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Faculty of Human Geography

Specialisation: Conflicts, Territories and Identities

**Romania: A transit country in the intra – EU
mobility of sub-Saharan African Migrants**

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Acknowledgements

This thesis represent the final step of the Master of Science in Human Geography degree with the specialisation in Conflicts, Territories and Identities. The research was conducted over a fieldwork time of three months from March until May 2018 in four cities of Romania, with Bucharest being the main place of residence for that period. The thesis is also a part of the VENI-research *Fortress Europe as a Mobile Space? Intra-Eu Mobility of African Migrants* for the Radboud University in Nijmegen.

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Executive summary

The presence of sub-Saharan African migrants in Eastern European countries such as Romania is becoming more common than it used to be 10 years ago. The mainstream populist discourse present in numerous European countries is starting to catch on a segment of the Romanian public opinion, creating an altered and predefined perspective of such a complex phenomenon as migration. However, the stories of these people vary from students who later became asylum seekers to migrant workers that turned out into political refugees.

Romania is often portrayed as a transit country, considering its geographical position but also the economic development. However, considering the mobility turn in social sciences, the attention is slowly shifting towards the dynamics of migrant movement. As a result, the thesis follows a critical approach to transit migration by presenting and reflecting upon the variety of personal migration stories collected in the spring of 2018.

Although most of mass media is illustrating migrants arriving in the Eastern European region through the Western Balkan Route, some of them enter in Romania by flight, based on a temporary visa. Their trajectories to the European continent might have some common points, but also a lot of differences that make any individual story to stand out. The factors that facilitate or restrict mobility are the key in understanding how trajectories might change along the way. They can cause unexpected turns that are interesting to look at and take into consideration.

After having reached the European Union space by entering Romania, some sub-Saharan African migrants choose to set a temporary residence in Bucharest. They motivated their choice by bringing in the economic, social and educational opportunities of the capital city. Others choose to move to different cities, where they can pursue their work or studies. On a long-term consideration, based on a set of diverse factors, some of them decide to remain in Romania, thus challenging the East-West paradigm and questioning the transit character of the country in the old continent.

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1. Introduction

The aim of my thesis is to present and analyze the mobility dynamics of Sub-Saharan African migrants that take place inside the European Union space. The topic raises numerous debates due to the fact that although the internal border controls of the EU have practically disappeared, the external border controls have been reinforced as a result of continuous irregular migration (Lutterbeck, 2006; Van Houtum, 2010). One consequence of these political actions is that once migrants manage to cross the external borders, they find themselves in a relatively open and free space.

I choose to focus on the African migrants because their intra EU movement generates great controversies. A relevant example is represented by the fact that even though there is high promotion of cross-border mobility for the EU citizens, the mobility of Sub-Saharan Africans, as unwanted migrants, is seen as problematic (Schapendonk, 2014). As a result, there is a constant debate generated over the revision or suspension of major EU documents such as the Dublin Convention or the Schengen Agreement.

The role of Romania as a transit country in this unpredictable and dynamic African mobility will be central to my study. Generally known as a major emigration country, Romania became a more attractive transit and immigration option over the last 10 years. Although highly understudied, the country has a major impact on migrant decision-making. Even though the situation is far more complex than it seems on a first look, it is my objective to research and identify their motivations for immigration, their conditions while in Romania (based on the level of precarity) and their reasons as well as trajectories for a possible out – migration.

The next section will consist of background information about Romania's migration profile, followed by a short presentation of the main internal migration policies and mechanisms. The facts that will be identified in these two parts will represent a solid basis for the relevancies (societal and scientific) of the thesis. The scientific relevance will be further developed into a conceptual framework. After that, I will present my objectives and my research question along with three sub – questions.

1.1 Background information: Migration in Romania

During the 20th century, Romania was considered to be mainly a country of emigration. There were several factors which contributed to the outflows. First of all, the World Wars impacted the emigration of the ethnic Hungarians from the region of Transylvania to Hungary (Munz, 2002). A second factor was represented by the instauration of the communist regime in 1945, which lasted until 1989. As a result, “political violence and deprivation generated by a largely ineffective and authoritarian administration represented a cause for emigration during the Communist period.”(HWWI, 2007) Last but not least, after the fall of the communist regime, new waves of outflows started. This was mainly a response to the process of economic transition which cut out approximately 3.5 million jobs.

However, in spite of the fact that the inflow of migrants was quite limited during the Communist period, as any foreigner – especially the ones from “unfriendly” countries – was labeled by the local authorities to be a possible threat, Romania experienced periods of noticeable immigrations as well. The most relevant example is given by the foreign students in the Romanian universities: “At its peak, the annual stock of foreign students rose to 16,900, representing 7-8% of all students registered at Romanian universities in 1981” (HWWI, 2007). Moreover, after 1989, although the level of inflow was relatively low, the number of foreign workers (mostly from Turkey and China) was increasing constantly (Dănăcică, 2010).

Since Romania’s integration in the European Union on the 1st January 2007, the context shifted visibly. Migrants from all parts of the world, including the African continent, started to emigrate to the newest member of the EU, hoping to benefit from the newly adopted legislation. Nevertheless, even though the number of African migrants in Romania had a continuous growth for the past 10 years, their status is still full of legal incertitude which will be further explained in the next section.

All things considered, it is important to acknowledge the fact that even though the country has a well - known reputation for its numbers of emigrants, the current realities, represented by the acceleration of the globalisation process and the new responsibilities as an European Union country, are changing the migration dynamics. Since Romania has not experienced noticeable inflows of foreign citizens, the society in general and the authorities in particular

might face a real challenge in dealing with diversity and integration of a notable number of newcomers. A first step in order to achieve an efficient management of migrants, would be to acknowledge the transformation into a transit/destination country and to adapt their already existing policies to the current complex mobility dynamics (Popescu & Toth, 2009).

1.2 Romanian Migration Policies

This research also focuses on policies regarding migrants who choose Romania as a transit or final destination. According to the main observers of the Romanian immigration politics, the main laws on migration have two major characteristics: first of all, although comprehensive, they are not yet sufficiently harmonized with the European Union standards. Second of all, the governmental strategy doesn't have a set of policies to integrate the founding concepts mentioned in the legal documents. (Ulrich et al., 2010)

At the moment, the most important policy document concerning migration is National Strategy for Immigration approved by the Romanian government for the period 2015 – 2018. According to it: “Romanian authorities will contribute to a flexible admission system, but at the same time will pay special attention to citizens from countries with migration potential or who may affect national security.” (Romanian Government, 2015) Moreover, the paper makes a firm statement towards the integration of the third – country nationals:

“Romania's active participation in the efforts of the international community and the European Union Member States in finding durable solutions for persons in need of international protection, and the social integration of third-country nationals. In this respect, the policy of social integration of third-country nationals is aimed at enabling persons who are resident or are domiciled in Romania to have baggage minimum knowledge and skills, mainly through Romanian language courses, programs of cultural orientation and counseling to enable them to access the services and social policies in conditions similar to those for Romanian citizens.”(Romanian Government, 2015)

Although, these measures seem to communicate a progress in this policy field, represented by a willingness for tolerance, dialogue and finally social integration for all types of migrants, the realities on the field are far from these objectives. As reported by an expert from a

romanian public institution: "Until recently, the integration of the migrants was never discussed in Romania". (Ulrich et al.,2010, p. 55) This discrepancy reveals the fact that Romania still has a long way ahead in the quest for integrating migrants and creating a secure environment for them. A first step in order to achieve that, would be to upgrade the institutional mechanisms in the direction of high efficiency and synchronization with the international standards.

1.3 Societal relevance

Taking into consideration Romania's migration background and their current internal political framework of the field, I think it is of a crucial importance to further explore the main reasons behind the motivations of the African communities to choose Romania as a transit/possible destination country.

Moreover, if we analyze the situation from a different perspective, the societal relevance of the thesis is also strongly related to the lack of awareness about the African communities who are present in the Romanian society. According to Iris Alexe, the way in which the Romanian population perceives the image of foreign citizens has a direct impact on the attitudes and behavior towards those migrants (2011, p. 81). Therefore, a survey taken by the same scholar reveals the fact that a significant number of Romanians have a negative perception against immigrants. They are considered to be lazy, disobedient, thieves, violent, aggressive and poor.

A major factor who has an important contribution for all these misperceptions is press and mass – media. A closer look to the main EU sources of information reveals strong headlines such as "hundreds of thousands of Roma invading Europe" meant to create a certain image and negatively influence public opinion. (Krieger & Maître, 2006, p. 46). The same model is constantly applied by Romanian newspapers when it comes to the African migrants, in order to achieve the same goal.

All these perceptions usually generate a set of negative attitudes such as: violent acts or social exclusion. In reality, the reasons and motivations for their mobility are far more complex. They can vary from study to work or from marriage to asylum seek.

To sum up, I think that high levels of discrimination based on misperceptions represent a pressing problem of the current Romanian society. Therefore, it is my objective to research, inform and finally recommend possible solutions for further social integration of the African migrants.

1.4 Scientific relevance

For many years, the migration research field has focused on various topics such as migration from Africa to Europe (eg. Schapendonk, 2011) or European border control (eg. van Houtum, 2010). Nevertheless, the scientific world has limited information about the African mobility inside the European continent. Schapendonk (2014) explains in his research proposal that the mobility of African migrants within the EU is understudied. According to him, “we know remarkably little about how, in what directions and for what reasons, Africans move across borders within the EU.” (Schapendonk, 2014, p.1). Therefore, the main objective of his research project is to provide a new level of understanding of cross – border West African mobility inside the European Union. As a member of Schapendonk’s VENI – research team, my master’s research will contribute to his study by focusing on Romania as a transit country for African migrants.

Throughout the past few decades much research has been conducted in the field of migration. However, the current literature is dominated by sedentarist approaches suggesting that migrants move from one state of fixity (country of origin) to another (country of destination) (Cresswell 2006). In this way, the role of mobility in migration is highly reduced and very often underresearched. As Papadopoulou – Kourkoula was putting it: “the reality of migration movements is far more complex and cannot be grasped by a dualistic approach. The same migrant can combine legal and illegal means and make various attempts through different channels before reaching the final destination” (2008, p. 2).

