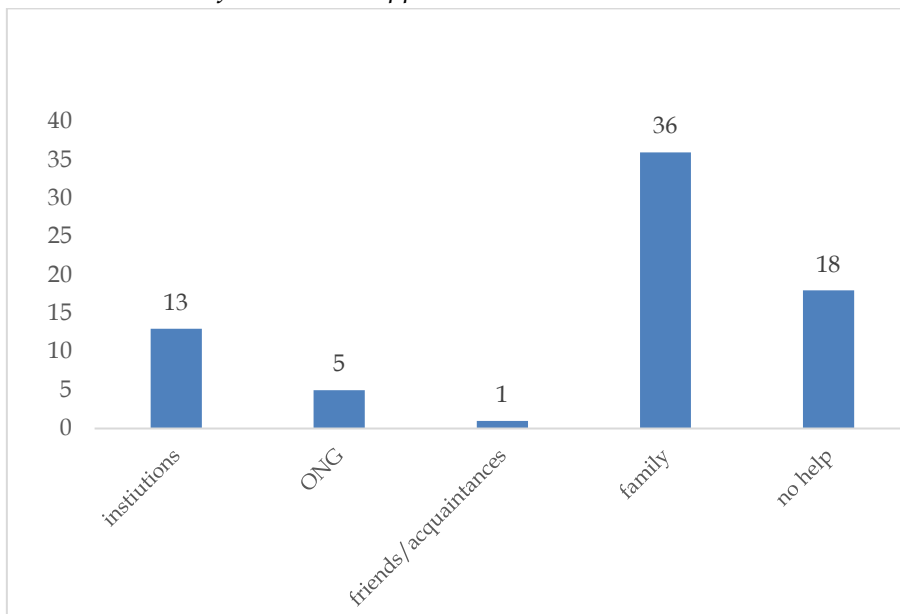
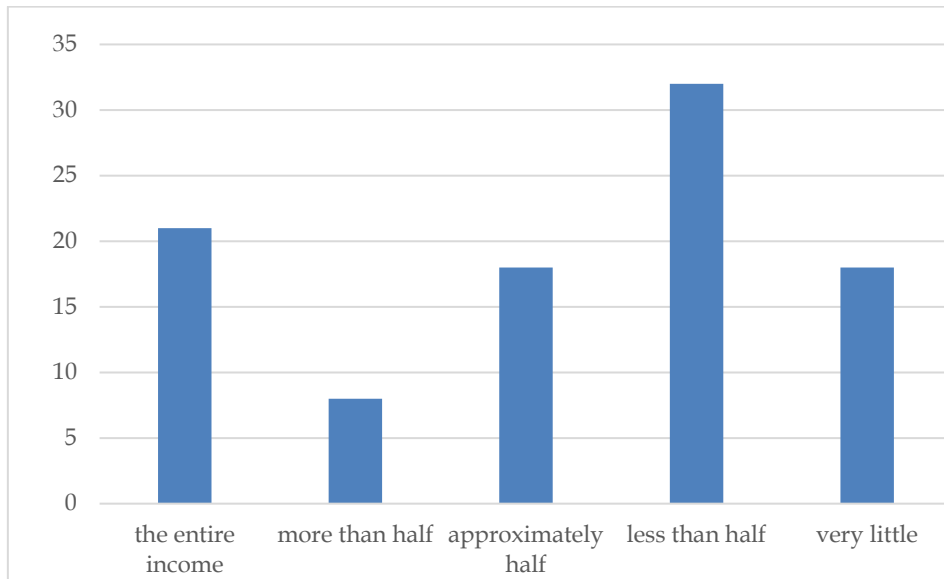
Table 6. *Source of household support*

