Do Return Migration Policies Matter?
A typology of young Romanian returnees’ attitudes towards return policies

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ABSTRACT

During the last decades, the interest in migration policies has increased, both at institutional level and in academia. However, if the scientific understanding of policies associated with migration at destination has tremendously advanced, our knowledge about origin countries interventions in migration stays limited. Our paper addresses one of the largely unexplored topic of this area: if and what kind of policies supporting return/returnees the returnees themselves find appropriate. The analysis is based on 120 interviews with Romanian returnees, aged 18 to 39, coming back after at least 6 months of working or studying abroad in different EU countries. The article reveals that even if the return policies are generally positively evaluated by the Romanian returned migrants, not all of them support the idea of having policies specially designed for attracting migrants back to the origin country. Some of them simply reject the idea and others are sceptical about the state capacity of implementing this type of policies. The paper explores all the main clusters of attitudes towards return migration policies and illustrates each of them with excerpts from in-depth interviews.

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Introduction

In 1993, when the first edition of “The Age of Migration” was published, its authors, Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, probably did not anticipate that their inspired title would, a few decades later, become a real label for (at least) the beginning of the twenty-first century. Especially nowadays, migration and its implications are present everywhere in public and academic discourse. In Europe, the rise in the number of asylum seekers has erupted in inflammatory formulas such as “crisis of migration”. Brexit and the recent terrorist attacks in major European cities have increased the concern and attention paid to international migration in terms of migratory flows and processes of integration (economic, social and cultural). International migration has become one of the hot topics of current public debate. While this increased passion may not be the best premise for the study of migration, its merit lies in stimulating research in the field. No one can doubt that the funds available for research have been augmented, and the social sciences are among the favoured beneficiaries. However, research seems unable to liberate itself from the “false universalism” (Burawoy 2016) imposed by the mechanisms of (social) sciences production. It continues to privilege Western societies’ mastery (Burawoy 2016). In migration studies, this is reflected in a prioritisation of topics of interest for receiving countries, or as de Haas & Vezzoli (2011, 2) put it, in “a general receiving-country bias”. This bias especially affects the study of migration policies.

Of relatively recent interest for academia (Massey 1999; Hollifield 2008; Hollifield and Wong, 2013) is the role of the state in international migration, which has been mainly analysed from the perspective of the receiving country. Although the need to investigate what happens in the origin country was acknowledged long ago (e.g. Massey 1999), and there has been progress in this direction, Weinäär explains, “While it seems obvious what immigration...
policy is, emigration policy represents an enigma” (2014, 5). Overlooking the exaggeration, the statement accurately stresses the disproportion in the levels of conceptualisation and accumulated knowledge on policies linked to the origin versus the destination areas of migration.

In this context, our paper is a contribution to the process of extending the list of topics investigated in relation to migration policies in countries of origin. In its current form, it does not offer a consistent contribution to theoretical advancement, but rather aims to contribute to the development of new lines of inquiry. Here we do not directly approach the intervention of the state, but rather seek to highlight the opinions that returnees themselves have about return migration policies and about the need for implementing such policies, specifically in the case of one particular emigration country (or labour emigration country, in the terminology used by Østergaard-Nielsen [2003]). We exclusively use qualitative information (120 interviews with young returnees) collected in one of the most important sending countries of intra-European migration, Romania. We prompted our interviewees to discuss not only the need for such policies in Romania, but also to describe their ideas about the content of such policies. Contrary to our expectations, the state’s interventions aimed at return migration/returnees were not entirely supported by our informants (themselves returnees). Some of our interviewees were sceptical about the need for such policies; some rejected the idea. For those who found such policies useful, the content they attributed to them was (consistently) broader than what we were used to finding in the literature describing origin country interventions in the area. Interestingly, regardless of the opinions about which policies were needed, the main factor that seemed to drive the scepticism was a lack of trust in the Romanian authorities and their actions and not, as previous literature has suggested (Tai and Truex 2015), concerns regarding the increase of social inequality.

This paper is structured in six parts. We begin with a general discussion about return migration policies, mainly aiming to clarify the meaning of the terms used here. We then discuss the few findings that research literature offers in relation to opinions/attitudes of the population of origin countries...
towards return migration policies. In the third section of the paper, we place our discussion in a very specific context (i.e. Romania) and briefly describe Romanian migration and the public authorities’ involvement in managing it. We state our case for choosing Romania as a propitious site for studying our topic. The methodology of the study is then presented. The fifth section of the paper is dedicated to results regarding our informants’ opinions about the current need for return policies in Romania and the way they conceive such policies. A brief discussion section closes the paper.

