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Article

Assessing Labour Migration Policies From the Incorporation Perspective. The Case of Romania

***Abstract:** Migrants play an important role in shaping today's EU, both in terms of the labour market, and society as a whole. The analyses of the migration policies, including the labour sector, are generally focused on the control and, respectively, on the security dimension, while a third branch includes the researches on the broader term of incorporation of migrants into the fabric of the host societies. This paper starts from the questions "why does the EU*

labour market need migrants?" and "what role can migrants play in community development?", and it argues that using an incorporation approach in public policies concerning migrants could provide a theoretical and actional solution to overcome challenges posed by various other policy and political positions aimed against migrants. An assessment of labour-connected incorporation policies and practices is presented as a study case, using evidence-based policies and practices from Romania. The main findings of the paper indicate that there is a huge gap between stated aims of written strategies, actions being implemented and the perception of intended target groups. The article argues that this deviation is due, at least in the case of Romania, to a weak administrative capacity to manage migrant flows and the challenges they bring to traditional and rigid legal and administrative systems. The gap is also due to poor operationalisation of the concept of in-

corporation in policy practice, with contradictory simultaneously policy narratives of adaptation, assimilation, inclusion, or integration, and without a clear goal that should shape a national labour migration policy.

***Keywords:** European Union; incorporation; labour migration policy; regular migration; Romania*

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1. Introduction

For the almost 21 million third-country nationals present in the European Union (EU) in 2019 (European Commission 2020a) through regular migration routes, there were almost 1.2 million work permits issued across the EU-27 from a total of almost three million first residence permits (Eurostat 2021; International Labour Organization 2021; Migration Data Portal 2021). This figure is almost three times higher than that recorded in 2011 when just over 400,000 work permits were issued by the EU member states. This shows a growing interest on the part of migrant workers from outside the EU, while it also highlights the attractiveness of the EU member states who are competing on the global labour market with traditional destinations for international talent. The boost that free movement of persons (workers, but not exclusively) had for the overall development of what we know currently as the European Union is already a truism. Little – or, at least, not a satisfactory amount, according to experts (IOM 2019) – has been written about the important role that migrants play in shaping today's EU, both in terms of the labour market, and society as a whole.

Migration is a largely debated (Pisarevskaya, Levy, Scholten & Jansen 2019), highly politicized and socio-economically significant topic at international level (see the 2018 UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration), regionally, in the EU (see the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 or 2021 State of the Union Address – European Commission 2020b; European Commission 2020c; European Commission 2021), and on the public agenda, as revealed by the 2019 Standard Eurobarometer no. 92 (European Commission 2019). Despite the diversity of topics covered within journals dedicated to migration studies (Pisarevskaya, Levy, Scholten & Jansen 2019), the main documents issued by various international organisations (i.e. EU, IOM, etc.) seem to divide migration policies into two broad categories: those targeting regular migration, generally directly or indirectly related to labour migration, and those on irregular migration. The literature review of the latter more important political contributions or statements in this field indicates a significant bias towards topics such as irregular migration, pressures on member states, migrants as simple vulnerable and needy persons, migrants as poorly educated persons which do not contribute – socially or economically – to the country in which they have migrated, integrated border management systems, etc. European migration management policy seems to assign *a priori* a negative label to intentions of migrants attempting to reach the EU shores. “[W]e should welcome those who come here legally and make such a vital contribution to our society and economy” is written in the migration section of the 2021 State of the Union address (European Commission 2021); before this statement, however, migrants are pictured mainly as a security concern and a significant challenge for the EU member states. In the context of the Ukrainian migration crisis and the rising criticisms pointing towards its possible associated security challenges for the receiving countries, we consider that it is important to have additional analyses not only from a humanitarian aid perspective, but also from the perspective of the societal contributions brought by labour migrants.

For policy experts and global organisations alike, the approach of the subject of migration is, therefore, disconcerting. On the one hand, there is this wide national and international recognition of this topic at policy level, on the other hand, the public and political discourse is predominantly populist, to the detriment of objective, evidence-based analyses (IOM 2019). The area of migration research is undergoing constant improvement both in quantitative coverage and qualitative content. Several analyses of the migration policies, including the labour

sector (Piché 2013; Hollifield & Wong 2015; IOM 2019), indicate that most are focused on the control dimension (entry-exit rules of a state, border control, etc.) and the security dimension (especially how migration affects the social and political structures of the countries of destination). There is, however, a third dimension, that of the incorporation of migrants into the fabric of the host societies. This dimension is what countries and regional bodies need to develop coherent policies around, aiming beyond the desire (explicit or implicit) of states, respectively the fear felt by migrants themselves, to assimilate / to be assimilated. This means striving for integration of people and their families in the societies, rather than in the states of their destination.

