

SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES REGARDING VOLUNTARY RETURN MIGRATION ON FAMILIES IN WESTERN ROMANIA

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Rezumat:

Lucrarea de față evidențiază câteva aspecte ce caracterizează familiile care revin din străinătate, după o perioadă mai mare de opt ani de rezidență. În prima parte a lucrării am realizat o analiză a literaturii de specialitate cu privire la migrația de revenire și efectele acesteia asupra familiilor și copiilor din România. În partea a doua, este prezentat un studiu realizat în perioada februarie-iulie 2020 cu scopul de a analiza impactul social al migrației de întoarcere asupra familiilor și copiilor din Vestul României. Cercetarea este una de tip calitativ, în care am utilizat metoda de cercetare interviul semi-structurat. Participanții la studiu au fost 22 persoane din Vestul României, care au revenit din diferite țări precum Italia, Spania, Franța, Grecia și Canada. Rezultatele cercetării au evidențiat următoarele aspecte: așteptările cu privire la țara în care au emigrat sunt de tip economic și social. Durata șederii a fost influențată de confirmarea așteptărilor, care i-a făcut pe participanții la studiu să petreacă peste opt ani în străinătate. Și-au format o rețea socială atât la locul de muncă, cât și prin alte activități, precum cele de petrecere a timpului liber sau hobby-uri. Dorul de casă și de familie și dorința ca ai lor copii să studieze în România i-a determinat să ia decizia de a se întoarce în țara de origine.

Cuvinte cheie: migrație de revenire, rețea de suport social, adaptabilitate, dificultăți, România

Résumé:

Cet article met en évidence certains aspects qui caractérisent les familles retournant de l'étranger, après une période de résidence de plus de huit ans. La première partie de l'article survole la littérature sur la migration de retour et ses effets sur les familles et les enfants en Roumanie. La deuxième partie contient une étude menée entre février et juillet 2020 afin d'analyser l'impact social de la migration de retour sur les familles et les enfants dans l'ouest de la Roumanie. La recherche est de type qualitatif, dans laquelle nous avons utilisé la méthode de recherche par entretien semi-structuré. Ont participé à l'étude 22 personnes de l'ouest de la Roumanie qui revenaient de différents pays tels que l'Italie, l'Espagne, la France, la Grèce et le Canada. Les résultats de la recherche ont mis en évidence les aspects suivants: les attentes vis-à-vis du pays dans lequel ils ont émigré sont de type économique et social. La durée du séjour a été influencée par la confirmation des attentes, ce qui a fait que les participants à l'étude ont passé plus de huit ans à l'étranger. Ils y ont constitué un réseau social à la fois au travail et

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qu'à travers d'autres activités (loisirs, passe-temps). Le désir d'avoir un foyer et une famille et le désir que leurs enfants étudient en Roumanie les ont déterminés à prendre la décision de retourner dans leur pays d'origine.

Mots-clés: migration de retour, réseau de soutien social, adaptabilité, difficultés, Roumanie

Introduction

Emigration of Romanians in the last 15 years to countries in Europe has also led to an increase in the flow of return migrants in their country of origin. Return migration is a topical subject due to the large number of Romanians that emigrate in different countries and, after a period of time, decide to return to their country of origin for various reasons. In general, the phenomenon of returning to the country of origin for people who migrated abroad from economic or family reasons has always existed but, in the last period, it has intensified¹. However, there is no concern among policy-makers on migrants returning to the country, and initiatives aimed at supporting their return or reintegration are still limited². Return migration is defined by Perruchoud and Redpath-Cross³ as “the movement of a person departing from a host country back into his/her country of origin, country of nationality or habitual residence, usually after spending a significant period of time in the host country, whether voluntarily or forced, assisted or spontaneous.” Temporary emigration for work is most often practiced; at the EU level, after 2007, an increase in the fluctuation of migrants from Romania to other countries in Europe was recorded, 2017 reaching the climax in terms of temporary emigrants⁴. One of the theories explaining the phenomenon of migration-return is identity-migration, proposed by Cormoș⁵ who mentions that emigrant changes are triggered by the new environment, where emigrants pass through a process of adaptation and integration through the stages of identity change. People who migrate can return to their country voluntarily or forced by certain circumstances. For this reason, return migration is defined

¹ Zaiceva, A., Zimmermann, K. F. (2016), “Returning home at times of trouble? Return migration of EU enlargement migrants during the crisis”. In M. Kahanec & K. Zimmermann (Eds.), *Labor migration, EU enlargement, and the great recession*, pp. 397–418. Berlin: Springer.