**Return migration policies and attitudes towards them: a brief introduction to the topic**

Even if intuitively *return migration policy* seems to be a straightforward concept (i.e. interventions related to return migration), in migration studies the meanings are not at all so clear. This is not because scholars in the field of migration studies are not capable of a simple language exercise, but because, in fact, the reality subordinated to the label is complex, volatile and hard to capture.

To date, *return migration policies* is a term that has been linked to interventions operating from two different spaces: the country of destination (the place to which the migrants have gone to live and from which they now wish to return) and the country of origin (the place to which the migrants wish to return). We will be referring here only to the latter sense. Specifically, we are interested here *only* in interventions designed and implemented by public authorities in the origin countries. Defining the object of interest so narrowly does not, as it might seem, make our task easier. The reason for doing so is that the interventions related to return do not, to date, constitute, as Koch, referring to destination countries and international organisations, explained, “a policy field in its own right” (Koch 2013, 906, emphasis added). The consequence is that the references to *return migration policies* of origin

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2 The literature also discusses a third level: the intervention of international organisations on return (especially IOM and, partially, UNHCR [Koch 2013]).
countries, or rather to *measures aimed at regulating/managing the return*, are scattered throughout different fields of inquiry, are difficult to identify and are usually described in connection with other different topics (e.g. transnationalism, diaspora, return migration and the migration and development nexus). Moreover, the fluid character of current migration and the different meanings of *return*,\(^3\) which today cannot be simply assimilated with permanent return but also encompass temporary or circular migration, make things even more complex.

Yet, recently, scholars in migration studies have started to pay attention to the role of *origin countries* in managing migration (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Gamlen 2008; de Haas and Vezzoli 2011; Lesińska 2013; Weinar 2014), and this also has consequences for conceptualisation in the field of migration policy. One may not talk yet about a widely accepted definition of origin country migration policies. However, there is a clear tendency towards the common acceptance of migration policies of origin countries as combining at least two components: emigration and diaspora (e.g. de Haas and Vezzoli 2011, Weinar 2014); but sometimes they also include three: emigration, diaspora and return (e.g. Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Lesińska 2013).\(^4\) As one may notice, there seems to be a consistent difference in the way *return-related interventions* are approached. Yet, none of the two positions mentioned above excludes/neglects them: in a two-dimensional perspective, return migration policies are part of emigration policies. We prefer here to use a three-dimensional perspective and to consider *return migration policies* as an independent dimension of the migration policies of origin countries.\(^5\)

Even when accepting one or the other of the two perspectives already mentioned, one important problem still remains for defining the content of such policies. Czaika and De Haas’s (2013, 489) solution, which is to define migration policies according to their establishment in order “to affect the

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\(^3\) See Sinatti (2015) for a discussion about Senegalese migration.

\(^4\) The labels used for different components of migration policy at origin differ from one author to another (e.g. Østergaard-Nielsen [2003] speaks in terms of “migration management”, “protection of overseas workers” and “return policies”).

\(^5\) For arguments see also Şerban (2014).
behaviour of a *target population*” (our emphasis added), only apparently solves the difficulty. Applied to the case of return migration, this is not very helpful, as the interventions directed to return (may) initially be aimed at a population of migrants, not at one of returnees. This is the source of another, relatively frequent, overlap: some interventions that could be linked to return migration are accepted by some authors as part of return migration policies, while the same interventions are considered by others to be part of diaspora policies.6

Lesińska (2013, 80–81), in one of the few attempts to conceptualise return migration policies at origin, defines them as including interventions to promote return and to inform the migrant communities about opportunities in the origin country, interventions aiming to support the employment of returnees, the offer of training and counselling and all other types of economic incentives to stimulate or channel entrepreneurial activities (including tax exemptions).7

If the literature on different cases offers sufficient examples to understand what kind of interventions origin states take to stimulate return or to support returnees, to our knowledge, the literature about the mechanism of producing these policies remains very limited. How are these policies elaborated? Is “behind closed doors” the strategy? What are the attitudes towards them? What are the factors behind such attitudes? These questions are relevant mainly due to the specificity of the policy measures which are designed for convincing/persuading migrants to return to their origin country. There are significant differences between the processes of designing and implementing policies for people who live within a country’s borders and for people who live abroad. The way in which these policies are adopted offers them reliability and directly affects their odds of successful implementation. Certainly, these are only part of the questions still to receive

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6 See, for example, Lesińska’s (2013) approach to *return migration policies* compared with Gamlen’s (2008) approach to *state and diaspora*.  
7 Lesińska (2013) also includes the setup of institutional structures as an action towards return migrants. However, we consider this a sign of the strength of commitment to support returnees rather than as an action oriented towards returnees.
research-based answers in relation to migration policies at origin, whether this refers to emigration, diaspora or return migration policies.