In light of previous arguments, in this article we use socio-political lenses, and we focus on labour migration and the need for additional analyses that go beyond the logic of “how to avoid migrants / how to stop migration and the migration crisis/how to ‘dissolve’ migrants in our societies”. We start from the questions “why does the EU labour market need migrants?” and “what role can migrants play in community development?”. This paper argues that using an incorporation approach in public policies concerning migrants, builds on differences and connections between economic, social and political spheres. Such a public policy approach could provide a theoretical and actional solution to overcome challenges posed by various other policy and political positions aimed against migrants. An assessment of labour-connected incorporation policies and practices will be presented, using evidence-based policies and practices from Romania.

Do migrant labour-oriented incorporation policies in some member states (especially in the emergent destination countries) differ from the general European Union guidelines? Is this deviation due to poor operationalisation of the concept of incorporation in policy practice? This article builds on those research questions. Content analysis of policy texts (when those policies do exist) indicates a desideratum towards migrants’ integration; whilst an assessment of measures actually taken, leads to conclusions that highlight either a weak administrative capacity to manage the subject of migration or (explicit / implicit) actions intended to assimilate migrants. We are interested in the ‘politics of migration’, i.e. in the political drivers (actors, interests, power relations) as defined in Hollifield and Wong (2015) which in our case, shape labour migration policy.

The paper is divided into five sections. This introductory part is followed by a literature review of the conceptual framework for studying factors of migration, and of specific incorporation policies. The subsequent section introduces the regional and national legislative frameworks that represent this sector’s intervention foundation. The fourth methodological section presents the research design of our empirical analysis and discusses our case study. Considering little has been written about this topic in Romania, the fifth and final section aims both to discuss the main implications of the findings, as well as to offer some policy proposals aimed to alleviate several identified shortcomings of the current labour migration policy framework.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Where does incorporation fit in migration studies?

Migration studies (Brettell & Hollifield 2015; Pisarevskaya, Levy, Scholten & Jansen 2019) are an interdisciplinary field, with inputs from economics, sociology, demography, environmental studies, geography, history, anthropology, law, and political sciences. Therefore, there

are a multitude of terms used to describe *the result of the interaction between migrants and the destination frameworks*: acculturation, adaptation, assimilation, inclusion, incorporation, integration, etc. (for an in-depth analysis of the different meaning of these terms, see Ion 2022). We use the concept of *incorporation* as a catch all item, considered neutral in terms of value, with explanatory values that encompass the more nuanced other options to be further presented. Incorporation is distinct from *integration*, which implies a two-way process, involving both migrants and receiving societies. The successful adaptation of migrants as individuals depends on them as persons (personal features such as education, skills, gender, age, health, etc.), as well as on a larger framework comprised, on the one side, from the social networks of the migrants, and, on the other, of the receiving societal, economic and political context. Researchers indicate that very strict requirements deter migrants to stay or impede their integration (IOM 2019, pp. 192-195). Examples vary from language proficiency from the beginning or within a short time after entry, to conditioning children school admission on the existence of a full education record. Additionally, strict conditions of naturalisation policies impede obtaining citizenship rights, negatively affecting migrants' interests of becoming a part of that society; de jure versus de facto citizenship rights; the non-validation or recognition of prior qualification confronts labour markets with deficit on certain positions or with overqualified personnel on low-skilled jobs. Also, the list of incorporation process (with integrative role) stakeholders is complex: migrants (as persons and networks), national authorities, local authorities, trade unions, employer organisations, civil society, and neighbouring communities. The corollary of this is that process outcomes vary significantly between states, among an already too diversified policy offer, with large international guidelines, but national answers comprised of too much specificity.

2.2. A broader view on migration policies: European and national answers

In this section, EU level guidance and good practices within EU member states are looked to, to identify and analyse migration policies and assess their effectiveness in a wider spectrum of incorporation options.