² Rentea, G. C. (2015), “Governmental Measures Supporting the Return and the Reintegration of Romanian Migrants”, *Social Work Review*. 14 -2, pp. 127-137.

³ Perruchoud, R., Redpath-Cross, J. (eds.). (2011), *Glossary on migration*. 2nd edition. International Migration Law. <https://www.corteidh.or.cr/sitios/Observaciones/11/Anexo5.pdf>, p.86.

⁴ Iftimoaie, C., Baci, I. C. (2018), “Analiza statistică a migrației externe după aderarea României la Uniunea Europeană”, *Romanian Statistical Review – Supplement*. 12, pp. 166-187. https://www.revistadestatistica.ro/supliment/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/rsss_12_2018_07_ro.pdf.

⁵ Cormoș, V. C. (2015), *Schimbări identitare în lumea migrației internaționale*. Lumen.

according to the circumstances that have imposed returning to the country of origin. This study is aimed only at voluntary return migration. Voluntary return is based on a freely taken decision by individuals and includes, on the one hand, the freedom of choice (without external pressure) and, on the other hand, an informed decision (the basis of the decision)⁶.

People who migrate assess the characteristics of both their country of origin and the destination country but, at the same time, evaluate the effects of migration for their family and for themselves. This may extend the staying in the country in which they migrated or may trigger the decision to return to their country of origin. The more time they spent abroad, the more difficult it is to adapt to the country of origin⁷. Return migration involves, for family members, a series of transitions, for example the education system, employment, social support network, culture, lifestyle, etc. When returning to the country voluntarily, it is assumed that the migrant is prepared for it, but it is not always so. Sometimes migrants discover that the situation in the family or community is different from what they have imagined or learned, or that their resources are insufficient⁸.

One of the first studies carried out on return migration⁹ shows that the return rate of migrants in the country of origin is of 1 to 2 migrants (data collected between 2002-2003). Another study¹⁰ makes a comparison between migrant groups that left before and after 2007. Those who left before 2007 made long-term plans, while the others did not have such plans. This study also shows that those with long-term plans prefer to return to Romania, while others consider migration to other countries. The diversity of reasons for returning to the country of origin has been studied internationally. Even though the period spent abroad can contribute to the accumulation of economic resources,

⁶ Rodenburg, J., Bloemen, E. (2014), *Returning with a health condition A toolkit for counselling migrants with health concerns*. International Organization for Migration. <https://publications.iom.int/books/returning-health-condition-toolkit-counselling-migrants-health-concerns>.

⁷ OECD (2017), "Capitalising on return migration by making it more attractive and sustainable", *Interrelations between Public Policies, Migration and Development*, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264265615-12-en>.

⁸ Battistella, G. (2018), *Return Migration: A Conceptual and Policy Framework*. <https://doi.org/10.14240/cmsesy030818>.

⁹ Ambrosini, *et al.* (2012), "The Selection of Migrants and Returnees in Romania: Evidence and Long-Run Implications", *IZA Discussion Papers* No. 6664. <https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/6664/the-selection-of-migrants-and-returnees-in-romania-evidence-and-long-run-implications>.

¹⁰ Mara, I. (2012), „Surveying Romanian migrants in Italy before and after the EU Accession: migration plans, labour market features and social inclusion”, *Norface Migration Discussion Paper* no. 2012-24. <https://wiiw.ac.at/surveying-romanian-migrants-in-italy-before-and-after-the-eu-accession-migration-plans-labour-market-features-and-social-inclusion-p-2629.html>.

developing new knowledge and skills, and the development of social networks, among the most mentioned factors contributing to the return decision are: financial stability¹¹; health issues¹²; family remaining in the home country¹³; attachment to the native country¹⁴; impossibility to adapt to the country's culture in which they migrated¹⁵; children education¹⁶.

Most people who migrate are motivated by solving some economic needs or maximizing career opportunities¹⁷. When these objectives are not achieved or even if they are met, the decision to return to the country of origin is taken into account.