Our aim here is mainly to address the second-last and (in part) the last of the questions mentioned above. Previous answers seem to be very scarce: we were able to identify only one study driven by relatively similar questions. Tai and Truex (2015) worked with both quantitative and qualitative data to investigate the attitudes of Chinese citizens towards return migration. The returnees of interest for them were highly skilled (students, professors and entrepreneurs). The results, based on a survey experiment (web samples) and face-to-face interviews (urban areas), showed a relatively high level of support for return migration policies aiming to attract/integrate highly skilled returnees. However, this support depended on the socio-economic status of the respondents; it was fragmented against the quantity of benefits intended to stimulate the return of migrants and the category of beneficiaries. The interventions targeting professors and entrepreneurs gained more support than those targeting students. Support for policies based on incentives decreased as the incentives increased, and the lower socio-economic strata of the population seemed to be less likely to support such interventions. Inspired by theoretical models used to explain attitudes towards immigrants/immigration policies, the two authors hypothesised (and their results support the assumptions) that explanations for those attitudes were found in the perceived societal gains associated with return (this explains the lower level of support for students when compared with support for professors and entrepreneurs) and in the inequality aversion, referring “both to citizens’ antipathy towards economic inequality and disparities in income distribution, as well as antipathy towards unequal and unfair policies in general” (Tai and Truex 2015, 774).

We started our research on the opinions of young Romanian returnees on the basis of these assumptions and gathered the relevant qualitative data within the framework of YMOBILITY, a Horizon 2020 research project designed for analysing intra-European youth mobility. Our endeavour has sought to understand what kind of support Romanian returnees give to return
migration interventions, to examine what type of interventions are perceived as beneficial and partially to explore the factors behind our informants’ choices of whether or not to support return migration policies in Romania. Using information only from young returnees limits the scope of our conclusions. We started from the assumption that because they are possible beneficiaries of such policies and are more empathetic with the return process, returnees themselves would have a more positive stance towards migration policies than towards other categories within the general Romanian population.

Romanian context

Romania is currently one of the most important origin countries of Europe. According to World Bank (WB) data, in 2013, more than 3.4 million Romanians were living abroad. At the time, this was more than 17% of the country’s population (World Bank 2016). Yet, the striking characteristic of Romanian migration lies not in the overall number of migrants, but in the huge increase in such a relatively short period of time, basically since the beginning of the new millennium (Sandu, 2010). Previous to that moment, Romania, a national state since 1918, had not had a consistent history of migration. Transylvania, one of the historical provinces, had been the source of some migration to the United States at the end of nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. After the Second World War, more than 50 years of communist rule gradually transformed the country into one of the most closed societies of the former communist bloc. Ethnic return migrations (Brubaker 1998) to Israel, Germany and, to a lesser extent, Hungary were the most consistent international movements across borders (Șerban 2011). The fall of the communist regime at the end of 1989 was followed by an explosion of departures abroad. After few years, the restrictions introduced by destination countries considerably slowed the pace of emigration. In the mid-’90s, a new wave of Romanian labour migration started to develop. Beginning in 2002, the year when Schengen Area-related visa restrictions were lifted for
Romanians, migration increased spectacularly. Shortly after this, Italy and Spain become the main migration destinations. These trends continued for a couple of years (Sandu 2010). The recent economic crisis, which hardly hit Southern Europe, coupled with gradually relaxing restrictions on travel and especially on working abroad, associated with the first years of Romania’s membership in the EU, gave new direction to Romanians’ movements abroad. Departures to Germany, the UK and France gained momentum. Italy retained its attraction, while the numbers of Romanians in Spain slowly diminished.\(^8\) Nowadays, Romanian migration is mostly a European migration (in 2013, more than 80% of Romanian migrants were living in other EU countries),\(^9\) with Italy, Spain, Germany, the UK and France on the list of the most important destinations. Romania’s achievement of full membership in the EU transformed Romanian migration into a highly complex and fluid phenomenon. Temporary and circular as well as permanent forms mixed together, resulting in a highly dynamic migration.

As labour migration increased, the flow of remittances grew substantially; the maximum point was reached in 2008 (more than 9 billion dollars in the estimation of the WB). Once the economic crisis set in, the remittances fell by almost a half, and since then, the trend has decreased. Even if the remittances had remained consistent, in 2013, they were contributing to less than 2% of Romania’s GDP (World Bank 2016). If the economic crisis impacted work-related departures, it marginally impacted return migration. Dedicated studies (Stănculescu and Stoiciu 2012) report low levels of return, and the 2011 National Census reveals an unexpected low number of returnees.