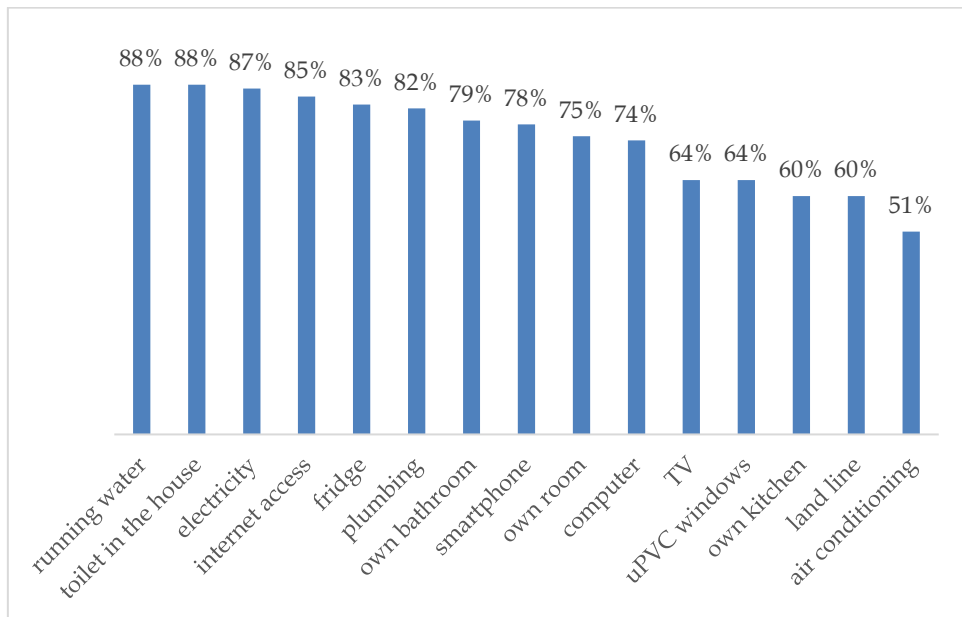
Table 7. Share of income spent on household utilities and rent

For a decent standard of living the utility cost should not surpass 40% of the household income. A sizable proportion of immigrants are over this threshold. 18% receive support for their living conditions from institutions and NGOs. LADO (Liga pentru Apărarea Drepturilor Omului - The League for the Protection of Human Rights) offers a one-time relocation sum to immigrants that are asylum seekers or refugees. The local labor and employment agencies have allocated aid for covering living conditions. These funds are limited and some, rarely target immigrants.

Students make up a large part of the population of immigrants. According to the Romanian Immigration Office the majority of immigrants that are outside the EU have a student visa. In the survey, students are approximately 45% of the sample. Their living conditions are worse than other categories of immigrants. The average size of student dwellings is 45 square meters compared to 59 for others. Their houses have 1.9 rooms compared to 2.5 on average for others. The non-EU immigrants, that are not students, live in households with 3.4 persons, compared to students who live with 2.3 persons. The average size of the household in the EU is 2.5. In Poland,

a country from Eastern Europe of similar size with Romania, the average size of the immigrant household is 1.5.

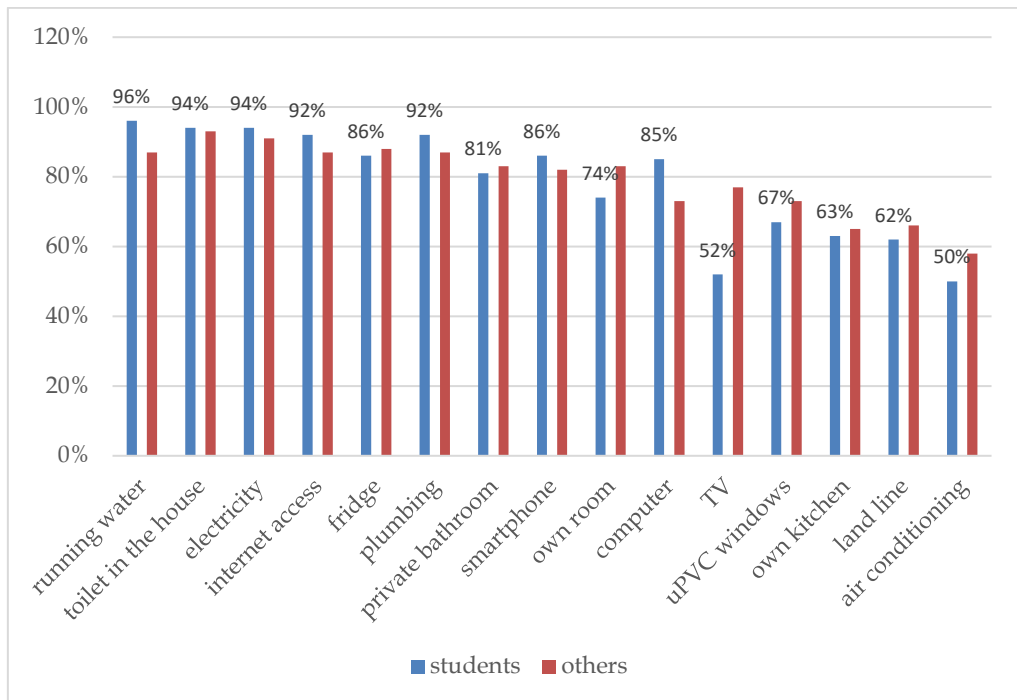
Table 8. *Access to utilities, plumbing and level of development*