Marcu¹⁸ highlights the fact that the likelihood of returning to Romania is greater for those who have families in the country. Borjas and Bratsberg¹⁹

¹¹ Borjas, G., Bratsberg, B. (1996), "Who leaves? The out-migration of the foreignborn", *Review of Economics Statistics*, 78-1, pp. 165-76; Roman, M., Goschin, Z. (2012), "Romanian Immigrants Worldwide: What makes them Return Home?", *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*, 6-2, pp. 2-17.

¹² Davies, et al. (2011), "The Dynamics of Health and Return Migration". *PLoS Medicine*, 8 (6): e1001046; doi: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1001046; Cassarino, J.P. (2004), "Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited". *International Journal on Multicultural Societies (IJMS)*, 6-2, pp. 253 -279, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1730637>.

¹³ Badea, C. V. (2009), *Migratia de revenire. Studiu de caz in satul Speriețeni, un sat de tranzitie*. Iași: Editura Lumen; Eurofund. (2012), *Labour mobility within the EU: The impact of return migration*. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2012/labour-market-social-policies/labour-mobility-within-the-eu-the-impact-of-return-migration>; Gashi, A. and Adnett, N. (2015), "The Determinants of Return Migration: Evidence for Kosovo". *Croatian Economic Survey*. 17-2, pp. 57-81. DOI: 10.15179/ces.17.2.2; Benhayoun, S. (2018), *apud* OECD (2020). *Sustainable Reintegration of Returning Migrants. A Better Homecoming*. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/9d3d05d2-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/9d3d05d2-en#chapter-d1e913>; Ianioglo, A. (2019), *Reintegrarea economică și socială a migranților reveniți în Republica Moldova. Raport științific*. Agenția Națională pentru Cercetare și Dezvoltare. <https://ancd.gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/Ianioglo%20%28INCE%29%20Raport-st-final-2019.pdf>; Adeniyi, A. G., Onyeukwu, P. E. (2021), "Return Migration, Reverse Culture Shock: a Critical Analysis of Their Patterns and Particularities Amongst Migrant Nigerian Elites", *International Journal of Management Science and Business Administration*. 7-3, pp. 30-36. DOI: 10.18775/ijm.sba.1849-5664-5419.2014.73.1003.

¹⁴ Barbiano di Belgiojoso, E. (2016), "Intentions on desired length of stay among immigrants in Italy", *Genus* 72-1, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41118-016-0006-y>.

¹⁵ Badea, C. V. (2009), *op. cit.*; Adeniyi, A. G., Onyeukwu, P. E. (2021), *op.cit.*

¹⁶ Apsite-Berina, E., Manea, M. E., Berzins, M. (2019), "The Ambiguity of Return Migration: Prolonged Crisis and Uncertainty in the Life Strategies of Young Romanian and Latvian Returnees", *International Migration*. doi: 10.1111/imig.12580.

¹⁷ Glytsos, 1988, *apud* Roman & Goschin, (2012), *op. cit.*, p.3.

¹⁸ Marcu, S. (2011), „Romanian Migration to the Community of Madrid (Spain): Patterns of Mobility and Return”, *International Journal of Population Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1155/2011/258646>.

¹⁹ Borjas, G., Bratsberg, B. (1996), *op.cit.*

explain the decision of migrants to return to their country of origin in relation to obtaining economic performance, namely the accumulation of resources appreciated as sufficient.

Other authors, such as Castles and Miller²⁰, Rolfe *et al.*²¹ and Apsite-Berina, Manea and Berzins²² highlight that economic crises, such as the one 2008, may also cause the intention of migrants to return to their country. One of the main effects of the economic crisis was the decrease in migration in the countries of southern Europe, which also accelerated some return migrations already foreseen and increased circular mobility²³. However, in the vision of Roman and Goschin²⁴, the economic crisis did not cause a mass return of Romanians working abroad.

An important aspect of return migration is school adaptation of children. In the case of children returning from abroad, the school adaptation process is more difficult because they need to adapt to the country's education system²⁵.