Established in 1989 as a liberal democracy, Romania inscribed in its first constitution thereafter the right of individuals to freely leave and return to the country. Without experience in managing migration and challenged by a

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plethora of problems connected with the change in political regime, Romanian authorities had a delayed reaction to migration. Some attempts to manage migration can be traced to as early as the mid-90s (i.e. labour migration agreements), but they were limited in scope and impact (Şerban and Stoica 2007). Once migration started to grow and Romania entered the process of negotiation for EU accession, an intense effort to curb irregular migration became the main factor shaping the Romanian system of migration management. Even though activity towards emigration was intense during the first years of the new millennium, the diasporic dimension of Romanian policies developed more slowly. Instrumental interventions to extend the network of consulates in the main countries of destination and to increase the number of diplomatic personnel with functions related to Romanian communities abroad were the first steps. However, the recognition of “diaspora” produced by the new wave of labour migration was a relatively late process. The population working abroad was incorporated as a new category into the long-standing Romanian policy regarding historical diaspora (i.e. ethnic Romanians living in neighbouring countries). The scope of intervention was largely confined to supporting cultural activities aimed at preserving the “Romanian-ness” of individuals living in foreign territories.

In this complex of interventions related to migration, Romanian authorities approached return migration in a rather episodic manner. The topic appeared in public debates from 2006 to 2008, a period of sustained economic growth for Romania. The lack of workers in certain economic sectors was timidly supplemented with immigrants, a new phenomenon for Romanian society (Şerban and Lăzărescu 2014). The perceived scarcity of labour and the perspective of an increase in immigration triggered interventions aimed at attracting Romanians from abroad back to their country of origin. A very complex plan to stimulate and facilitate the return and the reintegration of returnees into Romanian society was elaborated (Şerban 2015). However, once the economic crisis hit the Romanian economy, the priorities of the authorities fundamentally changed, and return migration became a marginal issue. Since then, even though issues related to migration periodically burst into the
public arena as hot topics (especially during elections), return migration has kept its marginal character on the official agenda.

In the whole dynamic associated with Romanian migration policy, one may easily detect a certain synchronisation in the pace of interventions with the process of negotiating EU membership. Once Romania became a full member of the EU, interest in (e)migration consistently decreased. This suggests not only a disproportionate origin-destination balance of power but also the existence of a specific component of foreign affairs interest in the development of migration policy.

It is difficult to assess the degree of public consultation related to migration policy in Romania. Some of the legal measures, especially those related to emigration, were very rapidly adopted and implemented. Their link with accession to the EU, a process largely supported by the Romanian population (Sandu 2008), made the strategy of taking decisions “behind closed doors” sustainable. If we take the parliamentary debates as an indicator, then diaspora-related interventions were the most controversial. Yet, this can be misleading: most of the debates were related to the sensitive topic of historical ethnic minorities living in neighbouring countries, not to the new diaspora, which was the result of post-1989 migration. Even though, as previously mentioned, topics related to migration and diaspora erupt periodically in public debates (especially during elections), we would rather characterise Romanian migration policy as uninformed by the opinions of the general population. In this context, our analysis provides a starting point for discussing the topic of public support and the potential for these policies, once adopted, to create social tensions.

Methodology

This paper is framed by the general methodological outline of the Horizon 2020 research project YMOBILITY. Our approach is built on a sample of 120 in-depth interviews conducted with Romanian young returnees. The term “returnee” is used here in a very specific way and designates only young
Romanian citizens (aged between 18 and 39) who had lived for at least six months in one of the following EU destinations: Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK, and who had returned at least six months before the time of the interview.

The project gave importance to a series of criteria in selecting the returnees, including equal distribution between a peripheral and a central region (60 interviews in the north-east region and 60 interviews in the centre region), a relatively balanced sample in terms of gender and between three categories of education: students (people who had lived abroad for educational reasons), low-skilled (working migrants without tertiary education) and highly skilled (working migrants with tertiary education). The interviewees were identified and selected using a combination of snowball sampling through the researchers’ social and professional networks and contacting potential informants via online social/professional networks (e.g. LinkedIn). These selection strategies assured a highly heterogeneous sample in terms of gender, education and region of residence. All interviews were conducted between November 2015 and June 2016 (details about the sample are provided in table 1).

Table 1. The structure of the sample by country of destination and category of education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of destination</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Low-skilled</th>
<th>Highly skilled</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview guide covered a series of topics related to the individuals’ familial and educational backgrounds, their experiences of migration and return as well as future plans. Informants were asked several questions which explored their knowledge about policies designed to support returnees, their
involvement in programmes linked to these types of policies and their opinions about initiatives or ideas to support return migrants.