The EU long term policy objectives and present competences on regular migration (or, in the Union's terms, 'legal' migration), as well as irregular migration, are detailed in the article 79 of the Lisbon Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The vision of a policy of shared competences between the EU and its member states is expressed here: an Union that intends to develop a common immigration framework "aimed at ensuring, at all stages, the efficient management of migration flows, fair treatment of third-country nationals residing legally in Member States, and the prevention of, and enhanced measures to combat, illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings". More specifically the policy framework emphasises promotion of integrative actions meant to be translated by Member States in domestic measures. This is to be enacted while "excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States" and underlining that the Member States are the sole actors able to manage the level of migration flows (TFEU 2007, art. 79; see also Guild 2013; SVR Research Unit and MPI Europe 2019).

Since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the EU has seen a surge in interest for the topic of immigration and asylum seeking, which resulted in several legislative actions, techni-

cal solutions, and recommendations. The immigration vision set forth in the Lisbon Treaty was designed to ensure a balanced and forward-looking approach to migration, introducing the solidarity principle at the core of its approach. With the vision and legislative foundation in place, the post-2009 period saw the introduction and development of specific legislative acts designed to not only regulate this field, but also to provide guidance for member states and international partners. Moreover, the wide focus migration received in 2015 was an impetus for establishing coherent and common policies in the area of asylum since they directly and indirectly impact other sectors and policies, including regular immigration and integration.

Actions taken since the Treaty's adoption are part of what is now a comprehensive, albeit perfectible set of policies that could potentially increase the attractiveness of the EU on the global labour market. The legislative evolution of the past decade regulating migration in the EU was marked by: the implementation of the Blue Card, adopted through the Council Directive 2009/50/EC, followed by the introduction of the Single Permit Directive 2011/98/EU detailing the rights and obligations of third-country nationals to reside and work in the EU. In 2011 the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) was initiated and was followed by the adoption of the European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals. Later on, in 2014, the Commission passed the seasonal workers Directive – 2014/36/EU which was followed by the adoption of Directive 2014/66/EU on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer. Finally, a European Agenda on Migration was issued in 2015 and, in 2016, EU Directive no. 801 established the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing. The Action Plan on integration of third country nationals must also be mentioned here. Recent developments in the area of immigration include development of the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum introduced in 2020 and subsequently, its Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027.

As the Lisbon Treaty meant the abolition of Maastricht pillar-based structure, the Amsterdam Justice and Home Affairs were reunited in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. A full „communitisation“ which has not meant an increase in the EU's presence in matters regarding migration. Although it should be a shared-competences policy, as underlined in key EU documents, the verbs chosen for describing the EU and the Member States attributes reveal that it is a policy that is communitized only on paper, not in practice. EU institutions still have a lot to do in this respect, to build on measures already taken for both regular – Directive on Family Reunification, Long Term Residents Directive, Blue Card Directive, etc. – and irregular migration – Asylum Procedures Directive, Return Directive, etc. (Guild 2013). National practices differ significantly, whilst harmonising benchmarks at EU level remains a challenge and a common approach to migration policies seems a distant output as EU institutions lack clearly defined competences in this matter (Guild 2013; SVR Research Unit and MPI Europe 2019).

So, how does the European Union conceive the ideal-type policies dealing with migrant integration at national level? The supranational vision is detailed in two 2020 communications issued by the European Commission – the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, and the Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027.-

In aspects concerning the subject of our analysis, our interest rests within the last sections of the *New Pact on Migration and Asylum* (European Commission 2020b), where – beyond the cautious formulations from the beginning of the document, – migrants are also perceived

as a source of talent and skills, as well as a category of persons that need specific measures to be integrated within European society.

At EU level, an observable bias towards high skilled workers or (future) researchers (as proven by the Commission's opinion regarding the reform of the EU Blue Card Directive adopted in September 2021) exists. The European Commission pleaded for a three pillar framework expressly conceived to correct the existing shortcomings in attracting migrant workforce: (a) fostering intra-EU mobility of long-term residents; (b) facilitating the admission process for all third-country workers, irrespective of their skill level; (c) managing future labour migration by creating a skill matching platform, at EU level, where third-country based workforce and EU member states meet, facilitating international recruitment.