Collyer, Duvell and de Haas identified in their paper significant developments that changed the field over the past decade. Among those, they stress the importance of technological improvement as a central factor to diversification and intensification of migration (2012, p. 410). Moreover, in their view of transit migration they state that it represents an important dimension of migration in and to Europe and there is a need to develop a sustained critical

approach to its continued use (p. 411). Last but not least, this necessity is strengthening by a limited understanding of further mobility of African migrants from eastern European countries. Bondarenko touched upon this aspect in his paper about post- Soviet Russia (2016) stating that although many Africans would say that they would go to Western Europe, they only use this statement as a psychological trick to cope with the daily hardships (p. 411). Therefore, the diversification of mobility in space is another understudied element which might provide a more complete image of the contemporary migration.

In my master' research I will critically assess the literature written about transit migration. In this way, I will try to get an insight on the impact of transit migration on African migrants and how does transit affect them and their mobility.

1.5 Conceptual framework

In order to assess presumed transit positions of migrants in Romania, this research has a special focus on five concepts with a complementary role: Transit migration, migration facilitation, migrant integration, mobility and social networks. In order to grasp a better understanding about the reality of respondents in relation to the theoretical realm, they will be combined to observe how the concepts could possibly influence the lives of migrants and vice versa. This part aims to explain the main debates revolving around the five main concepts representing the foundation of the research.

Transit migration

Despite the widespread use of the concept, no adequate or commonly agreed definition of transit migration was developed (Duvell, 2012). Nevertheless, the most common definition states the fact that transit migration represents: "migration in one country with the intention of seeking the possibility there to emigrate to another country as the country of final destination." (Duvell, 2012, p. 47).

Why is transit migration so important nowadays? There are numerous reasons behind the choice of a migrant before taking a transit route. A possible answer is offered by Slobodan Djajic. He states in his paper that: "The choice of land routes through transit countries is not only the cheapest undocumented means of getting to the final destination, but it also allows

the migrant to work and accumulate savings.” (Djajic, 2017). In other words, economic motives are always taken into consideration, but there are similar factors as well: political (the political regime of a country and the attitude towards migrants), social (the possibility of an already existing social network) and cultural (the passions and curiosities of the migrant about one country).

Looking at it from the perspective of an outsider, transit migration seems to be a simple process to comprehend considering the fact that it refers to migrants times of waiting after they left the country of origin and before arriving to the place tagged as destination. It implies a break, a waiting period, in migrants’ journeys (Collyer 2007; Bredeloup 2012). It is not so much a migration category, but rather a migratory phase that cuts across various migration categories such as regular/irregular migration and economic migrants/political refugees. (Papadopoulou – Kourkoula 2008; Schapendonk, 2012, p. 578).

However, the concept gained more and more importance over the years, being used in numerous political discourses of the European leaders during the last decade. According to Yeduygu and Yukseker, “the political construction of transit migration in the European sphere should be interpreted through the intertwined processes of securitisation and economisation of international migratory regimes, which are not only becoming more restrictive and selective but also more dynamic and multifaced” (2012, p.442). Their argument is based on the fact that European immigration policies and practices have been oriented to facilitate the personal economic interests and increase the security concerns. As a result, transit migration has been highly politicised, thus confirming the statement of Duvell, who argued that “transit migration is as much a discourse as it is a scientific concept.” (Duvell, 2006) In other words, the academic concept became blurred by powerful individuals with political agendas, thus leading to misunderstandings and incorrect perceptions.

In my thesis, I follow this critical approach to the transit migration concept. The starting point is the work of Collyer, Duvell and de Haas (2012) who introduce a different perspective of how to approach transit migration:

“A systematic study of ‘transit migration’ in the greater European geo-political context can also generate important lessons about the way in which migrants respond to the political-economic environment and the ways in which this is presented and discussed in the overlapping fields of policy, media and academia. First, the problem of ‘transit migration’: as well as a type of migration it is commonly used to describe certain migrants, forms of

migration and even the countries they are deemed to traverse. The term can be seen as an attempt to group a heterogeneous array of migration processes, migrants, potential migrants and countries around a limited series of largely undefined commonalities involving illegality, high risk, lack of control and above all an assumed desire to reach European territory.” (Collyer et al., 2012, p. 411).

This statement by three important migration scholars also fit the situation of Romania since the country is often discursively framed as the transit country in Eastern Europe. This is often fueled by mediatized and politicized images of insecurity and illegality. But following Collyer, Duvell and de Haas, we cannot simply write about Romania as it is the transit country in Europe as we cannot simply call someone a transit migrant. In my opinion, the best way to deal with the transit migration debate is to do justice to the different lived realities of migrants and to investigate how they themselves see their position in a particular society.

Migration as a mobility process

Mobility-led research has an important role in the research, with regard to migration processes within global systems. Aspirations, goals and destinations might not be anticipated anymore and such unexpected influencing factors are going to be studied in order to grasp the dynamics of mobility. With the dispersal of the set of categories inside migration, also the migrant type has blurred, as financial, political or even cultural motivations to move might be deeply interconnected (Collyer & De Haas, 2010; Schapendonk, 2011). The changing societal environment and increased opportunities to be interconnected and mobility-determined migration patterns to have changed. Alongside the mobility turn (Sheller & Urry, 2006), it should be studied the process of mobility instead of origin, transit and destination countries, to be able to research the factors that impact further mobility of migrants.

Büscher and Urry (2009) argue that with this refreshed paradigm of mobilities, in doing research on these themes also the dynamics between the theoretical, empirical, critique and engagement have changed. These enlarged mobility processes through the shrinkage of both time and space, have facilitated the movement of human beings, and also the movement of goods, ideas and capital through remittances and cross-border trade (de Haas, 2010). The

utility of multiple focuses in migration research is thus crucial in order to grasp the essence of a phenomenon in the mobile world.

The diffusion of borders also demands a "diffusion" of borders in research techniques and lenses, as also a mobile way of researching seemingly fixed phenomena in certain places in order to comprehend the life-worlds of migrants nowadays. These have turned out to be more mobile, dynamic but also fuller of social connections and the influence of information from different people, places and experiences. All of these factors create a world in which the migrant lives as well, which cannot be declined when researching themes related to migration or even less when studying migratory patterns in itself. (Hui 2016, Brugman 2016)

All in all, my research will have a special focus on the mobility processes enclosed within the transit migration through Romania, and also how this influences the choices of the migrants in relation with their future aspirations and further mobility. Influencing aspects such as economic opportunities or social networks are taken into consideration, as it is the goal of the research to understand motivations and drivers related to mobility patterns.

Facilitation of migration

Another notion that is going to be relevant in reaching the objectives of the thesis is represented by the facilitation of migration. The notion represents only an element of what the literature calls migration industry. The concept had a remarkable evolution over the past decade, developing from a migrant – facilitation theory to a more complex linkage between different elements.

One of the most predominant definitions of migration industry used is the one issued by Hernandez-Leon who defines the field as "the ensemble of entrepreneurs who, motivated by the pursuit of financial gain, provide a variety of services facilitating human mobility across international borders" (2008, p. 154). However, this particular view fails to include new emerging elements of the contemporary dynamic migration industry as discussed below.

Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen are trying to nuance the theory by adding two other perspectives. According to their definition migration industry is "encompassing not only service providers facilitating migration, but equally control providers such as private

contractors performing immigration checks, operating detention centers and/or carrying out forced returns” (2013, p. 6). They conclude by defining it as ”an array of non-state actors who provide services that facilitate, constrain or assist international migration” (2013, pp. 6-7).

Nevertheless, the three elements identified and included by the two authors (facilitation, control and rescue) are not only distinct subcategories of the industry. Instead, the complex interplay between them leads to different effects on migrants’ journeys. As Schapendonk (2017) puts it, the migration industry is a complex web of actors as he states: ”it is the ‘coming-togetherness’ of all sorts of migration facilitators and migration controllers that create a ‘force field of relationalities’ (Ingold 2011, p. 93 as mentioned in Schapendonk, 2017, p. 3). Approaching the industry as a complex web of relations, helps us to understand better the evolution of migrant trajectories, with all its ups and downs” (p. 3).

Social networks

Social networks has a key role in migration theories. It helps to explain how and why people move across borders. This also counts for the intra-EU mobility.

Collyer (2006) makes a differentiation between family ties and non-family ties, as an essential distinction within the concept of social networks for mobility studies. Former 'chain-migration' through family members migrating to a specific destination because of their networks in these places, has been restricted through changes in legislation, which made it more difficult for family members to reunite in receiving nations. Nonfamily ties, represented by friendships, or even 'weaker' ties, have consequently become even more important and are of greater significance for this particular study: "these non-family ties are clearly important. Without them migration to a strange new city with a language that was unfamiliar to almost all respondents when they arrived would be extremely difficult" (Collyer, 2006, p. 713).

In the group generally called 'strong' or 'binding' ties are valuable for maintaining assets, but within these networks there is a mandatory practice to reciprocate exchanges and services to one another. 'Weak' or 'bonding' ties could have a contribution to gaining certain resources, but the network is less dense. Even though the group appears to share characteristics at first sight like place of origin, language or religion, there is no regular or binding interaction between the members of it. Especially in looking for labour, social ties within networks can therefore result in both expected- and unexpected opportunities. The first group, Han Lin

(2005) identifies as 'expressive', which means the intention of these ties is to maintain and continue already existing, shared resources. This contact is therefore more intensive, while the second group of networks which is called 'instrumental', means that the purpose is to gain additional or new resources.

However, the importance of weaker ties should not be underestimated in order to change migratory patterns for humans on the move, as they might influence trajectories in terms of labour opportunities or simple social encounters (Granovetter, 1973). While the increasing migration restrictions to Europe make stronger ties less attainable, weaker ties have become more valuable amongst migrants (Collyer, 2006, p. 715). Having all these in mind, it will be valuable to see whether all these networks have a major role in fostering the transit through Romania and thus contributing to a further mobility inside the EU or, on the contrary, represent a contribution in the embeddedness of migrants.