The entire sample of interviews was transcribed verbatim and a specialised qualitative software (NVivo 11) was used for a first exploratory analysis of the interviews. The codifying procedure allowed us to identify all the paragraphs related to policies for returnees and to include them in the analyses presented in this paper. Through a careful analysis of the qualitative evidence, we built a typology of returnees’ attitudes towards origin country’s policies on return migration; each category of attitudes is detailed in the next section.

On the one hand, some of the main limits of this methodological approach are in direct relation to the selection procedure, which combined snowball sampling through the researchers’ social and professional networks and contacting potential informants via online social networks (e.g. LinkedIn). On the other hand, all these selection strategies assured a highly heterogeneous sample that was balanced in terms of gender, education and region of residence.

Are return migration policies desirable for Romania?

In this section, we investigate the young returnees’ opinions related to the need for return migration policies in Romania. We began our analysis with the expectation of finding a high level of support for return migration policies. This was mainly based on the characteristics of our sample. Previous work (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Tai and Truex 2015) in the field suggests that the support for diaspora or return migration policies is not necessarily high at the level of the general population or at the level of the non-migrant population. Yet, our interviewees were returnees, who were basically the main beneficiaries of any such interventions of the Romanian authorities. Logically, they should back interventions that would benefit them; however, contrary to our expectations, our informants’ answers suggested that the idea of
implementing return migration policies in Romania was actually disputed. Though many of the interviewees believed that Romania needed policies to encourage return and support returnees, some of them thought these policies needed to be developed only under specific conditions. And there were informants who definitely rejected the idea.

Many of our interviewees supported return migration policies in general. They were favourable to interventions that addressed all returnees, irrespective of their characteristics. Some of the informants thought in terms of return migration, rather than migration, and associated it with a kind of return to “normality”. This stance seems to stem from a negative evaluation of migration as a symptom of the dysfunctions of Romanian society in general, rather than from a positive evaluation of return. Migration was perceived as a factor producing disequilibrium that is naturally compensated by return. As one of our migrants put it, Romania is the home of migrants and, whatever the conditions abroad, it signifies the (only) place where Romanians may find their happiness/contentment with life. From this point of view, supporting migrants to come back is considered a necessary action.

R: Definitely, it would be good because then people wouldn’t leave anymore … I would say this [having support policies for returnees] would be a good thing. Nowhere is better than home. (male, 35 years old, returnee from Germany)

In some other cases, the support for return migration policies reflected a lack of interest in the issue (answers of the type “why not?”) rather than a strong opinion. This was confirmed by the inability to further develop (or exemplify) the content of return migration policies or to argument their opinion.

Though the majority of our informants considered migration policies to be necessary, some of them doubted their usefulness if (potential) beneficiaries included the entire population of (would-be) returnees. There were different types of reasoning behind these positions. The first type of
reasoning considered the anticipated effectiveness of such policies and advocated targeting policies by excluding would-be beneficiaries who had a low chance of returning. In this rationale, the probability of return is adversely related to the success of integration at destination, or, to put it otherwise, only those who do not really integrate return to their country of origin. One of our informants, a highly educated returnee from Germany (female, 31 years old) illustrated this way of thinking. She distinguished between those migrating for “economic” reasons and those migrating for “professional” reasons (the distinction partially overlaps with low-skilled/highly skilled migration, but also referred to economic migration/migration driven by self-fulfilment reasons). For those in the first category, the intervention, in her opinion, would be beneficial and would have a chance of success. For those in the second, no intervention would be desirable as the chance of success would be basically non-existent. A second type of reasoning linked return migration policies with the benefits/contributions that returnees would bring to the development of their country of origin (Romania, in this case). In this perspective, policies should be designed according to the (current) needs of Romania and would-be returnees are conceived rather as a pool from which to select those with the desired characteristics. Generally, the interviewees adopting this stance referred to highly skilled migrants (e.g. physicians), but the level of education was not the main criterion for operating distinctions. The level of skills seemed to be more important than the educational achievements (construction workers are also mentioned as one possible target group of return migration policies). Finally, a third type of reasoning made a connection between the needs of those who return and return migration policies. In this perspective, the need for help with integration in the origin society was dependent on the time spent abroad and the place where the migrant was educated (origin or destination country). Individuals who spent a long period of time abroad (10–15 years) or those who were educated abroad seemed to be perceived as less prepared for return and in need of help to re-adapt at home.
Contrary to our expectations, some of the returnees considered return migration policies not to be needed in general or not to be needed in the particular case of Romania. Most of the interviewees sharing this view argued by referring to other more important and more urgent needs to be met for the Romanian population.