In addition, beyond the labour shortage where migrants are an/the answer, the European Commission is realistic about their need for integration, even if, cynically speaking, this might be just a reason for them to work harder. In a context where many migrants are unemployed, without (recognised) education and proper social interaction, it is difficult to proceed with integration-oriented policies.

Careful not to extend beyond the competences of the member states, the European Commission appears to be positioning itself as an adjunct of the states in their efforts to integrate migrants, providing support actions such as cooperation, best practices, mutual learning, partnership. Although it belongs to a decisional area whereby there is a fragile balance between supranational and national competences, the *Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027* (European Commission 2020c) manages to create a coherent vision on actions that should be taken to integrate and include migrants both for their own benefit and that of the European society. In addition, the value of the document – compared to the Commission's previous 2016 initiative – lays in (a) the measures conceived for not only newcomers, but also for naturalised and EU citizens with a migrant background, and in (b) the lessons learned and initiatives designed to improve / complement the previous ones.

The Action Plan was drawn up in an unstable environment. Even from the first paragraphs, which draw attention to the features of a “European way of life”; and an acknowledgment towards rights and responsibilities of the newcomers, placing them under the umbrella of the European values foreseen in the EU primary law. This makes for a disclaimer addressed to both Member States reluctant to supranational interference and possible disruptive effects of migration, but also to third-country nationals themselves, who it makes aware of the requirements they must meet in their new accommodating societies. Regarding integration and inclusion, the Commission document advises Member States to be guided in creating migration policies by principles and values such as inclusion for all (by redrafting existing policies in an integrated approach in order to make them widely accessible), targeted support (for specific vulnerable groups), anti-discrimination measures, comprehensive vision of the integration process (i.e. both pre-migration measures and continuous integrative programmes), openness towards various stakeholders (without challenging the primacy of the nation state, it refers to a partnership vision that includes supranational and subnational actors from public, private or non-profit areas).

The main sectoral areas that need constant and sustained intervention were identified by the Commission in 2020 after consultations with stakeholders. These areas are: education and training; employment and skills; health; and housing. In addition to the above-mentioned specific measures, the document also presents a series of cross-cutting actions as part of a com-

prehensive vision to promote integration and inclusion in different policies: partnerships; consultations and dialogue with multi-level stakeholders; European funding; participation in community life; digitisation; policy monitoring.

Romania's *strategy* on migration dates from 2021 (Government of Romania 2021a) and it has an intricate structure with significant sections to improve, from the definition of migration until the meaning of an integrated perspective. While an in-depth content analysis of this framework would need a different paper, due to its many incoherencies, several examples are needed for our current analytical framework: (a) inflation of data regarding numbers of issued work permits (or of migrants entered through irregular channels, etc.), without additional analysis pointing towards, for instance, the labour needs of the Romanian sectors and the congruences / discrepancies between the existing work demand and offer; (b) long lists of legal documents in force at European and national level, without a comparative input about qualitative implementation of the *acquis*; (c) political declarations of intent about the necessity of integrating migrants, without clear or practical links between measures foreseen in the guiding European documents and the domestic action plans. In the *Action Plan for the period 2021 – 2022 for the implementation of the National Strategy on Immigration for the period 2021 – 2024* (Government of Romania 2021b), the wording of specific objectives and of associated results seems very little connected to the needs of the internal labour market.

Absorption capacity and attractiveness of the labour market in Romania, for foreign citizens would make for important additions to this strategy. Clear data about the labour deficit must be offered, while recurrent information campaigns could be implemented. Facilities regarding admission and stay on the territory of Romania of qualified foreigners, recognition of qualifications are also lacking. It is even more disconcerting that the action plan for the strategy does not operationalise specific objectives in the form of clear actions, expected results and indicators. Indicators presented in the strategy refer mainly to written or adopted official documents, without including the implementation and the evaluation phases of any policy-making cycle. For example, in aspects regarding the inclusion of migrants, there is no reference to the four pressing issues presented in European documents (education and training; employment and skills; health; and housing) or in additional aspects such as digitisation or policy monitoring.

The evaluation of the Romanian national framework is aimed to demonstrate that incorporation policies, in some cases, differ from the general European Union guidelines. We argue that this difference is mainly due to a misunderstanding of the theoretical concept of incorporation and an inconsistent implementation of related policies. Therefore, the previous results of public policy evaluation of strategies and relevant legislation being enacted in Romania need to be further integrated with the results of a statistical analysis of the opinion data of migrants to Romania, the case study of our article.