Migrant integration

Another aspect that is considered during the research is the integration of sub-Saharan African migrants in Romania. It is often assumed that transit migration goes with a limited embeddedness of migrants as a result of a low level of integration. Therefore, the paper will contain a closer observation to the migrant level of integration in Romania.

Until recently, the main literature on migrant integration in Europe has emphasized the importance of the “national models” in understanding the discrepancy between the stages of integration in different countries. The first model is differential exclusion, named and explained by Castles (1995) who explains the differences between the facile inclusions of migrants into the labor market on the one hand, and the restrictive measures related to citizenship or residence on the other. This has been applied for many years in countries such as Germany, Austria or Belgium. The second is the assimilationist model, often associated with French politics, where immigrant children are born French citizens with secure rights. In other words, the social and integration policies are ensured but specific legislation adapted to the ethnic communities is not taken into consideration. Last but not least, the multicultural-leaning integration, specific to countries such as Canada and Australia, publicly recognizes the cultural diversity of the immigrants and targets the efforts to protect and guarantee their ethnic identity. (Codagnone & Kluzer, 2011, pp. 51-53)

During the last 15 years these national models have been gradually modified as the European Union attempted to create a common framework that no longer corresponds to the old models. As Carrera puts it:

”These traditional models of integration no longer exist. Societies and their public philosophies towards immigrants and their integration are continuously changing. National models and integration programmes have often been rendered moot by evolving contemporary realities, political and economic priorities, and dramatic events.” (2006, p. 4)

However, it is important to keep in mind that even though migrant integration is moving to a new phase with the goal of an European-wide civic participation, the policy measures and implementation are still deployed at the local level where one could find a variety of solutions to apply the general concepts. Since the research focuses on Romania, I will have a close look at the local practices that are followed in order to achieve the integration aim.

Formulating a conceptual framework

All things considered, transit migration is a became a powerful tool, used in the discourses of the politicians for personal purposes. Therefore, it is my goal to adopt a critical approach towards the concept in order to identify the heterogeneous array of people and the processes they are going through, in order to find the answers to the research questions. The mobile approach towards the way migrants move inside Europe is also very useful in understanding the dynamism of their existence. Within the process of studying, the fieldwork information, I have to understand their mobile livelihoods and the facilitators that influenced new trajectories for them. Social networks are in this case also important to consider.

However, we need to juxtapose the potential mobility, or internal drives with migrant embeddedness in society. Here comes the importance of the migrant integration and the national efforts in implementing it. It also underlines that we cannot see migrants’ social networks as a driver to onward migration. People’s social connections in a particular place are important keep factors.

Nevertheless, for those who decide to continue their journey to other European destinations, it is very probable that a new set of facilitators will come into discussion. Therefore, the role

of social networks is crucial in the given context. Both strong and weak ties will be mentioned in order to emphasize their part in decision making with regard to mobility. The combination transit migration, migrant integration and social networks , all reviewed through a mobility lens is thus central to my research. Nevertheless, the analysis will be deeply focused on the interviews I have taken in order to underline the significant details in understanding the position of migrants in Romania in the light of their mobility trajectories.

1.6 Research objective and research question

Taking into consideration all the conceptual framework and the two relevances that I have just explained, it is my objective to create in-depth insights about the political, economical, social and cultural impact on the motivations of African migrants who transit Romania and how does the country influence their choices with regard to further intra – EU mobility. By doing this, I can give the migrant an active role in instead of fixing him in a macro – level research. The main research question that derives from the research objective is as follows:

How can transit migration explain the mobility trajectories of sub-Saharan African migrants through Romania?

This question can be followed by three sub – questions which will be taken as starting points for the development of the chapters. These are:

- How can it be explained by the facilitators of migration?

As a response to the first sub – question, I will try expand and look into a set of general causes such as: studies, marriage, work etc. in order to find out which motivations are stronger. After that, I will have a deeper look at the main actors that play a role in the facilitation of sub-Saharan African migration to Romania. The main goal would be to conclude whether they have a powerful influence in shaping the mobility trajectories to specific destinations.

- To what extent do African Migrants show a lack of long-term integration?

When it comes to the integration of the migrant, the first aspect that it will be looked into is a set of indicators which might reveal the level of a migrant integration in a foreign state: Access to labour market, education, accommodation, culture and language, civic participation. Based on that, the conclusions of the chapter will provide a response to the assumption that a low level of integration is directly correlated to a further mobility inside the European space.

- What are the future aspirations for migration?

As a response to the third question, the chapter will provide a series of empirical examples to support the theoretical framework of the paper. I will look into the main trajectories of the migrants to find out if the traditional East – West route is still dominating in the intra – EU mobility or there is a diversification in space which allows unusual trajectories (West – East for example) to be taken into consideration. What is more, this part will also approach the possible restrictions for out – migration of factors of immobility.

Chaper 2 - The stories of the migrants

Introduction

In this part I would like to introduce the people that I have met during my fieldwork period. These are the people who helped me understand the dynamics of migration in Romania. They did that by sharing their stories, their unfortunat events, their current life and their dreams about the future. Some of them were more open and very willing to talk to me, others looked at me with suspicion at first, but I gradually managed to convince them that I have the best intentions.

As mentioned in the introduction, a major assistance in finding my respondents and facilitating the way for a dialogue with them was the three months internship that I did at the International Organization for Migration. During these three months, I managed to take 15 interviews of people from sub-Saharan African countries such as: Cameroun, Nigeria, Congo, Togo, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Somalia. The interviews were conducted in English, Romanian and French depending on their country of origin and their knowledge at that moment.

My first interview

I started my internship in Bucharest on the first day of March 2018. Although I have lived in the city before, during my Bachelor studies, everything seemed different and unusual. I met my new colleagues and tried to understand my duties as an intern as fast as possible. They told me more about the main projects of the organization and showed me the facilities of the building. There I discovered Romanian language classes where the beneficiaries used to come and learn.

The second day I had a private talk with the head of the office. After a more in-depth discussion about my research and my fieldwork plan, we agreed that, in order to establish a closer connection with the future interviewees, it might be a good idea to have my own private meetings with them. Therefore, he decided that twice a week I should have a separate

course where I could teach them the basics of financial education in Romania. Even though I have never done something similar before, I accepted and embraced the idea.

It took almost a month before I had my first interview because gaining trust with people coming from a different culture might turn into a real challenge sometimes. I was welcoming them every day with a large smile on my face, constantly asking them about their families or friends and providing them with as much value as I could during those courses that we had together.

Denise, a thirty-two years old woman from Cameroun, used to follow the classes very closely. She was also extremely active and positive towards the activities, so when I told her about my research, she was more than willing to cooperate and to talk to me. We talked in romanian for about an hour, enough time for me to ask all my questions and clarify the doubts that I had. But before anything, she told me about her family. Denise grew up in a divorced family with 3 brothers and 2 sisters. Two of them died while she was young.

When I asked her about the initial idea of Europe, Denise replied me in a simple but powerful sentence: “Europe was always an untouchable dream”. That made me think of how utopian could this place be portrait by so many people who found themselves outside the borders. I will analyze this perspective more in-depth in the future parts of the thesis.

After Denise left, I remained at that table completing the notes in front of me and trying to put all the information in the right order. At the end, after one month into the field, I had the first feeling of achievement and an ambition to move forward.

Meeting the IOM partners – new opportunities showed up

One week after my discussion with Denise, there was an inter-institutional meeting at the UN House of Romania. I was taken there by one of my colleagues and I had the chance to meet representatives from all the NGO’s who work in the migration field. During the brakes, I encountered Valentina, a woman who works at AIDROM Romania, an ecumenical NGO which offers legal, cultural and spiritual services for all types of migrants coming to Romania. She was very enthusiastic to hear all my ideas and told me that there is a guy from Nigeria working in their organization might be more than happy to help me.

That's how I met Hussein!

Hussein came to Romania in 2010 after his family reintegration request was accepted. He has a Romanian wife of which he met and married in his home country and two-year old son. He was extremely open from the second we met and right after we started he told me straight forward: "You can ask me everything you want. No issue is too sensitive for me." We started with an informal discussion about Nigeria and the contrast between the resources of the country and high level corrupt politicians which are considered to be the main source of internal instability.

This is why Hussein always dreamed to leave and experience the life of a European country: "My preferred destinations were Germany and Norway. But I have also dreamt of visiting Brasov (a famous touristic city in Romania) after watching the movies with Dracula (the urban legend)." However, his expectations were not fully met, at least by Romania: "I imagined and expected to find a country with less corruption and cleaner cities." Nevertheless, Hussein feels safe in Bucharest, which he considers a good place to raise his son.

At the end of the interview, he expressed his deep appreciation for me and my journey of bringing up the image of African migrants in Romania. Moreover, I was invited to have a traditional Nigerian dinner at his house, when my time would allow it.

A few days later, on 16th of April, while I was at work, I got an unexpected call from the same Valentina. I was informed by her that a migrant of whom she helped getting the refugee status is visiting her in the afternoon and there is a good chance that she will accept to answer my questions. I was very excited to hear all that. I announced my supervisor that I am taking off the rest of day and I took a taxi to the agreed meeting point. That was the day where I met the good friend of Valentina, Pauline.

She is a thirty-year old woman from Cameroun who applied for a study visa in 2016. Although Pauline is married and has one daughter in her home country, she decided to take a big and risky step in order to create a better future in a different country. I asked her, as I did with everybody else, what was on her mind before coming to any european country. Her answer was new to me at that point: "I thought that Europe can bring all the solutions for us. But soon I realized that you need to make many sacrifices in order to achieve your goals."

In other words, her story can be classified as a classical learning experience where one acknowledges that success usually comes only if it's the result of a patiently working process. We talked for almost an hour about the dynamic of her mobility: from a student trying to get a degree turning into an asylum seeker and in the end a refugee with a stable job and a secure home. Before we left, she strongly expressed her desire to reunify her family and to have her daughter again under the same roof. I will talk more about her story in the following chapters.