According to a study by the "Social Alternatives Association" (2008-2012), over 21,000 children requested the equivalence of studies to re-enrol in the Romanian educational system²⁶. The study also shows that these children doubled at least one class they had already attended abroad and wanted to return abroad. The study highlights that, each year, between 1,200 and 1,400 of the remigrated children need specialized intervention from a psychological, social, and education point of view, as they have difficulties in reading in the mother tongue. Because of return migration to Romania, children may face different issues such as: readaptation and social reintegration issues, changes in the emotional and affective state of the child, behavioural changes, and somatic and psycho-somatic disorders (insomnia, headache, stomach ache, lack of appetite)²⁷. Another research shows that behavioural symptoms manifest most of the time after changing the environment (returning to the country of origin), while psycho-emotional symptoms can install after the

²⁰ Castles S., Miller, M. (2009), *The age of migration. International population movements in the modern world*, 4th edition, New York, Guilford Press. DOI: 10.1080/10803920500434037.

²¹ Rolfe, H. *et al.* (2013), "Potential impacts on the UK of future migration from Bulgaria and Romania.", *Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, p.16.

²² Apsite-Berina, E., Manea, M. E., Berzins, M. (2019), *op.cit.*

²³ Rolfe, *et al.* (2013), *op.cit.*; Eurofund (2012), *op. cit.*

²⁴ Roman, M., Goschin, Z. (2012), *op.cit.*

²⁵ Pleșca, M., Popa, L.L. (2017), *Remigrația și efectul acesteia asupra dezvoltării copilului*, pp. 83-87. https://ibn.idsi.md/ru/vizualizare_articol/127265/dublincore.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 84-85.

²⁷ Hăhăianu, F., Manasia, L. (2013), *Copilăria între două țări. Perspective asupra dezvoltării personalității copilului remigrant*.

return, but they manifest later in the child's life²⁸. Symptoms vary by age and gender. Boys who emigrated before puberty can develop psychiatric symptoms. In addition, both boys and girls who returned to the country of origin after puberty can develop self-image disorders, such as dissatisfaction or self-rejection. Often, remigrant children say they feel alone or have difficulties in finding their place in the group of friends, even if they make new friends or resume friendship with the old ones.²⁹

Another study by Luca *et al.*³⁰ highlighted that problems related to the failure of adapting occur because these children were not consulted on the departure to another country or return to the country of origin. In addition, children who did not want to return to Romania, particularly those who stayed more than three years abroad and those who want to return abroad have adaptation difficulties. The result of the analysis of the consequences of children's return migration³¹ demonstrates that children's readiness brings social reintegration issues; moderate or accentuated negative affective states; 10-15% at risk for emotional, behavioural, attention, and relationship difficulties. The difference between children at risk of developing a certain disorder and those who do not pose such a risk is made by the child's resilience, his/her ability to adapt to any situation. The same study shows that the perception of children on the reasons for returning to their country of origin is a general one and it is caused by the inadequacy in the country in which they migrated (failure to adapt to the education system, to society, or to the culture of the country of destination) or by financial problems. In addition, this study shows that most children (86%) were consulted on returning to their country, however, the remaining 14% were not consulted, which may have a negative impact on the children's readaptation to the community, school and life in Romania.

Reintegration into the country of origin was analysed in relation to other factors as well: the duration of migration and lived experience in the country of destination, the context of reintegration into the country of origin in relation to the objectives of each of them, and the differences between wages in the destination country and the country of origin³². Cassarino³³ highlights that an important part of the return process in the country of origin is the

²⁸ *Ibidem.*

²⁹ *Ibidem.*

³⁰ Luca, C., Foca, L., Gulei, A.S., Brebuleț, S.D. (2012), *Remigrația copiilor români*. Iași: Alternative Sociale.

³¹ *Ibidem.*

³² Dustmann, 2003, *apud* Vlase (2013), "My Husband Is a Patriot": Gender and Romanian Family Return Migration from Italy. *Journal of Ethinc and Migration Studies*, 39-5, pp. 741-758.

³³ Cassarino, J. P. (2004), *op. cit.*

process of preparing to return, i.e., the period during which the migrant takes steps to gather information, restore social links, and gather material resources to make reintegration in the country of origin easier. Preparing to return to the country of origin differs from one person to another due to a series of factors, such as informational means, financial and social resources available to adapt again to the country of origin³⁴.