3. Case study. Methodology, results and discussion

3.1. Methodology

Based on the developed theoretical framework, we have analysed opinion data of migrants to Romania. The questionnaire aimed at collecting data on personal experiences and perceptions across several dimensions, ranging from administrative interaction with Romanian authorities and legal framework to private interactions with neighbours and other people during migrants

stay in Romania. The target population for the questionnaire was composed of migrants to Romania, irrespective of their characteristics. The sample included in the research was an opportunity sample, being comprised of persons who sought the services of the IOM bureau in Romania for various reasons. Irregular migrants, or temporary migrants who then moved to other destinations were not included, also persons unable or unwilling to seek legal migrant status were not included.

Given the scarcity of empirical research conducted in Romania on migrant subjects, our analysis focused on data collected by the IOM Romania office between August and November 2021 through a survey conducted with Babes Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca and applied to third-country nationals with legal residence in Romania, who participated in the national integration program and requested IOM assistance during the data collection period. A total of 284 answers were recorded. The general theme of the questionnaire was to understand the integration needs of third-country nationals and the type of additional activities that could be developed to contribute to their integration.

3.2. Results and discussion

The population sample of our research was largely made up of persons who have been in Romania for at least four years. Almost two thirds of the respondents declared that they had been in Romania for a period exceeding 4 years (Table 1). Respondents were also well educated, with the latest educational level attained (Table 2) indicating that almost one third have completed at least upper-secondary education (high school equivalent) and another third have also completed higher education (university) degrees.

Table 1. Period lived in Romania (years)

How long have you lived in Romania					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than a year	14	4.9	5.0	5.0
	1-2 years	38	13.4	13.6	18.6
	2-4 years	42	14.8	15.1	33.7
	4-6 years	66	23.2	23.7	57.3
	Over 6 years	119	41.9	42.7	100.0
	Total	279	98.2	100.0	
Missing	System	5	1.8		
Total		284	100.0		

Table 2 – Highest educational attainment level

What is your highest educational attainment?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Primary school	20	7.0	7.5	7.5
	Lower-secondary (gymnasium)	39	13.7	14.7	22.2
	Vocational training	3	1.1	1.1	23.3
	Upper-secondary (high school)	82	28.9	30.8	54.1
	College (short – degree)	14	4.9	5.3	59.4
	Higher education (university BA degree)	74	26.1	27.8	87.2
	Higher education (masters or PhD.)	34	12.0	12.8	100.0
	Total	266	93.7	100.0	
Missing	System	18	6.3		
Total		284	100.0		

Age distribution was found to be well balanced, with a range from 19 to 81 years old, and an average age of 34 years old. Males are overrepresented in the sample, with a frequency of 54% of the respondents. Almost half of responses declared that they are married, while almost 40% declared that they are single.

The demographic characteristics of the opportunity sample point out the fact that it is primarily made up of young married males, who have settled for a relatively long time in Romania. From this point of view, we expect that they are, to a certain level, already incorporated in the Romanian social and economic system. Even so, their experiences, repeated interactions with the administrative system and its various branches, such as legal status, obtaining work rights and recognition of educational attainment, provide strong opinions and evaluations as arguments for our objective.

We measured respondents' views of several topics, on a scale from 1 to 10. They were asked to evaluate general affirmations regarding the overall or the economic situation of Romania. They expressed their own perceptions on how they have fared in the time they spent in Romania, regarding social interactions with neighbours, various public services (such as health care). Specific evaluations were also required regarding their personal experience on the job market and their own general personal situation. Table 3 sums up the most relevant median scored on selected variables.

Migrants' views on the general and the economic situation in Romania is a moderately positive one. As the median values show, interviewed people mostly believe that Romanians are tolerant and accept migrants, and they are satisfied with the living conditions they have in Romania. They have a moderate positive view on the direction they feel the general situation is going, and also regarding their own income in Romania. It is worth mentioning that while public services, such as medical services, receive a somewhat positive evaluation, the estimated chances on the job market are rather low. Migrants are rather cautious regarding the self-assessment of their estimated success in living in Romania. One in three interviewees said that they are not sure they are going to succeed in Romania. While it is debatable what *being suc-*

cessful entails, the reader should be reminded that the majority of interviewed migrants are long term residents in Romania. With this in mind, we can safely conclude that, even in the fortunate case of persons being able to stay for a longer period of time in Romania, their prospects for developing a successful life for themselves and their families is a moderately optimistic one. This is further sustained by views regarding access to the job market, to economic resources as well as some public services, such as education.