An unexpected visit turned in my favor

It happened on 23th April 2018, during a rainy Monday. I was asked to do a research about the number of migrants coming in Romania through the Black Sea. All of a sudden, someone comes in front of the office door. There was a short, young girl who seemed confused and disoriented. She presented herself and asked me politely if I can help her with some legal advice regarding her status on the Romanian territory. I called one of my colleagues to come down and listen to her situation. In the meantime, I decided to wait there and try to find out whether this can be an opportunity for me to obtain a new interview.

I soon found out that her name is Gloya, she is 23 years old and she comes from Congo. In 2016, after graduating high school in her home country, Gloya was encouraged by a friend of her father to study economics in Romania. In this way, a safer life would have been guaranteed to her.

I let her know that I am also 23 years old and also a student doing a research project based on interviews. The IOM's waiting room, where this discussion took place, had no windows and appeared to be rather uncomfortable for a one-hour in-depth interview. Therefore, I suggested meeting on a different day and in a different context to discuss more about the life that she has in Romania. Gloya replied that her schedule is very tight but she would be more than willing to talk to me right there, because there was no problem with the grey environment.

After my colleague explained the necessary procedures that she needed, Gloya felt relaxed enough to open up to me even more than in the beginning. She told me that she grew up in a family with 7 children and with a father who was always persecuted due to his political

orientation. This is one of the reasons why, from a very young age, she wanted to leave Congo.

“I expected Europe to be more expensive than Congo but also a safer place to live with a much more developed and active social life. America was the number one destination for me, but in the end, Europe was good enough.”

When I asked her about the life in Romania, she was pleased to say that she feels extremely safe and that leaving again is not an option because the local environment is suitable for the development of her future career.

2.1 My first trip in the country

The end of April found me in a delicate situation. I have almost finished my second month of internship and fieldwork and I had only taken 4 interviews out of 20, which represented my initial target. On the other hand, I was telling myself that the past weeks were a good investment in terms of building social connections with representatives of the Romanian migration field. Therefore, based on the decision to rely on those people, I called Valentina which has helped me before through her network. She said that there was nothing to do for me at that time and place, but suggested to go to Timisoara because the city represents an “attractive” destination for many migrants, including sub-Saharan Africans.

What do I mean by “attractive”? Timisoara is a city situated on the Western part of Romania, considered by many to be the main economic, social and cultural center of that region. Moreover, the geographical proximity with Serbia and Hungary makes the area to be a highly frequented migrant zone. I thought it might be a good idea considering the possibility of enlarging the categories of my respondents. While in Bucharest I soon realized that most of my interviewees could be economic migrants, students or people with an interest in following the academic path, in Timisoara due to the geographical position, there might be higher chances to find and discuss with asylum seekers or refugees. And my guess was confirmed after I’ve met Aischa and Yawne.

I bought my plane tickets and took off on April 29th 2018. The next day, after reaching out to the members of AIDROM Timisoara, we went together to their emergency center for asylum

seekers. The place is designed to offer a safe and quiet place to the vulnerable people waiting for a legal decision and for a change of status. The atmosphere in the center was welcoming and in spite of the poor conditions, the small randomly formed community felt comfortable inside. Among those people there were two young women from Togo and Congo. Both of them were told that someone may come to talk to them, so my presence didn't come across as a surprise. The interviews took place in the yard of the center, a familiar place to both of my respondents. After I detailed them the purpose of conversation and asked for the permission to take notes, we started.

The name of my first interlocutor was Aischa. She is 25 and comes from Togo. According to her story, Aischa grew up in a small town called Bafilo, a place mainly inhabited by the Kotokoli tribe which the family belongs to. Although the desire of discovering other places was constantly present, the social context was rather discouraging: "Only a few people travel from Togo." Furthermore, when asked about the European image, the answer was, although maybe categorized as unexpected by many, short and to the point: "I never thought I would go to Europe".

However, life took an unpredictable turn in the moment of the acceptance to participate in an Erasmus Plus environmental project in Romania. It turned out that what seemed to be a periodic international opportunity into an unknown country transformed into a life-saving event. While in Romania, Aischa received the information that a local armed group is looking to murder her so it's better to remain in Europe for as long as she can. Aischa managed to save herself by applying for asylum and get temporary protection and a shelter from the NGO's. I will give more details about her situation in the following chapters, but right now she is likely to obtain her refugee status and start a new life in Romania.

We took a ten minutes break and then I started a discussion with Yawne. She said that her English is not good enough to sustain our conversation, so we agreed to talk in French. Since the beginning, a chill went down my spine when she told me about her upbringing in Congo. Even though I didn't specifically asked for traumatic details from the past, Yawne insisted on telling me about how her father was murdered by the authorities in front of the whole family and how she, her sister and her mother were repeatedly abused by the same people for months in a row.

Under all these traumatic circumstances, all that she wanted was to escape and run away as far as possible. There was no clear plan or destination, just the thought of freedom and safety.

The wish eventually materialized when the Catholic Church of Congo purchased a passport on her name and made possible the transfer to Morocco before coming to Europe. “I never thought about Europe when I was young” she confessed. Even so, she arrived in Romania in October 2017 with a visa for studies. The visa, which is generally seen as an opportunity by many, was canceled in the moment when she was caught trying to cross the border in order to spend Christmas with her father in France. At that time, Yawne remained with only two options: apply for asylum or be deported. A form of international protection remained the only answer.

Even though, when the interview took place, Yawne didn't have a refugee status granted, the situation was stable. In spite of her mistake, she wished to continue the university studies in Timisoara. What is more, she looked very interested in the Romanian language and one month later I've been told that she took up a class to foster her learning process.

A random approach which led to a new contact

It happened on May 7th 2018. It had been a usual day for me up to a point. I came down from work, I had a consistent meal and then I took my bag to the local gym where I normally spend my afternoons. On my way there, I had to pass by a highly populated central park of Bucharest. That was the place where I've met William. He was sitting on a bench, chatting with a friend. I didn't know anything about them and a lot of questions popped up in my head instantly. Who are they? Where do they come from? If I will go and talk to them, will their reaction be positive? I decided to take my chances and see what I can get out of the experience.

Therefore, I went there and I asked if it is possible to sit down next to them. They agreed passively and continued their debate without paying any attention to my presence there. So I stood there for approximately ten minutes, pretending to drink my water while waiting for a friend, until I finally asked where they come from. “Ghana” was the answer. Then I introduced and explained a little bit about myself. Unfortunately, the friend of William was in a hurry, so after a few minutes the two of us remained alone on that bench. Even though suspicious in the beginning, he eventually opened up and talked to me about his life and the

journey to my country. I told him briefly about my research and he immediately agreed to meet again in order to discuss things more in-depth.

A few days later, we've met in a quiet coffee shop. There I had the chance to find out that William is 39 years old, married with one son. His wife is a Romanian woman and they met in 2014 when William came to Bucharest with a study visa. Unfortunately, due to a series of financial issues, he couldn't finish get a degree and was forced to go back to Ghana. His wife followed him and they got married in Accra in 2016. That allowed William to apply for a family reintegration visa and come back to the capital of Romania.

His case stands out when it comes to the perception of Romania as a host country. "I don't consider this place as a safe zone" he said. He argued that people can become really aggressive sometimes. Moreover, William was the first respondent who claimed that he would have loved to go back to the home country if it wasn't for his wife and young son. I kept in touch with long after the interview took place and in spite of the rough start, I personally consider him one of the most trustworthy informants that I had during my fieldwork period.

2.2 The tour to Craiova and the results

My fieldwork period was going better and better. I already had interesting insights from my respondents which helped in drawing a mental picture of my research chapters. However, there were still missing pieces which I wanted to complete in order to have a comprehensive set of interviews. For example, even though it could be considered common knowledge to say that Romania is an attractive country for enrolling in a university programme, I felt like there is limited information about the migrants coming to this country for study purposes. Therefore, I asked my IOM colleagues what I can do in order to encounter more sub-Saharan African students, and they suggested a spontaneous trip to Craiova.

Craiova is a small city situated in the South-West of the country. In spite of the geographical limitation, the area is well known for having two academic centers and an active student vibration. Moreover, from a historical standpoint, the electrical industry used to be present

and thus to create numerous job opportunities for people with experience in the field regardless of their nationality.

When it comes to the organizations facilitating the migration process in Craiova, my colleagues put me in contact with Global Help, an NGO specialized in providing humanitarian assistance for families situated in isolated communities. I wrote to the person in charge, detailing the objectives and the relevance of the Master Thesis and fortunately, the reply was positive. I was told that there is a group of young students (but not only) who will be interested to share their stories and that I will have 5 individual meetings scheduled in order to increase the efficiency of the process.

That being said, I jumped on the train and arrived there on May 16th, 2018. At the Global Help office, I was welcomed by two ladies who told me that the migrants were informed about my arrival and might come in any minute to talk to me. After 15 minutes a young guy appeared in the office with a large smile on his face. He was introduced to me as Redson from Zimbabwe. We went together to a quiet separate room, a more appropriate space for an in-depth discussion.

I fully presented myself and explained the reasons for my trip to Craiova, thus trying to create a comfortable and trustworthy atmosphere. He told me a funny story about how everyone is surprised by his appearance (he is short and thin while most of the people expect a tall, muscular guy when they picture an African student in their heads).

Redson slowly started to tell me more about his childhood. Unlike most of my respondents he lived a safe life as a child inside a warm and financially secure family. He finished high school and applied to the University of Medicine in Zimbabwe. The application was rejected due to the low grades and thus the academic choice shifted to a university of engineering in the same city. After two years of struggling, Redson decided to abandon those studies and follow his initial dream of becoming a doctor. In order to do that, he turned his face towards Europe because: "I always thought of Europe as a place where all dreams can come true". UK was a dream destination since he was young, but from a realistic standpoint he soon realized that studying there is not financially possible. As a result, he used the internet as a facilitator to find a more affordable educational option. I will explain more about this particular episode of Redson's journey in the next chapters.

When it comes to the life in Romania, things seemed to fall in place from multiple perspectives. The accommodation was fully provided by the university, a local company hired him for a part-time position and he extended the social circle pretty fast due to the advanced knowledge of Romanian language. Nevertheless, in regards to a possible out-migration, Redson expressed the wish to move to Ireland after the studies in Craiova, invoking one more time the financial argument. I will go more in-depth about this aspect in Out-Migration Chapter of the Thesis.