There are different types of migrants returning to the country of origin: one such type consists of migrants who can either opt for joining the workforce or refuse to join the labour market. The reason some of the migrants refuse to join the workforce is that they come to the country of origin with resources accumulated in the country in which they migrated and rely on these. The migrants returning to the country of origin go through different states and stages of tension when they have to make this decision; also, when they reach a changed environment, they face an almost non-existent social and economic basis, and this can cause a psychological, social, and relational imbalance. Thus, family, the community, and even state institutions for psycho-socio-emotional support and for professional training should assist the person returned from abroad³⁵. Considering the lack of jobs in the country of origin, the main option for migrants returned to their country was entrepreneurship³⁶. A second type consists of migrants who accept a lower-paying job, relying at the same time on the resources gained abroad. Even if the income is lower at the beginning than in the country of destination, the migrant's reasoning is "though I get less, with the money I already have, I can live there better than here because the cost of living is low and because I like it more; I'm more familiar with people and places"³⁷. A third type consists of migrants who have returned after losing their jobs or other issues. There is also a fourth type of migrants, namely the ones who have gained enough resources and are willing to open their own business, where they could use the experience gained abroad. Several studies, for example, Dustmann and Kirchkamp; Naudé, W., Siegel, M. and Marchand³⁸, highlighted that migrants returned to their home country tend to start their own business.

³⁴ Davids & Van Houte, 2008, *apud* Vlase (2013), *op. cit.*

³⁵ Cormoș, V. C. (2015), *op. cit.*

³⁶ Stănculescu & Stoiciu (2012), *apud* Anghel, R.G, Botezat, A., Coșciug, A., Manafi, I., Roman, M. (2016), *International Migration, Return Migration, and their Effects: A Comprehensive Review on the Romanian Case*. IZA Nr. 10445.

³⁷ *Ibidem.*

³⁸ Dustmann, C., Kirchkamp, O. (2002), "The optimal migration duration and activity choice after re-migration", *Journal of Development Economics*, 67-2, pp. 351-372; Naudé, W., Siegel, M. & Marchand, K. (2017), "Migration, entrepreneurship and development: critical questions". *IZA J Migration* 6-5. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40176-016-0077-8>;

Despite all the negative effects of return migration, there are also positive effects such as new skills and experience acquired in the country in which they migrated³⁹.

Return migration can have an impact both in the country of destination and in the country of origin, in areas such as economics, human rights, education, social work, etc. Individuals have encountered a number of difficulties until they adapted to the society in the country where they emigrated, difficulties such as language learning, culture acceptance, lifestyle, community reactions, etc. Based on these difficulties, the migrant suffers from behavioural, attitude, lifestyle, self-esteem, etc. changes; because of these changes, there may be changes in the relationship with the family, life partner, even with members of the community of origin. Another difficulty faced by persons who have returned from abroad is that of discrimination, marginalization or inadaptability in their country of origin; stress caused by lack of job or unstable job⁴⁰.

Research methodology

The aim of the study is to present the social impact of return migration on families and children in western Romania. The objectives of the study aim at: exploring the expectations of families and remigrants about life abroad at the time of migration; identifying the social support network formed in the country in which they migrated; identifying the factors that have led to the return to the country of origin, and exploring the expectations of families and children about the return, as well as the exploration of the difficulties that families and children have encountered on returning to the country.

The design of the research is a descriptive-exploratory one, in which the semi-structured interview was used as a research method.

The research tool was the semi-structured interview on eight areas, namely: factual data (age, country in which they emigrated, the length of stay in that country, etc.); the expectations of the country in which they emigrated; the social support network formed in the country in which they emigrated; the degree of adaptability abroad (at school, at work); expectations for returning to the country of origin; the social support network in the country of origin; the

³⁹ Domingues, Dos Santos, M., Postel-Vinay, F. (2003), "Migration as a Source of Growth: The Perspective of a Developing Country", *Journal of Population Economics*, 16-1, pp. 161-175; Catalano, H (2015). Socio-educational consequences of the remigration phenomenon. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 180, pp. 49 – 54.

⁴⁰ Catalano, H. (2018), "Social Adjustment And School Integration of Remigrant Students – A study for Romania", *Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 8-4, pp. 32-38.

degree of adaptability in the country of origin (at school, at the workplace); and other difficulties encountered on returning to the country of origin.

The sampling method used was that of the snowball. The participants in the study were 22 people aged 32 to 70. Each study participant returned to the country with the family, the age of children varying from 2 years to 44 years. Most participants in the study are high school graduates from Hunedoara and Caraş-Severin counties and come from both rural and urban areas. The countries they have returned from are: Spain, Italy, France, Greece, and Canada. The length of stay in the country in which they emigrated varies from 8 to 25 years. The time passed since their return varies from 1 to 10 years.