Table 3. Median scores of migrants' perceptions of their experiences in Romania (scale from 1 lowest to 10 highest)

	N (valid)	Median score
The general situation in Romania is progressing in a positive direction	275	7
The economic situation of Romania is worse than it was a year ago	262	5
Your family income is enough for a decent lifestyle	257	5
You are generally satisfied with your living conditions in Romania	274	8
Romanians welcome and accept migrants into their country	269	8
It is not hard to find a well-paid workplace in Romania	255	5
Do you think you are going to make it in Romania	252	5

We infer that, whilst generally satisfied regarding social interactions and public services, migrants tend to be reserved in their evaluations of the economic system and their chances on the job market. This is reflected in their general appraisal of their chances of success in building a decent life in Romania. Those observations as a whole, are pointing towards a policy framework lacking specific measures and actions targeted at the economic sector with a focus on migrants and their incorporation in an active economic life. Migrants tend to be defined in strategies and policies rather as an entity which only consumes resources whereas ways to support them becoming economically productive are not being developed.

Employment is the most frequently encountered issue shared by interviewed persons. The distribution of issues faced by migrants since the beginning of their stay in Romania shows that job finding, clarification of legal status, access to education and an insufficient knowledge of the Romanian language are the most frequent hurdles in settling in Romania. This also points towards overarching policy areas which have not been adequately addressed by strategies, nor migration policies. As demonstrated in our analysis of national strategies and policies, the above mentioned difficulties are rarely worded in official documents and almost no explicit measures have been enacted towards them. Unsurprisingly, study results reflect this lack of compatibility between policy texts and migrants' experiences, whereby data show (Table 4) that people tend to find these areas problematic when trying to settle in Romania.

Table 4. Areas where migrants experience difficulties in their process of settling in Romania

Question: In which of the following situations did you experience difficulties while in Romania	Frequency (percent of cases)
Access to the job market	57.1%
Insufficient knowledge of the Romanian language	54%
Establishing legal residence status	52.4%
Access to education	50%
Finding a job	40.8%
Recognition of education degrees from home country	38.1%
Social integration	26.2%
Cultural integration	25%

Frequency distributions point towards two areas where migrants have often encountered difficulties: education and labour market. It is important to note at this point that social, as well as cultural interactions, have a far less prominent position in migrants' opinions towards settling in Romania. Theoretical frameworks, as well as European level policy frameworks, emphasise these dimensions as being essential to the incorporation of migrants into host societies. However, the situation in Romania differs, as Romania is a recent migration receiver. Previously, being predominantly a transit country for migrants, Romania has not, so far, experienced challenges regarding education or job market integration of migrants. However, as recent migrant waves have begun targeting Romania, these sectors will likely come under serious pressure, unless robust policy, including an action plan and strategy that implements specific objectives in a manner that evokes clear actions, expected results and indicators, is developed and implemented.

It is also important to point out that data show that the variable with the strongest explanatory value, both for opinions and self-evaluations of their current situation in Romania, is the length of stay. Gender, the level of education, or other socio-demographic variables which are usually used in correlation and regression models to explore causal relationships have proven to be not statistically significant, or show low statistical significance for a limited number of variables. The length of stay in Romania correlates positively and evidences strong associations with self-assessments on all dimensions, at a 95% confidence level.