After the interview finished, we shook hands and reciprocally wished good luck. Outside the door, there was another person waiting for me. It was a young girl, which seemed to be a little bit stifled. I apologized for the delay and invited her inside. I applied the same introductory routine to decrease the level of tension and to create a sense of reliability (“we are almost the same age”, “we are both students”, “we have similar school struggles regarding homework and projects” etc.). I found out that her name is Mercy, she comes from Nigeria and her presence in Romania is a result of the dream of studying Medicine. However, as for other respondents that I previously had, the path to Europe was far from being a straight line in the sand. But I will give more details about that in the following chapter.

“What about your life here?” I asked. “It has its ups and downs but it could have been better” was the immediate answer. She told me about her accommodation troubles, having to move from one apartment to another and her stressful work experience as a waiter in Craiova. On the other hand, she supported the almost general statement of Romania being a safe country and even brought in a new perspective: “Romania is safer than Nigeria especially for women”.

Lastly, I was curious to find out more about her future plans and Mercy seemed to have a pretty structured plan about her professional trajectory: “My final dream is to work as a doctor in Nigeria. But until then, I want to do my residence in Canada.” She looked very ambitious and confident in her decisions. I wished her good luck and thanked her one more time for the amiability and openness to come and talk to me.

The next person that came in that day was a man who presented himself as Cristian. He claimed to be born and raised in Congo, but since 2008 he moved through different cities of Romania. Even though it still counts as a subjective appreciation, I categorize his story to be one of the most emotional and unpredictable out of everything that I’ve heard during my fieldwork period. Therefore even though not much will be disclosed here, during the thesis, I

will often bring examples of his encounters as I consider them relevant for what I intend to analyze.

After the third interview, the exhaustion started to come into play. However, I didn't have an accommodation for that night in the city and I had to come back to Bucharest with the last train in the evening. Therefore, after a break of 10 minutes, I insisted to continue being at the same time extremely grateful to meet and connect with so many people in the same day.

The following respondent entered in the building with a shy smile on his face. I warmly offered him a friendly handshake followed by a proper welcome. He introduced himself as Fidelis. From the first glance, I noticed something unusual about his aspect. He was short and skinny, just like Redson (the Medicine student which I have mentioned earlier). Fidelis sensed my look and asked me straight away: "You have met my friend, right?" That was a little bit unexpected for me but the things got clarified during the next minutes. I was told that he is also from Zimbabwe and he is aware of the fact his aspect is not typical to Sub-Saharan African people. All these were new to me, so I didn't know how to react or what to say. However, my curiosity increased even more and I could not wait to talk to him.

As I did with everybody else, I invited him to tell me a few facts about his childhood in Zimbabwe and the vision the he had back in those days. According to the story I was told, Fidelis didn't have the easiest youth that one could have. He managed to finish high school but financial problems stopped him from joining a local university. Therefore, the young graduate started to work as a library assistant, hoping that one day the option of starting a bachelor course would become more affordable.

Moving to another place was never an option for him: "I was not thinking to go outside my country because I imagined that everything is ok. I didn't see myself studying in Europe or anywhere else in the world." However, during the year of 2012, a representative from the Ministry of Education proposed a scholarship in Romania. Apparently, the proposal is based on a private agreement between the University of Craiova and government officials of Zimbabwe. Fidelis accepted the offer and jumped in the first flight of his life, with Bucharest as a final destination. He completed a Bachelor Degree in finance followed by Master courses in Management at the same university.

When it comes to future plans, Fidelis has a very structured vision. On the short term, he is planning to move to Bucharest because there are more job openings. However, there was

another dream coming up on the long run: “I would like to go to the UK and join the community of my co-nationals there. I am seriously thinking about it for a few years.” I will have a full interpretation in the out-migration chapter.

The last interview of that day was with a woman in her fifties, who came in with her daughter which seemed to be about my age. The young girl was very suspicious about me from the beginning, avoided eye contact and refused to engage in any kind of conversation. I didn't want to be overly persistent, so I was content with talking only to her mother. Her name is Liliane, she is 52 years old and comes from Congo.

In 2012 Liliane, alongside her two daughters, applied for a family reintegration visa at the Romanian Embassy in South Africa. Her husband came in Bucharest in 2008, contracted by the same Taxi company who hired Cristian. She encountered financial difficulties on her journey to Europe, but eventually reunited with the husband. After that, they had to live in poor conditions, moving from one city to another. Eventually, they managed to find a stable home and Craiova and together decided to remain and raise their children there.

To conclude, I consider the trip to Craiova as a challenging stage in my fieldwork period. Taking five interviews in the same day is not an easy task. On my way back to Bucharest I tried to order the facts both in my journal and in my head. I was almost done with my research but I had to visit one more city before the end.

2.3 A final trip in a tensioned environment

It was the 20th of May. My internship was almost over and so was my fieldwork and documentation period. I already had more than 10 interviews and enough insights for my thesis, but the initial objective was not attained yet. For this reason I suggested to my colleagues a final fieldwork trip to the migrant center situated in Giurgiu. They made a few phone calls and arranged my arrival there. Two days later, I took the bus from Bucharest in the early morning and came to the destination after only one hour.

Giurgiu is a small city situated at the southern border of Romania where asylum seekers are accommodated and linguistically prepared for their possible future life in Romania. The migration center is owned and administrated by the General Inspectorate for Immigration

since 2011. The access inside the facility is usually highly restricted (especially to journalists), but as a result of their close cooperation with NGOs and other international partners (including IOM), I could enter without follow-up questions or controls. The administrator showed me the rooms and the resources that the center is able to provide for the migrants. At the end of my tour I observed a relatively unusual room on the ground floor. The administrator pointed out a sign labeled as “LimbaRomână” and then I understood: that was the Romanian language class. After a shy knock on the door, we came in and noticed two young African guys listening closely to their teacher. I introduced myself to them, talked a little bit about my research journey and asked for their support. The guys agreed immediately. I suppose the age similarity played a major role in my favor once more. So I waited patiently for the class to finish before I could have the full attention of my informants.

Their names are Ahmed and Abukar. Both of them are from Somalia but they didn't know each other before they've met in the center. Even though the arrival to Romania happened at different times the route was similar. But I will talk more about their journey in the next chapter. Here (as I did with all my other respondents) I would like to share a fragment of their life in Somalia and the image of Europe through their eyes.

Abukar is 28 years old and he is married. His wife is still in Somalia, taking care of their only child. Abukar has an academic background in accounting and practical expertise gained during the three years of working as an accountant for the Somalian government. However, due to the constant political instabilities, he was death threatened by the radical opposition groups: “Terrorists said they will kill me and my whole family.” Therefore, Abukar was constrained to go as far as possible in order to protect himself: “I never left Somalia in my life.” As for the possible destinations, Sudan was an option but in the end, he settled for Turkey in the summer of 2016. The plan was to complete the academic studies, but after several rejections, Abukar decided to continue the journey to the EU, until he arrived in Romania, one year later.

Ahmed is 29 years old and single. He managed to finish pre-university classes in his home country but considering the internal political situation, Ahmed was determined to continue with university studies in a different place. As a result, he moved to Turkey in 2012 and started the Computer Engineering Faculty in Istanbul, graduating four years later. However, the limited job opportunities forced him to a further migration towards the European Union space: “I imagined that Europe would be the best place to live and study and now I think the

same – if you have peace, you have everything.” Ahmed entered in Romania in June 2017 and honestly confessed that he didn’t know anything at all about the country, except from the fact that it is part of the European Union.

In spite of their shortcomings, which will be explained in much detail during the next chapters, both of them are firmly convinced to remain in Romania, learn the local language, join a Romanian university and eventually get the citizenship. We remained in touch through social media and I offered them helpful materials to learn the language and get the right information about the local academic field. After we finished, I wished them good luck and left to meet my next informant.

The administrator said that there might be another person from Congo willing to talk to me about his journey. We’ve met him on the hallway but that was not an adequate space for an in-depth interview. The only room available for us was the evaluation office. This is the place where newcomers enter and answer a set of questions to the migration officer. Based on that, a profile is created and it is decided whether he can remain in the center or not. At first, I was not comfortable with the suggestion, thinking that my respondent might get stifled by being in that specific place. But since there was no other alternative, I conformed to the proposal.

The interior of the room was grey and provided a feeling of emptiness. Only two tables and five chairs could be found inside. There was only one small window which made it almost impossible for the space to be naturally lighted. All in all, the atmosphere was extremely tensioned even for a person who came in there for the first time like I did. I looked at my informant but I couldn’t read anything particularly off his face. I asked him how is feeling but soon I learned that he only speaks French. That made things even more interesting!

His name is Serge and, like I mentioned earlier, he is originally from Congo. His tumultuous background impressed and also kept me curious from the first couple of minutes. According to his statement, he was involved in politics from a young age, taking part in an opposition party. As a result of his political views, he got arrested by the authorities during December 2016. After a few months the police released him, not without additional threats and acts of intimidation. That was the moment when Serge made up his mind to migrate to Europe as soon as possible. “Why Europe?” I wondered. “I imagined the people are nice based on the movies I watched back home. I also saw my friends on Facebook having a good time in countries like France or Belgium” he replied. “It makes sense. But why Romania, since you have so many options?” I continued. “A friend told me that it is very easy to obtain asylum

here” he answered. When it comes to his future, he admitted that he would love to reunite and live with his sister in France.

That interview did not last as long as the others, due to the conditions that I have just described. Therefore, we left that room as soon as I finished my questionnaire and went back to the administrator. I didn’t have any other meeting scheduled in that day at the migration center and that was also the last interview of my three months fieldwork.

Conclusions

All things considered, as stated in the introduction, the role of this chapter was to introduce and briefly present the 15 respondents encountered between March – May 2018. They helped me to create a framework in which I can further apply the concepts related to transit migration, migration industry, integration, EU – mobility and so on.

Their stories, experiences and background reflect the complexity of contemporary international migration. While some of them grew up in healthy and stable households, others had to face a rough upbringing. Furthermore, the reasons for their arrival in Romania vary from asylum seeking to family reintegration or study purposes. Last but not least, there is also a powerful dynamic when it comes to possible out-migrations, both inside and outside the EU relatively open space. All these aspects will be discussed and analyzed in the following chapter of the thesis.