R: I think this is laughable. I believe these things exist only at a theoretical level. I haven’t heard about it and I do not want to hear – namely, definitely no. In this country there are many more things that should be done instead. Why do those who return need help?! (male, 39 years old, returnee from Spain)

The interviewee quoted above assumed that most the returnees come back with money and that generally they did not belong to the most disadvantaged social strata of Romanian society. He strongly rejected the idea of supporting returnees and considered this literally a waste of resources.

R: These seem enormously stupid to me. Why should something like that exist?! There are people (knocks with his hands on the table) who have a hard life and starve, and they can’t raise their children. Why? So we need to – to what? I don’t see the sense in that. What do they need? Money? Psychological counselling? Will they be destroyed because they’ve returned? Then why would they return? Let them stay there. Do you understand me? Therefore, this is a waste of resources and of, of, of ... I don’t know. I don’t get it. At least I don’t get it. Well, I am talking from my point of view. (...) This is what we lack: to pay taxes and fees to those who have returned who are poor! (male, 39 years old, returnee from Spain)

This idea of a category that would be (unnecessarily) favoured also appears in other interviews, in more or less elaborated forms, even if the assertions were weaker:

R: The only policy ... should be to help the population in general, and then everybody would be able to manage. (...) In the end, you are part of the general population. I don’t think you’re special because you’ve come back from abroad. You went, you worked, you made your money – or you lost your money ... unfortunately, that also happens. You should ... You don’t need to readapt here. You should reintegrate. Find a base. If you’ve had nothing until now and ... I don’t know. But this can also be applied to the general population which doesn’t manage very well. So ... (male,
26 years old, returnee from the U.K.)

If some of our informants associate return migration policies with (unneeded) positive discrimination, others consider that if the aim of these policies is to stimulate the migrants’ return, then they are not necessary in the case of Romania. In their view, return migration is a matter of the development of the origin country, and it will naturally emerge as Romania develops:

R: There is no need to help someone to come home. Because they come voluntarily. The main thing is to organise the country so that it works. As long as you offer a matrix, a space in which one can live and develop and have a life ... they will come voluntarily. (male, 32 years old, returnee from the U.K.)

Though most of the arguments went in the direction that returnees are a category belonging to the general Romanian population once they return and should be treated in the same way as the others, other informants believed that support was effectively not needed, as migrants had already experienced a similar and even more complex process of adaptation (integration) in the destination country.

R: But they have no reason to support you in the end. You are coming back to your country from a place that, if we take what the people say, is more civilised. It is like they are trying to help you to adapt to worse conditions, and this seems to me ... this seems offensive to me. (male, 26 years old, returnee from the U.K.)

What kind of support measures should Romanian return migration policies include?

In this section we move the analysis further in the direction of concrete interventions that our interviewees think were appropriate in the case of Romania.

Most of those who agreed with the idea of return migration policies provided information about the interventions they perceived to be needed. In most cases, the interviewees mentioned at least one type of intervention, but
there were also returnees who elaborated pretty coherent plans for support. We concentrate our attention here on identifying types of interventions, paying less attention to if and how the interviewees articulated them as part of larger, more coherent constructions.\textsuperscript{11}

As can easily be anticipated, the answers were diverse. However, only some of them were effectively related to return. As expected, some of the informants discussed more general policies that had a larger scope and were aimed more at the development of Romania. We have chosen to present/discuss only those answers specifically targeting the group of returnees.

Most of our interviewees suggested that creating/facilitating access to a job was the most needed support. Yet, access to a job was not considered sufficient enough. The main problem upon return is not finding a job \textit{per se}, but finding a job that provides a decent income. This is perceived as particularly difficult for returnees, who have been used to consistently earning higher wages in the destination countries. The salary is not the only discouraging characteristic of the jobs available in Romania. Other issues, such as requiring few qualifications, offering unstable situations or those located in small companies, were also mentioned as problematic. Therefore, support measures should be directed not only to help returnees find a job but to find a job with certain characteristics and within a relatively short time upon return. Our informants suggested some solutions to this problem too: to negotiate with big companies and convince them to allocate a quota (e.g. 10\%) of the available positions to returnees; to offer fiscal incentives to companies hiring returnees; to exempt returnees from taxes and fees (e.g. as in the case of other categories of employees, such as IT specialists).

Helping returnees to find a job was not the only suggested intervention. Financial assistance (in the form of a one-off payment or, in a similar manner, to offer social assistance benefits) was considered helpful upon return as it could assist with finding/renting a house.