Table 5. Correlation coefficients of self-assessment of own status in Romania and explanatory variables

	How long have you been staying in Romania?			What is the highest educational attainment you have?	
	N (valid)	Spearman Rho	Sig. (2-tailed)	Spearman Rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
The general situation in Romania is progressing in a positive direction	275	.332	.000	.187	.002
The economic situation of Romania is worse than it was a year ago	262	.255	.000	.050	.435
Your family income is enough for a decent lifestyle	246	.213	.001	-.100	.126
You are generally satisfied with your living conditions in Romania	274	.368	.000	.172	.005
Romanians welcome and accept migrants into their country	269	.368	.000	.154	.013
It is not hard to find a well-paid workplace in Romania	255	.219	.000	.006	.923
Do you think you are going to make it in Romania	252	-.085	.181	.061	.348

Data in Table 5 show that, although people who manage to stay longer in Romania tend to have a more favourable self-assessment both of the general environment and their own status, there are significant areas, such as the expectation to succeed in building a new life in Romania, where not even length of stay influences a positive answer. Interestingly, the level of educational attainment is not a strong explanatory variable for migrants' opinions. For instance, not even the ability of finding a job or maintaining a decent lifestyle seem to be influenced by a higher level of educational attainment.

Length of stay, sometimes, affects the rate at which migrants face several difficulties. The cross tabulation between the frequency of different difficulties faced by migrants and the number of years spent in Romania show a number of structural difficulties, which can easily be attributed to policy failures in addressing the real needs of migrants.

Even though it is expected for migrants, in their first year of stay in a foreign country, to encounter legal status difficulties it is also noteworthy that almost half of the migrants interviewed (45.6% of cases) mention these difficulties even after six years of stay. Access to the job market, while it tends to improve after the first three years of stay, is still mentioned by 57.6% of the migrants interviewed who have already been in Romania for over 6 years. Access to education is an area where the situation gradually improves. Education is being mentioned as a difficulty by 66% of newly arrived migrants (less than a year of stay in Romania) but only by 38% of long-term staying migrants. The recognition of degrees from a migrant's origin country (or other countries, if s/he has already studied abroad) is the area which records the largest improvement over time, being one of the main difficulties encountered during the first year of stay, but only a minor difficulty for migrants who have been in Romania for longer

than six years. The only difficulty which consistently persists in almost half of the cases recorded is the insufficient knowledge of Romanian language. This is mentioned by 58.3% of migrants in their first year of stay, and also by 56.3% of migrants who have stayed in Romania for longer than six years. As data in the Table 6 show, the more time migrants have been residing in Romania the less they tend to face challenges regarding different dimensions of their daily lives and their interactions with public administration organisations.

Table 6. Distribution of challenges faced by migrants according to their length of stay in Romania

Question: In which of the following situations did you experience difficulties while in Romania	How long have you been living in Romania				
	Less than 1 year	1-2 years	2-4 years	4-6 years	Over 6 years
Access to the job market	75.0%	63.2%	48.6%	55.6%	57.3%
Insufficient knowledge of the Romanian language	58.3%	47.4%	45.7%	58.7%	56.3%
Establishing legal residence status	91.7%	71.1%	48.6%	47.6%	45.6%
Access to education	66.7%	63.2%	51.4%	57.1%	38.8%
Finding a job	41.7%	39.5%	51.4%	42.9%	35.0%
Recognition of education degrees from home country	75.0%	36.8%	45.7%	38.1%	32.0%
Social integration	41.7%	39.5%	20.0%	25.4%	22.3%
Cultural integration	33.3%	39.5%	22.9%	19.0%	22.3%

Data show that, while job market access and education seem to be the sectors where migrants face the most serious incorporation difficulties, there is a difference between them. Thus, education tends to be a more short-term difficulty. Both access to education and the recognition of degrees' migrants hold from their home country (or other countries, if the case) are difficulties which are mostly overcome in the first year of stay. Conversely, access to the job market and actually obtaining and occupying a job seems to be a medium- and long-term difficulty which does not seem to diminish in importance or prevalence as time passes.

Two types of conclusions arise from the study. At an individual level, it seems that there are no characteristics which could guarantee success for a migrant coming to Romania seeking to establish a new life here. Gender, educational attainment, and even age affect the difficulties they will face. Individual resilience and being able to stay for a long period of time in Romania offers migrants an advantage in overcoming some of the difficulties they face here. Establishing legal residence status and having access to, or recognition of education are difficulties which are diminished or dematerialise over time. Gaining access to the job market and securing a job, and even more so a well-paying job, is a difficulty migrants face which persists even as time passes by.

From a public policy perspective, it is clear that access to the job market is a systemic structural issue. This is not limited to only access to the job market, but also being able to find a job matching migrants' own levels of expertise and education seem to be issues which need to be addressed by national strategies and public policies.