Some of the participants were interviewed at their homes, while other interviews were conducted online via videoconferencing. Their duration varied from 25 to 50 minutes.

All participants interviewed face-to-face agreed to be recorded and the answers were subsequently analysed using the NVivo program.

Interviewees were informed about the purpose of the study and that the provided information collected remains confidential, and their name will not be disclosed in the study. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the research whenever they wanted.

Results

The following results were presented after analysing the responses from interviews of participants:

Exploring the expectations of families and remigrants on life abroad at the time of emigration

Before going abroad, each of the participants in the study imagined life abroad in a certain way and, based on this, had some expectations. Most participants imagined their lives with more opportunities in terms of finding a job. From a social point of view, they imagined friendly, “very patient”, “welcoming and warm” people. From a cultural point of view, study participants expected a culture different from the one in the country of origin, but they adapted to foreign food, “eating everything”, and they adapted to the celebrations there and, at the same time, shared the culture of the country of origin. Families’ expectations of life abroad can be grouped into different categories: a first category would be the economic type, including 9 of the participants in the study. Most wanted “some extra money” or “a better living”. Another category of expectations is the social type: a very small number of participants migrated to another country for “hospitality and courtesy” or even for “fun”. For all study participants, expectations were confirmed. They

found in the country in which they emigrated a better living, a higher salary than the one they had in their country of origin; they also found hospitality and kindness in people with whom they interacted over the years spent abroad.

In addition to the expectations they had, the participants in the study faced fears at the time of departure, such as: finding a job, learning the language of the country in which they emigrated, integration into the country where they emigrated, or even finding a home. They managed to overcome these fears with the help of supporting friends and family that were already living there. The fact that these expectations were confirmed influenced the length of stay, all participants living abroad for over 8 years.

The degree of adaptability was high for most participants, who “easily” found themselves a job. The people they met were “sociable”, “friendly”, and “welcoming”. The children also adapted very easily, most of them being born there and starting their studies in the host country. One case was the exception, “the fact that we were foreigners was a persecution, the children did not adapt at all, they were marginalized.”

Identifying the social support network formed in the country in which they emigrated

In the years spent abroad, the participants in the study formed a social support network at work, others had their family or friends in the country they emigrated to, they also made friends through various activities such as fishing, children’s extracurricular activities, walking pets etc. Most participants mentioned that they are also sociable, in this context, and that it was not difficult to make new friends. Their social support network was particularly comprised of family members, people of Romanian nationality, as well as people of other nationalities. A small number of participants mentioned members of the church in the social support network. The communities in which several of the study participants lived are formed by Romanian migrants, but not exclusively. Adapting to both living and culture in that country, they have managed to integrate, people in the country of destination accepting them in their circles of friends and presenting their country’s culture. The fact that they integrated and had moral support and even material support from the community in which they lived, prolonged the length of stay in the host country.

Identifying the factors that have led to the return to their country and exploring the expectations of families and children about the return

What caused the study participants to return to Romania was “home and family longing”. They mentioned that they consulted with their children to

make the decision to return to Romania, and they agreed. Another answer to this question was “we came back for our children”, i.e., they wanted their children to continue their studies at home. They considered that child education is more important than financial resources. Only one participant in the study said the reason for the return was retirement. He maintained the fact that children remained in the country they had emigrated to.

When they were asked about the regrets of the time spent abroad, most of them answered there aren't any, and even said they would gladly return. Other responses were: “we have not visited enough”, “health and social assistance system, cheap access to swimming pools and culture, access to university courses that are free for people over 65, civilized behaviour in stores”, “I did not contribute more at work”, “Italian cuisine and the sea”.

Regarding how they imagined it would be upon return to the country, most of them hoped it would be “better”. Instead, their fears are divided into several categories. Some were afraid they would not get used to live in Romania, others were afraid that children's adaptability in the school environment and in the social environment would be difficult, and the rest said they had no fears about returning home.

Regarding the expectations, they answered that they had to come back; most hoped to change the mentality of society. Other expectations were that they would find a job very easily, a better country economy, a better infrastructure, and a decent bureaucracy. However, they were disappointed with these expectations. 5 participants mentioned that they had no expectations because they already knew what was waiting for them. They appreciated that many things had not changed.