82% of foreign students rent their place compared to the 69% of other categories of immigrants. 9% of non-students own a house and the same percentage resides in a house owned by a family member.

To conclude, immigrants that did not come to Romania for studies are better off than students. They live in larger houses and more of them own houses.

The living conditions of student immigrants differ significantly from other immigrants as shown in Table 9. More students have running water, internet access, plumbing and access to a computer. This is due to their concentration in urban residences such as students' dorms and rented flats.

Table 9. *Student and non-student immigrants' access to utilities*

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to reveal the housing conditions of immigrants in Romania following a survey applied in 2017. A number of insights emerged. One idea is that the living conditions gap of urban migrant dwellers and the local urban population exists. They share with others smaller living spaces possibly not because they cannot afford rent. The majority of the immigrant population surveyed and from outside the European Union is composed of two categories: students and corporate immigrants. Students are most likely to share a room with others and all of them live in the cities. On the other hand, the type of flats rented by immigrants who work might be small and expensive. This might be because of a basic housing problem that relates to discrimination in the housing markets. Students and immigrants are often

subject of discrimination on the renting market. This makes communal living more likely to the high costs and limited availability of affordable renting.

The presence of areas that are densely populated with overcrowded dwellings is an indicator of a lower socio-economic status. Yet, according to the European Union standards of overcrowding, most of the local population lives in overcrowded apartments. Moreover, some live-in overcrowded flats strategically to save money or they have a special status as students.

As with other surveys on immigrants, one has to bear in mind that the results of the study have to be interpreted with caution. Not having a randomized large sample of immigrant's limits, to a certain extent, engaging into generalizations or argue that the sample is representative to the Moldovan population, the largest category in this sample. Although students make up a large part of the surveyed population it is not representative for the immigrant student population as a whole. Notwithstanding such shortcomings, the study offers a novel insight into how immigrants living in Romania deal with their housing situation.

Romanian policy makers and bureaucrats point out the evident lack of data regarding the living conditions of immigrants. It is clear from the study that the survey reveals a more complex picture of the housing. The image will deepen in complexity once Romania joins the Schengen area and it becomes more challenging with the increasing immigrant population that arrives for work to fill in the critical labor force shortages. In 2019, a Romanian construction company was fined for providing poor living conditions to its workers from Vietnam. The immigrants were living in containers with no running water or other basic sanitation facilities (Digi24.ro, 2019). This story highlights the critical need for a complex approach on analyzing the immigrant housing conditions in Romania.

Undoubtedly the differences between students, corporate migrants and workers dictate a differential approach by local and national authorities. Also, cultural conventions now forbid open racist remarks and policies and subtle forms of exclusion and rejection should be taken into account when interacting with ethnic and racial minorities. In the housing and renting domain, racial minorities are consequently prone to be victims of discriminatory practices. That is why their careful scrutiny and identification

will be a challenging task but research and policy analysis have to devise tool to their demise.

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