Chapter 3 – Causes and facilitators of migration

This chapter will present the reasons behind the migrant's arrival to the European Union space and to Romania in particular. In other words, I will explain what are the initial intentions, plans and expectations of a sub-Saharan African individual for entering into the Romanian territory and what services do they use in order to facilitate the transition process. The critical approach will help me to explore a large variety of elements and to have a complete examination, of the cases. In the first section I will define and clarify the most important reasons for migration to Romania with a clear emphasis on the dynamic of the mobility. In the second part, the central facilitators of migration will be identified and evaluated based on their impact in the contemporary international migration. The chapter will end with the most relevant conclusions and possible recommendations for the future.

3.1 Reasons for migration

In the first part of the chapter I will write about the main reasons and motivations for the immigration of my sub-Saharan African respondents to Romania. The main argument that I am going to build upon in this part is related to the fact that, unlike the mainstream media which is constantly reporting the already well-known stereotypes about the migrants coming to Europe only to seek employment opportunities, the reasons and motivations are extremely diverse and, in some cases, rather unexpected. However, the main immigration reasons that I have identified during my fieldwork are: Studies, Family Reunification, Tourism, Asylum Seeking, and Employment.

Coming to study in Romania: An affordable option

One of the main reasons why migrants from all over the world, including here the sub-Saharan Africa, come to Romania is expressed by their desire to pursue an academic career in an EU university. No less than five of my respondents told me that this country option stood out for a series of uncommon particularities such as: the facile process before getting the visa

for studies “I applied for studies here because a friend told me that in Romania you can obtain visa for studies easier than in other EU countries” (Pauline, 11/04/2018) or diversity of languages in which the study programmes are taught: “My father’s friend told me that here I can easily access programmes taught in french.”.(Gloya, 23/04/2018)

Nevertheless, a major driver of migration to Romania that I have encountered on numerous conversations that I had with my respondents is represented by the fact that Romania has the lowest fees for the Universities of Medicine and Pharmacy in whole region.

After I met Redson, the young student from Zimbabwe currently studying in Medicine in the small city of Craiova, he explained to me the complete logical process of him coming to this specific country of Europe: “Back in my home country, I started to check medical schools in the European countries on the Internet. I have checked tens of universities from Ukraine, Poland or Bulgaria but in the end, I found out that Romania has the lowest fees for this type of studies.” (Redson, 16/05/2018)

His statement was sustained by Mercy. She said that: “Before I found out about Romania, I applied to a University from Ukraine through an agent. But after a careful comparison between the two countries, I realized that Romania can offer me much more satisfaction for a lower fee.” (Mercy, 16/05/2018)

Their statements confirm a general trend that is happening for more than two decades: The Universities of Medicine attract more and more foreign students every year. According to an article published by the Euro Education platform: “Most medical university students are attracted by medicine in Romania because of the quality of studies, the possibility of choosing the language of study (Romanian, English, French, Germany or even Hungarian), reasonable tuition fees and living cost, and a diploma recognized all over Europe and beyond.” (EuroEducation, 2017) Therefore, it is expected that the number of students coming to Romania to study this field will continue to grow over the next years.

Last but not least, following the importance of not fixing a migrant into a certain category, I discovered an interesting dynamic while listening to the stories of my respondents. Although most of them initially applied for study visa, the context changed over time forcing them to reapply for a different category: family reunification or asylum seek. In the next sub – chapters I am going to explain more about these two different categories.

Family reunification in Romania: Bureaucracy and extra suspicion

As stated in the title of this part, applying for family reunification in Romania is far from being a facile process. The stories that have been told to me, can only confirm the struggle of getting back together in the same place with one's spouse.

" I have met my wife in Nigeria and we got married in 2015. After that, she convinced me to come and live together in Romania. I applied for a family reunification visa but it got rejected due to the fact that some papers were missing from the file. Then, I applied again and they offered me a three months permit. I managed to extend it to one year and after our baby was born, I received a five-year permit. Every time I was talking to the authorities, they were very suspicious of me and they had a negative attitude all the time." (Hussein, 12/04/2018)

" I met my wife while I was a student in Bucharest. When the Romanian authorities deported me back to Ghana, she came for me and we got married there. After a few months I have applied for family reunification here [n.r. Romania]. Although the process is much more complicated than when I applied for studies, my request got accepted." (William, 07/05/2018)

These two migrant stories confirmed the administrative loops that need to be faced in order to get the permission of staying in Romania, as well as the intriguing dynamic of re-applying on a different basis after an episode of deportation.

Asylum seekers: Not always an initial intention

According to the international organizations, the number of asylum seekers in Romania is continuously growing during the past 5 years. Save the Children is reporting that the number of people who seek asylum in Romania has tripled over the last year, and the ascending trend will continue in the near future. (Save the Children, 2018) However, the reality behind these numbers is much more complex than that. In this part, I will explain the elaborate journey of most of the migrants who end up asking for a form of international protection to the Romanian Government.

As stated before, in numerous cases, the migrants who choose Romania as a possible destination in their journey to Europe, take this country into consideration for educational purposes. Even though they initially come on the Romanian territory with the aspiration to

study in a University or to take post-high school classes, their situation and therefore their objectives might change over the course of time.

“I found out about Romania from a friend who told me that there you can obtain a visa very easy if you apply for studies. So, I did that. Soon after my arrival, I moved to Pitesti in order to learn the language and get familiar with the local culture. Yet, after seven months, I was running out of money. I knew that if the authorities check my account and discover that I don't have enough to pay my fees, I will be sent to prison and then deported. I was very scared, so I decided to run away to Hungary. But the police caught me at the border and after hearing my story, they offered me two options: either apply for asylum or be sent back to my home country. In the end, I decided to become an asylum seeker because being deported to Cameroun was not an option for me.” (Pauline, 16/04/2018)

“After I decided to leave Morocco, I just wanted to go in a country where I can learn a new language and start a university. I received an initial 6 months visa for studies in Romania, on November 2017. One month later, my father came to me and told me that he wants us to spend the Christmas holidays together in France. He had everything set up, including a false passport with my name on it. Unfortunately, the border police stopped us. I have been detained for a few hours in Arad where they took my fingerprints and registered me in their database. After that, an officer came to me and offered two options: either I apply for asylum or I will be sent back to my home country. Now I am an asylum seeker waiting for my response.” (Yawne, 30/04/2018)

These two stories confirm the complexity of migrant trajectories, stories and motivations to arrive on the European Union territory in general, and in Romania in particular. The experiences that Pauline shared during our conversation, helped me to better understand the situation of a non – EU citizen who end up in the impossibility of paying the academic fees. Her disastrous financial situation combined with the tensed political context found in the home country, forced her to apply for asylum as a last resort. The story of Yawne has a series of intriguing similarities. She also came in Romania as a student, but the unfortunate entourage (represented by her father) forced her to make a careless decision. As a result, she found herself with no other viable choice than to seek asylum.

To conclude, a considerable number of the current asylum seekers do not have this targeted approach of coming to the European Union countries with one final objective in mind: to

obtain international protection. Most of them rather find themselves in this situation after a period of time where unfortunate events might occur.

Tourism

Although a less discussed aspect when it comes to international migration, tourism represents a relevant sphere in the mobility dynamics all over the world. In spite of the fact that the level of sub-Saharan African tourism to Romania is rather low, thanks to a series of international projects that work as facilitators and that I am going to talk about in the second part of this chapter, the general trend seems to modify. Moreover, having in mind the same idea of not fixing the migrant, there are some cases where a simple tourist can later become a student or an asylum seeker. I found out more about these transformations after I've met Aischa, the young woman from Togo, in Timisoara:

“I found out about Romania through an environmental project organized under the Erasmus+ framework in partnership with the local associations. The project involved three countries: Romania, Mozambique and Togo and the main objective was to raise awareness about the dangers of not protecting the nature. After the local associations accepted me in the programme, I applied for a tourist visa because I was supposed to stay in the country only for 10 days.” (Aischa, 30/04/2018)

However, the story of Aischa took an unexpected turn once she arrived in Bucharest.

“In the fifth day of the project, a friend called me and told me that the authorities are looking for my family and that is very dangerous for me to come back to Togo. I was very scared. In that moment, I didn't know anything about asylum seeking. When I asked for help people refused to do something and preferred to say 'we don't have a solution for you'. I didn't want to go back so the organizers of the project threatened me with jail, forced return and killing in my own country. I run away to Arad and there, even though the local police were a little bit suspicious, they took me to a refugee center in Timisoara where I was helped in the procedure of asylum seeking.”

All in all, the story of Aischa clearly stands out for the unexpected turn of events and can be used as a tool to better understand the reasons that can be found behind a general set of statistics. Tourism is and will remain an important reason for migrating from one place to

another. However, it is important not to forget about the different ramifications that mobility might imply.

Employment: Are there economic migrants who choose Romania?

The last reason for migration that I am going to talk about in this part of my chapter is represented by the people who move to have a job in a different place. Nevertheless, as in all the cases mentioned before, moving to work in Romania is not a main target of a migrant but rather a situation in which he or she ends up.

A relevant story for this statement was given to me by Christian, the Congolese man who came in Romania in 2008, after two recruiters from a taxi company came to Congo with the precise objective of hiring 100 people as drivers for their business.

He told me that: “At that time, the political context was much tensed in Congo and a lot of people got arrested after the elections of 2006. The romanian recruiters had the initial contracts prepared for us to sign. I was lucky that I had a passport.” (Christian, 16/05/2018)

The taxi company, which I am going to talk about in the second part of this chapter, represented a major facilitator for his movement. What is even more interesting about Christian and his journey is the fact that although he is categorized as an economic migrant, the choice of him working in Romania was rather contextual. His experience, as many others that I have presented already, has a thing that came to my attention: Regardless of the reason for immigration to Romania (Studies, family reunification, asylum seeking, tourism, employment) the motivation of the migrants was rather a partial one. Most of the time they were convinced by a family member, someone in their social network, an organization or even a company to follow the journey to the EU and to Romania in particular

In the next part of this chapter, I will talk about the main facilitators of migration to Romania and then I will conclude by stressing one more time the diverse motivation of the migrants and their expectations.