\textsuperscript{11} As expected, only very few interviewees imagined very elaborate policy scenarios.
Supporting the returnees to invest their money earned abroad was a recurrent theme of the analysed answers. Tax exemption seemed to be the most popular intervention. Some of the interviewees elaborated on this, suggesting that facilities for business investments would not bring consistent benefits to Romania if they were not directed towards specific types of investment (discouraging investment in small businesses such as shops and restaurants because there is a risk in “rubble”, as one of interviewees put it, was one of the examples). Connected with this area of intervention was the idea of reducing the costs of transportation between origin and destination countries. In our interviewees’ opinions, this would allow migrants to continue working abroad while supervising possible investments/businesses in the origin country.

Though the above-mentioned types of interventions were largely supported by our informants, others were mentioned in just a few cases, such as the following: providing benefits for the children of returnees; supporting the return of (at least) one parent in the case of couples who had left their children behind; providing help to the children of returnees to adapt to the Romanian education system; providing information about Romania.

We need return migration policies – but their chance of being effective is very low

When discussing return migration policies, most of our interviewees seemed to be sceptical about their effectiveness (in general and/or in the case of Romania).

Our analysis suggests that the young Romanian returnees we interviewed mostly understood return migration policies as assembling interventions aimed at increasing the number of Romanian migrants coming back home. Even if return migration policies were conceived as targeting specific categories (e.g. those migrants with the skills most needed for the Romanian labour market), again, the ultimate criterion for evaluating the success of the policy would be the number of those who return. From this perspective,
(future) Romanian return migration policies were mostly evaluated as having a limited chance of success.

Based on our data, we can distinguish two standpoints. First, young returnees do not believe that interventions will consistently increase the number of Romanians returning home, because they perceive return as associated with a complex causality and/or as mainly prompted by the development of the origin country. Even if they agree with specific interventions, the chances of success are generally perceived as limited if the general context in Romania does not (fundamentally) change. Second, young returnees are sceptical about the success of return migration policies because they do not perceive Romanian authorities to be capable of implementing such policies. Trust that what is said will be properly translated into actions remains very low and is mainly responsible for the negative evaluation of the chance of success for return migration policies in Romania.

When considering the first perspective, the reasons behind the scepticism can be evaluated as mostly based on intrinsic factors associated with our informants’ perceptions of the process of migration per se. One of these factors is integration at the destination and the inertia or the ordinariness of living in one (destination) country. This factor is particularly associated with long-term and family migration.

I: But how do you think such policies would work? I do not know. How useful would these policies be? Do you believe they would return?
R: No.
I: No?
R: No. Because, if you have lived there, one year, two, three – you are used to living there. I’ve seen this in the case of my friend who lives in Germany. And my auntie, who found a job there and has established credit there, bought a house there, brought her entire family there. Her daughter is my age. She is married to an Italian. So, those who left [Romania], rarely come back. (female, 29 years old, returnee from Italy)

Another element that grounds the scepticism is embedded in the conviction that return is prompted mostly by personal, emotional and affective reasons. In this context, any attempt to offer material incentives
could be helpful but would not be decisive for the decision to move back to the origin country.

R: Hmm, I believe that the usefulness is limited because when the people ... if they want to come here, they usually look for other indications, not necessarily [financial help] ... (male, 39 years old, returnee from Germany)

R: I have heard ... one can hear every kind of rumour outside (i.e. abroad), but there is no reality in what is talked about. (...) Nobody comes because they have been asked by someone else. (male, 39 years old, returnee from Spain)

Beyond these factors, which can mainly be associated with individual concerns, our informants perceived some other more general barriers based on the characteristics of migration today at the global level. Especially individuals with specific, highly skilled professions/higher education (and education completed abroad) are perceived as difficult to convince to return. In our interviewees’ interpretations, these individuals are aware of the value of their diplomas (especially if they were earned abroad, e.g. in the UK) and of the variety of opportunities they have for finding jobs anywhere, not only in Romania. When seeking to lure highly skilled/highly educated migrants back home, Romanian authorities should be aware they are engaging in a truly international competition for talent. Highly skilled/highly educated returnees are perceived as having an advantage when compared to the low- or medium-skilled, less-educated would-be Romanian returnees. For them, the conditions of the Romanian labour market are not perceived as being as bad as for returnees in other categories. However, for highly skilled, highly educated returnees, incentives have a low chance of success because these migrants are basically free to move anywhere.