Exploring the difficulties that families and children have encountered upon returning to the country

With regard to family and friends' support towards the migration of the people who participated in this study, we can say that, to the greatest extent, they have received moral support, especially from family members and the social support network in the country. Only one participant specified that he had no relatives here and did not involve friends in his personal life.

From the point of view of adapting to lifestyle in Romania, some of the participants said they adapted easily. Just as mentioned above, they had the support of their family and friends, which is an advantage from this point of view. From a job perspective, even if it meant the starting of their own business or their employment under the leadership of others, it was surprisingly easy. They had helped employers with the experience gained abroad. Instead, the other participants said that adaptation to new living conditions was difficult; they encountered many difficulties on several plans.

Adaptation of children to school was excellent, according to their parents. Due to the mentality in the country in which they emigrated, children were easily integrated, they made friends, they attended courses, some got awards or won Olympics in various subjects. Parents received praise from teaching staff on children's integration into the class team.

With regard to the difficulties they encountered, most of them faced various problems: lack of public space; lack of water, gas and sewerage services; the absence of financial resources; differences in thinking, perception, and mentality in society.

In terms of the opportunities and challenges encountered by the participants, the following can be distinguished: most said that there are many opportunities, and one just needs to take advantage of them. For some, opportunity means time spent with family and friends, jobs found easily, and not being "stigmatized". There were various challenges that can be grouped according to social categories or in terms of country management (bureaucracy, corruption, deficient public services, etc.). Most participants wanted their initial expectations to be fulfilled, regardless of the difficulties encountered.

Conclusions and discussion

Return migration is a stage of the migratory process, in which people who migrate have certain expectations of the host country. Due to the fulfilment of these expectations, the length of stay in the country to which they emigrated may vary. The study shows that most participants had expectations of increasing financial revenues, which were fulfilled. Another category of expectations refers to social aspects. This category includes people who left for "fun" or because they had heard there were "warm, welcoming and sociable" people in that country. They also faced a series of fears about departing abroad, fears such as language learning in the country, finding a job, adaptation and integration into society, and finding a home. Once abroad, they managed to overcome these fears, focusing on the goals they had at the time of departure. Fulfilment of expectations influenced the length of stay, finding a job and a better living made them spend more time abroad. The degree of adaptability was easy for most participants, except for two participants in the study, who appreciated that they did not adapt to the lifestyle from abroad, arguing that they felt a clear discrimination from those with whom they interacted abroad: "the fact that I was Romanian was a stigma."

The main ways through which persons participating in this study formed a social support network in the host country were at work, through various recreational and social activities; they also managed to make friends because they are sociable people. Friendships formed abroad did not influence the length of stay.

The analysis of the study shows that the main reason for which they decided to return to the country of origin was home and family. Another reason for returning home was the desire for their children to continue their studies in Romania. Two people mentioned retirement as reason for the return. Most participants did not have regrets about the time spent abroad.

The return to the country came with a series of fears about adaptation to the Romanian community. Some were afraid they would not get used to life in Romania, others had fears about the adaptability of their children to the education and social life system in Romania.

Participants were also confronted with a number of difficulties, even if they had the support of family and friends: bureaucracy and prolonged time to obtain documentation from public institutions; a limited digitization in public institutions or public space; and differences in mentality of the Romanian society.

The degree of adaptability for both children and their parents was easy, they adapted to the community, although some people they interacted with believed they were “mere puppets and well loaded” because they had been abroad.

A proposal regarding the adaptability of children to the Romanian school system would be the implementation of schools offering social activities with other children in order to improve both social relations with other children and overcoming the difficulties of learning Romanian. Another proposal is to develop specialized counselling and guidance services for people who have returned from abroad in order to help them find a job or overcome the different difficulties encountered in the country.

The limits of the study derive from the qualitative research method based on the interpretation of researchers, while there is a risk of involuntarily influencing the participants’ responses. On the other hand, interviews made through videoconferencing limited direct observation. The results offer more information than generalizations.

Understanding decisions on return migration is important in order to develop adequate migration policies and to create opportunities for migrants in Romania. Future research can take into account the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on people who decide to return to their country of origin.

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