3.2 Facilitators of migration to Romania

In this second part of the chapter, I will develop more on the main facilitators of migration to Romania. One striking aspect that I have encountered in my research about these different actors (individuals, companies, organizations, programs) that have the same thing in common, namely facilitating the immigration of sub – Saharan Africans, is that they are diverse in their field of expertise as well as in their methods of action. I will start the chapter by talking about the idea of social networks and their potential of convincing current and future migrants about Romania as a desirable destination, especially for students. Then I will dive deeper into the Catholic Church and their role as major agent in the contemporary international migration. The discussion will then shift towards the education counselors as viable alternatives for youngsters who want to study abroad. The last part of the chapter will include a thorough analysis on local politicians and their understanding of migration as part of a broader picture, as well as the enlargement of regional programs (such as Erasmus) which can unlock new perspectives and opportunities for the sub – Saharan population.

Social networks: The growing importance of the weak ties

Migrants are constantly relying on their connections before, during and after their journey from one place to another for centuries. However, policy developments over the last few decades, particularly in Europe, have devalued the social capital of individuals who lack the necessary documentation to work or reside legally by criminalizing support for such individuals, increasing their vulnerability (Collyer, 2005). As social capital becomes more fragile, migrants have to work harder to build and maintain it. (Pathirage&Collyer, 2011 p. 316). Another interesting trend is represented by the fact that people tend to rely more and more on weak or indirect ties who experienced living in an European country, instead of their family or close friends.

During my interview with Denise, she explained that:

"After my studies, I moved to Gabon and I worked there for 4 years in extremely difficult conditions (13 hours a day). There I met 6 romanians who helped me in the process. Out of those six, a woman became a good friend of mine and constantly encouraged me to migrate and live in Romania, promising me a better life. I've already learned a little bit of romanian when I was there." (Denise, 11/04/2018)

Gloya, another person who came in Romania for studies, confessed that: "I applied for studies here, encouraged by a friend of my father who already lives in Romania." (Gloya, 23/04/2018)

Mercy, the young nigerian student confirmed this trend: "One day, at a private event, I encountered someone who works at the Nigerian embassy in Bucharest. He told me more about the country and encouraged me to come and study here." (Mercy, 16/05/2018)

All these empirical data confirm the initial statement and endorse the work of Suzanne E. Beech on international student mobility. She states the fact that, that these social networks directly shape the geographies of international students by detailing how they are part of complex communities already in motion without which both shape their decision to study abroad and their place of study. (2015, p. 333) Although each migrant (and international student in particular), has its own dreams when it comes to a possible destination country, they take less risks when it comes to the actual migration and settlement process.

"The students involved in the process therefore take the advice of individuals, not solely on the basis of their shared connections or on the strength of their relationship to one another, but due to their shared experience. This confirms Granovetter's (1973) weak ties theory as it demonstrates that those with whom one is less familiar actually provide key information through the network." (2015, p. 340)

Another critical aspect is represented by importance of continuously working on and extending the personal social circle of a migrant. "Migrants and prospective migrants are understandably keen to maximize the potential benefit they may draw from the social relationships they have established and to cultivate new ones. This activity, so widespread in migrant sending areas, reaffirms Bourdieu's notion that social capital requires work, not only to activate, but also to maintain." (Pathirage&Collyer, 2011, p. 332) This phenomenon appears as a result of the extreme fragility and unpredictability of the social network.

To sum up, the role of the social networks as facilitator of international migration is well known for decades already. However, the new perspectives of reliance on weak ties and constant

extension of the social group could tell us more about the future developments of social interactions between different people and groups

The Catholic Church: A conservative actor in a dynamic field

This particular ecclesiastic institution represents one of the most important “players” when it comes to contemporary international migration of sub-Saharan Africans. However, understanding the complex relation between migration and Catholicism requires a careful consideration of the nature of Catholicism, as well as the endurance of its past and present.

I have encountered and found out more about this matter during the discussion with Yawne. She confessed that:

“After the tragic events that happened to me and my family back in Congo, the Congolese Catholic Church helped me to move to Morocco, where they gave me accommodation and food. After 6 years there, I decided to move to Romania, so they took care of me and helped in applying for a study visa.” (Yawne, 30/04/2018)

This statement raised a couple of questions: Why is the Catholic Church actively involved in the complex process of migration? And more important: Could it bring a stronger sense of transnationalism?

First of all, my findings support the work of Gemma Tulud Cruz in the paper entitled “Toward a theology of migration”. There she states the fact that: “Today, religious groups worldwide continue to play a major role in working for better living conditions for migrants in the way local churches provide various services that welcome and help migrants.” (2014, p. 80) Moreover, the author identifies a possible answer to my first question by affirming: “Catholicity, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, is the ability to hold things together in tension with one another. As a heuristic means, it can help in situating ethnicity in the context of the radical universality that is humanity’s call and deepest identity” (2014, p. 104). Therefore, the Catholic Church as an actor in the migration process might have the ability to bridge the ethnic differences into a universal mutual acceptance and tolerance.

Second of all, when it comes to the transnational character of the religious organisation, the process is involving more factors than usual. Dominic Pasura and Martha Erdal studied the connection between catholicism and transnationalism and one of their conclusion was that: "Transnationalism among migrants, however, does not only concern networks and exchanges of goods but also transnational religious practices that involve the transformation of identity, community and ritual practices." (2016, p. 24) As a result, "The Church integrates them into powerful, well-established networks where they can express interests, gain skills, and make claims with respect to their home and host countries." (2016, p. 124)

To conclude, Catholicism maintains an active role in the countinously changing field of migration using theology to ground the human rights for migrants for a better understanding of the concept of human being. In addition, although the link between religion and transnational practices might seen unusual for most people, the reality on the field offers a different perspective. As Schiller et al. (2011, p. 400) argue, 'rootedness and openness cannot be seen in oppositional terms but constitute aspects of the creativity through which migrants build homes and sacred spaces in a new environment and within transnational networks' (2016, p. 141)

Education Agents: A problematic bridge to cross

As implied in the previous sub-chapter, international education is becoming a compelling driver of international mobility. More and more youngsters dream and plan on studying in one of the high level universities present in the European Union space and not only. In order to achieve that, apart from using the already mentioned social networks, they also contact education agents for a more comprehensive set of bureaucratic information about their perspective country. Furthermore, they facilitate the application process to the desired university, thus simplifying the admission procedure for the candidates.

Mercy confirmed this modern trend in our disscusion: "Before coming to Romania, I've applied to an university in Ukraine through an agent."

F.L. Collins studied this topic more in-depth and came to the conclusion that "Education agents do not just direct new international students to educational institutions. Rather, they

offer a much broader package of services that includes travel and visa/permit arrangements, home stays, counselling and other settlement issues. Moreover, these agencies usually have a far broader customer base than just international students.” (2008, pp 406-407) Therefore, these agencies can be considered a central part of the ”education industry” where prospective students have a more facil access to high level universities.

However, not all the education agencies represent a trustworthy source and a virtual bridge to the universities abroad. There is an example missing here.

The best example was offered to me by Redson, one of my respondents.

”Before I came to the university in Craiova, I applied here through an agent. He told me that my application was accepted but when I arrived in Romania, I found out that my agent tricked me in order to take my money. I was not registered in the database of my faculty so I had to wait one more year before I actually started the courses.” (Redson, 16/05/2018)

The story of Redson emphasize the dark side of this emerging process in the sub-Saharan countries. Although agencies become more and more viable for prospective students due to the complete set of services that they offer, a direct application to the universities through the internet still remains a better option.

Local politicians and international programs: A different mentality for a better future

Another significant facilitator of international mobility is defined by the young generation of politicians present in the sub-Saharan countries.

William, a respondent from Ghana, experienced a situation of this sort:

”I have encountered important politicians through my business. They advised me to pursue an academic path in Europe. Their argument was that the European ideas will help me develop my business once I would come back to Ghana.” (William, 07/05/2018)

In addition, in order to establish closer ties with the EU countries, more and more sub-Saharan African countries signed international agreements, thus joining the Erasmus+ programme.

Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. Its budget of €14.7 billion will provide opportunities for over 4 million Europeans to study, train, gain experience, and volunteer abroad. Set to last until 2020, Erasmus+ doesn't just have opportunities for students. Merging seven prior programmes, it has opportunities for a wide variety of individuals and organisations. (European Commission - Official Website)

The story of Aischa and her experiences with the Erasmus+ that I have mentioned before serve as an ideal example of how these type of international programmes can support the international mobility for a mutual benefit and an increased global awareness.

Companies

The last major facilitator of migration to Romania that I have identified during my fieldwork research is related to the desire of the Romanian companies to hire low-paid workers from sub-Saharan countries in order to increase their profits. I have already partially touched upon this topic when I talked about the employment as a reason for immigration in Romania. As I said there, the story of Christian, the Congolese taxi driver that was recruited from his own country to come and work in Europe, stood out as a perfect example of how a profit - oriented company can influence contemporary international mobility.

A first argument in favor of my statement stands by the fact that, the recruiting part was only the initial phase of the process. The company purchased the plane tickets for all of their future employees and took care of all the possible misunderstandings: “When we have arrived on the airport in Bucharest, the manager of FlyTaxi [n.r. the company that hired him] came and talked to the police officers present there. He explained them the situation, and assured them that all of our documents are legal. After that, they took us to our new homes. The conditions were extremely bad, but at least we had a roof over our head.” (Christian, 16/05/2018)

However, the romanian companies cannot only be considered as pure facilitators of international mobility due to the fact that their practices include high levels of exploitation and abuse on workers.