Even though return seems to be perceived as a phenomenon that is difficult to influence, in our informants’ discourse, there were also factors associated with the Romanian situation which seriously impinge on the success of return migration policies and these are mostly related to trust. There is a real lack of trust that return migration policies would genuinely aim to stimulate return migration. As one of our interviewees pointed out, it is
doubtful that the Romanian authorities would really be interested in stimulating return as long as migrants are a source of remittances. In this perspective, return migration policy is labelled a “hypocrisy”. Those who benefit from the money coming from migration cannot really be interested in reducing the pool of those who send money home. The main source of scepticism is a lack of trust in the capacity of Romanian public authorities to develop and, especially, to properly implement such policies. Our informants’ lack of trust in the Romanian authorities is not surprising (this is consistent with other studies on Romanian entrepreneurs [Croitoru 2013]); what is surprising is the strength of the feeling. This partially explains the lack of interest in searching for information related to return migration policies and the conviction that a person can base his/her future actions only on his/her own resources. One of our respondents expressed this view very clearly:

R: If people don’t believe, so... today, people’s mentality is like this: if they don’t see something with their own eyes, they don’t believe it. What could I receive from the new government? (...) ... Are their hearts broken for me? No way! I don’t put my hope [in them] ... so, basically, as far as I’m concerned..., the government doesn’t exist. I don’t watch TV because I don’t ... I’m not interested in what I see there. Yes ... since I came back to Romania, I’ve watched sometimes, so that, you know, ... basically, my family watches and I walk by ... I’ve never seen two politicians talking about the Romanian people. Just about themselves. If one has, I wouldn’t know what about. Still there ... nobody is interested in [what happens to] us. (He laughs) So, what do they have to offer me? What? (male, 39 years old, returnee from Spain)

This idea, that migrants have been abandoned by the Romanian authorities strengthens the conviction that individuals can trust only themselves:

R: (...) Romanians from abroad don’t trust Romanian politics [political life] – that someone is doing, is doing something good for them. (...) Especially there [abroad] they think have been abandoned and nobody will ever pay attention to them. (male, 29 years old, returnee from Italy)

R: I have heard, now, recently – I don’t know how much is true. However, until Romania supports me, I will have to support myself. I have more trust in my own support and in my own strength. (female, 36 years old,
Discussion

Our expectation of finding a strong support for return migration policies among young returnees remains unconfirmed. This may suggest that, in the case of Romania, these policies have the potential of being a controversial issue. Based on our data, we have identified three types of attitudes towards return migration policies. First, there is what can be labelled as general support. This is mainly based on the interpretation of return migration as a concept that is in opposition to migration. In this view, migration is an indicator of problems associated with one country. In this discourse, the origin country becomes the home country, and returning home is definitely a good thing. Given the general arguments behind this attitude, we doubt that this kind of general support will continue if confronted with concrete plans for intervention.

The second type of attitude supports only targeted interventions. The categories of (potential) beneficiaries are defined by different criteria (exclusion or inclusion) and consider the (anticipated) efficiency of such policies, the returnees’ needs and the needs of the origin country (mostly defined in relation to the labour market).

Finally, the third type of attitude rejects any type of intervention aimed at supporting the returnees. This seems to be based on a lack of recognition of the returnees as a distinct social group with specific needs, and it also seems to be based on the conviction that migration is directly linked to development. Once the society reaches a certain level of development, migration genuinely stops and return migration increases.

The proposed typology can be a useful tool for understanding the variety of opinions about the role of the state in the process of return migration. One can also expect to find heterogeneity within the general population of an origin country and that support for implementing return migration policy will be limited to a specific category of people. In other
words, there does not seem to be general support for attracting natives back to the origin country through policies financed by the state.

Our attempt to investigate the kinds of measures that should be included in return migration policies points to several major lines of intervention: those that target jobs, entrepreneurial behaviours and the children of returnees.

The success of return migration policies is perceived mainly in quantitative terms (i.e. the number of those who return) and, generally, the interventions are associated with a limited chance of success. The main causes seem to be certain objective factors associated with international migration/Romanian international migration but, most importantly, with the lack of trust in the capacity of Romanian authorities to implement such policies.

Our preliminary conclusions show limited agreement with previous work in the field (Tai and Truex 2015). In our evaluation, return migration policies have the potential to be very controversial. This potential may be reduced by targeting the interventions.\(^\text{12}\) Differing again with the results of the study of Tai and Truex, our analysis shows that the main factor driving the scepticism in relation to return migration policies is a lack of trust in the authorities of the origin country rather than concerns with social inequality. However, the results should be accepted with caution, as they are limited to a very specific context (Romania) and confined to the very specific category of young returnees.

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\(^{12}\) The fact that the work of Tai and Truex (2015) was based on investigating the attitudes towards targeted policies can explain part of our apparently different conclusions.
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