4. Conclusions

The problems Romania encounters generally subscribe to those that will massively affect – in some cases already do – Europe. Negative net migration rates amid a declining local population and increasing pressures on social protection instruments is one of the most prominent ones. While Western Europe, subject to massive challenges of irregular migration, also benefits from intra-EU mobility of both high and low-skilled workers, Eastern Europe also faces additional sectoral labour work shortages, while their governments and societies are refractory to accepting migrants that could cover the needs of the deficient sectors (IOM 2019).

Aware of the societal contributions that labour migrants are able to bring and focusing on the incorporation of migrants into the fabric of the host societies, our evidence based analysis of Romanian policies and practices underline that there is need to develop coherent policies to overcome challenges brought by the interaction between migrants and the destination frameworks. The final aim of this incorporation process should have an integrative stake, but it depends on migrants as persons, as well as on a larger picture comprised, on the one side, of the social networks of the migrants, and, on the other, of the receiving societal, economic and political context. The main findings of the paper indicate that there is a huge gap between stated aims of written strategies, actions being implemented and the perception of intended target groups, in our case migrants to Romania. We consider that this deviation is due, at least in the case of Romania, to a weak administrative capacity to manage migrant flows and the challenges they bring to traditional and rigid legal and administrative systems. The gap is also due to poor operationalisation of the concept of incorporation in policy practice, with contradictory simultaneously policy narratives of adaptation, assimilation, inclusion, or integration, and without a clear goal that should shape a national labour migration policy.

Currently, the data based analyses that recognise the demand for regular migration to cover the labour market needs of some receiving societies, are outdated by the discourse focused on the challenges of irregular migration. Moreover, faced with tabloid oriented media discourse, there are few proper analytical approaches that go beyond the mere economic utility of migrants. Also, there is room for better research leading to more representative and efficient incorporation policies drawing on the awareness of the non-economic challenges faced by migrants: cultural, linguistic, axiological, etc. Our article may suffer from the same confinement in the destination country perspective, as we do not address a lot of important questions: why do people leave? Where do they come from? Where do they usually go? How do they approach departure? How long do they intend to leave? Of course, our decision of not providing answers to these questions comes from the different focus of our contribution; nevertheless, we consider that a follow up of our research will fill some important gaps in understanding labour migration and providing better incorporation policies.

When analysing national policies from the migration area, it is difficult to identify and indicate models to follow. This results from the fact that each country has designed policies not only according to its administrative capability (which is also a factor to be taken care of), but also compatible with its political, social, economic, cultural and historical context, which determines the presence of numerous singular national answers difficult to compare. Still, there are some general recommendations to be found in the labour migration literature that can be seen as possible solutions to alleviate the current Romanian labour migration framework (Guild 2013; IOM 2019; SVR Research Unit and MPI Europe 2019; Eurofound 2019):

- Building or strengthening networks and frameworks for sharing best practices on migration management;
- Widening policy consultation bodies towards multiple stakeholders of the migration process (inclusiveness is a factor that leads to more sustainable and holistic policy results);
- Supporting research and using research results (also conducting / using migrant surveys as a source of feedback / evaluation of the existing measure);
- Elaborating comprehensive strategies and designing interdependent inclusion policies, rather than singular policy approaches tackling specific inclusion areas;
- Providing tailored measures to various group of migrants, accordingly to their specific features and needs (first/second generation of migrants, vulnerable categories like women, etc.);
- Better national support (human resources, finances, etc.) for migration management and policies;
- Accelerated and transparent procedures of selecting and hiring migrant workers (in Romania, a particular focus should be on ensuring work permits are easily obtained should someone wish to hire a third country national/migrant worker; currently, there are still several circular administrative procedures where people cannot work without a work permit, but they cannot get a work permit without a job);
- Accurate evidence of the labour market shortages (people, skills, sectors): updated in real time; disseminated on international and national specific platforms; used both to inform and advertise migrants, and also to encourage locales to embrace migrant workers;
- Better protection mechanisms for workers (also job quality, working conditions, etc.; compatibility with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights stipulations);
- Fighting labour discrimination (also mismatch between professional experience and/or skills, and work offer);
- Horizontal and vertical cooperation among EU member states and EU in order to have a transnational database for syncing their needs and their access to potential labour force.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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