“Soon after we arrived, we realized that the employers tricked us and changed our contracts. The initial contract that we signed in Congo included a salary of 400 dollars while the second

contract that we received in Bucharest stipulated only 700 lei (approximately 150 dollars). During the first months, they didn't even respect that small amount. Moreover, they took our passports away. If one of us wanted to send money back home, they would have sent a representative from the company to intermediate the process. Another thing that I remember from that period is that we did not have health insurances. So we found a way to complain to the authorities and the company got fined for that. After six months the company fired us and declared that it is impossible to work with an African. We were left in middle of the street with nothing to hope for.” (Christian, 16/05/2018)

To conclude, I think that the practice of sending recruiters to sub-Saharan African countries will become seriously taken into account for the following years by the romanian companies, especially considering the fact that the local workforce is constantly leaving the country to find employment opportunities on the EU job market and even outside the union. Even so, it is equally important to acknowledge the restrictive practices imposed on migrants and to implement the adequate policies in order to prevent further abuses.

Conclusion

All things considered, the reasoning behind a migrant's choice is far more complex than it seems on a statistical note. Even though it becomes more and more acknowledged that Romania represents an ideal alternative for students who cannot afford high-priced university fees, the mobility dynamics can sometimes turn an international student into an asylum seeker or a family reunification solicitant. Following the same rationale, an employee can become an illegal resident, a recently deported person can come back and re-integrate and the list of examples can continue. Another critical finding of this chapter is represented by the fact that external factors have an important influence in the migrant decision. As it was already presented, the list of facilitators of migration to Romania can be characterized by a striking diversity due to the uncommon actors that get involved in the process.

When it comes to recommendations for the future, I would suggest a closer attention to all these key actors of migration, a thorough analysis of their practices and an adaptation of the internal legislation accordingly. Only by doing so, further abuses will be prevented and migration would bring benefits for all the parties involved.

Chapter 4 - Migrant trajectories to Romania

In this chapter I will write about the different main factors, actors or situations that alter the migration trajectories to the country which is subject of my research. The main purpose of this chapter would be to raise the level of awareness about how the Romanian government through its responsible institutions on the one hand, and private actors or institutions on the other, directly and indirectly influence the trajectories of the migrants to Romania. In order to support my assumptions, I will mainly use the interviews that I had with my sub-Saharan African respondents who shared their stories and pointed out the difficult moments of their journey. The chapter will start with a qualitative analysis of the Western Balkan Route in order to give a different perspective of the situation in the area. Then I will identify the main issues related to the flying trajectories to Romania as well as the diplomatic relations that the state from Eastern Europe has in the African region. In the last fragment, I will refer to education as a trajectory influencer and the impact that studies have on the decision to migrate. The chapter will end with conclusions and further recommendations.

4.1 Romanian diplomacy in Sub-Saharan Africa: the challenge of reaching an Embassy

One other important aspect that could and most of the times does influence the migrant trajectories to a specific country or region, is the location of the diplomatic mission that represents a possible destination for a person on the move. After I have finished the interviews with my target group of respondents, I came across an interesting and rather unusual fact: Romania has only 9 diplomatic missions in the whole Sub-Saharan Africa. To be more specific, the countries that host a Romanian embassy in their capital city are: Angola, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe. In this part, based on my discussions, I will try to emphasize how a factor like this can shape a migration trajectory and experience.

The first time when I've heard about this issue was during my first interview that I had, Denise. When I asked her about the migration background and the visa process, Denise changed the tone to a more serious note:

“After I have finished my high school studies, I moved to Gabon to get a job. I worked there for 4 years in extremely difficult conditions, sometimes for 13 hours a day. [...] When I decided to come here, I took a bus to Nigeria to get my visa because Romania doesn’t have an embassy in Cameroon or Gabon. I had to wait there in very poor conditions for three weeks, even though they promised that the process will be faster.” (Denise, 11/04/2018)

Pauline, the refugee who is currently working in a call center in Bucharest, and Gloya, the girl from Congo who came to study economics encountered similar experiences as those previously told to me by Denise.

“I applied for the Romanian visa in Dubai and I waited there for 6 weeks even though they promised me that the process will take 1 month. I had to stay there on my own expenses, because traveling back and forth wouldn’t have been a better idea.” (23/04/2018)

However, the person who expressed a lot of feelings and emotions related to this fact was Aischa. Originating from Togo, Aischa ended up in one of the refugee centers in Timisoara after she came to Romania for an Erasmus+ project. She was extremely critical to the employees due to the fact that they generated a constant feeling of non – acceptance:

“I had to travel from Togo to Nigeria by bus and it took me two days. There, they (n.r. the Romanian diplomats) tried to find problems in order to return us. They refused Nigerian money and had a very strict schedule which delayed the procedure. After that I had to fly to Europe from Ghana.” (Aischa, 30/04/2018)

All these common points that have been repeatedly described to me, related to the high levels of bureaucracy, the constant delays in granting visas and sometimes the negative attitude towards migrants convinced that the diplomatic stations, which naturally should embody the role of a facilitator of migration, could also be seen as check points that hinder the mobility process. A first step that could be done by the Romanian government in order to ameliorate the twisted paths of Sub-Saharan African migrants, would be to acknowledge the changing international context and to adapt by strengthening their diplomatic ties with countries from the region. A result of these actions would be represented by opening new embassies in countries such as: Cameroon, Congo or Ghana. In any case, I think that awareness on this topic should be raised in order to avoid future abuses and ensure a competent process.

4.2 The paths of education: How university studies influenced trajectories to Europe

As stated in the title, this fragment is about the role of education in shaping migrant's future trajectories to Europe and to Romania in particular. In order to demonstrate that there is a connection between intellectual pursue and international mobility, I will mainly use fieldwork conversations and findings combined with academic literature on the topic. I will start by presenting a series of quantitative results that I find to be constructive while in the second section I will move to qualitative analysis of my discussions.

First of all, an aspect that struck me while I was gathering together all my interview results is that all the respondents who shared their stories with me have something in common when it comes to educational qualification. According to my findings, every Sub-Saharan African that I have talked to has at least a form of secondary education completed. I consider it to be an insightful finding especially for the fact that it contradicts the mainstream narrative according to which African migrants that come to Europe are usually uneducated and unprepared to handle job requirements in one of the EU countries.

Second of all, in order to move to a more qualitative side of this topic, I would like to start by reintroducing the story of Ahmed and his journey. As mentioned earlier, he came to Romania using the Western Balkan Route, but the migration struggle didn't start when he arrived in Greece. The educational hopes and dreams made a huge difference for him:

“I imagined that Europe would be the best place to live and study and now I think the same: if you have peace, you have everything. I didn't know anything about Romania at that point. So after I've finished high school in Somalia, I decided to move to Turkey, where I have studied computer engineering. I graduated the university in Istanbul in 2012. [...] Now that I am here, I would love to join another university. I have always wanted to study Medicine.” (Ahmed, 22/05/2018)

It can be clearly understood from his statement that from a young age, Ahmed desired and managed to pursue academic studies in countries which are geographically and culturally distant from his home country. A similar situation was encountered during another interview with Christian, the Congolese man who was recruited to come to Romania for work in 2008. According to the life story that he shared with me:

“I have finished high school in Congo and then I moved to Tanzania to study Philosophy at the University level. After I graduated there, I returned to become a professor of Religion and French. I also did a specialization course in Informatics.” (Christian, 16/05/2018)

The way in which these trajectories might be interpreted is that people look for educational opportunities outside the area in which they were born and raised regardless of their level of studies. These findings could be placed in opposition with the work of W.T.S. Gould on education and migration. According to him:

“Analyses of migration differentials have consistently shown educational status to be one of the main characteristics affecting individual propensity to move. In addition education will affect the distance and frequency of moves that do take place. The educated are more likely to move than are the non-educated; they move over longer distances, and move more frequently. These general findings seem to be as valid in developed as in developing countries, but are more strongly felt in the Third World.” (1982, p. 106)

All things considered, I think that is critical to acknowledge the fact that educational opportunities can shape a migrant trajectory before coming to the EU and not only. In the next chapter, I will have a complementary fragment where I will talk about how and why university studies represent a major facilitator of migration to Romania. There I will also explain what are the main actors involved in process and what can be done in order to ensure a safe mobility for the benefit of all sides. However, a fact that seems to stand out from my interviews is that Sub-Saharan Africans do not neglect education as some might assume. They are constantly looking for opportunities to improve themselves on a professional and academic level regardless of the geographical region or their current status. This aspect should be something to reflect upon by the researchers of the migration field.

4.3 Western Balkan Route: Statistics versus Reality

The Western Balkan geographic region has experienced noticeable flows of migrants throughout history. (Teqja, 2015) However, recent migration movements through the Western Balkan Route raised concerns among politicians, diplomats and international organizations about the “crisis” in the area. In this part, I will develop an alternative perspective from the political discourse, based on the stories that have been told to me by Ahmed and Abukar, the two people from Somalia who got their refugee status in Romania at the end of 2017.

As stated in Chapter 2, both of them felt comfortable to hear that I am a student, so they accepted to share their stories without much hesitation. At a certain point during the interaction, I was curious to find out more about their journey and how did they end up in Giurgiu. Ahmed replied:

“After I graduated university in Istanbul, Turkey, I took the decision to find better opportunities in one of the EU countries. I moved to Greece where I had to stay in a camp for a few weeks and from there I traveled through Macedonia and Serbia until I finally ended up in Romania in June 2017.” (Ahmed, 22/05/2018)

When I first heard about his journey, I was immediately thinking about all the articles, statistics and political concerns about the Western Balkan Route. So I asked them to give me more details about their experiences in order to compare them with what I have already known from previous readings and researches. Fortunately for me, Abukar was a great help in that matter. Although he considered his story to be similar with what I have already heard from Ahmed, the small details offered me a wider image of the situation:

“I traveled to Turkey in 2016 because I wanted to join a university there. Even though I managed to pass the preliminary phases, when I got there, the faculty rejected my application so I moved to Greece. I had a friend there and I stayed with him for two months. After that I moved to Macedonia, Serbia and since August 2017, I am in Romania. I took different buses to travel but most of the time I was walking. The most difficult part when you want to reach a destination is that even though you use gps, you are never sure if you already crossed the border to a new country or not yet.” (Abukar, 22/05/2018)

Furthermore, regardless of the fatigue and the confusion, two constants in the course of migration, unfortunate and dangerous episodes might and usually occur in any moment. As a result, different forms of unjustified restrictions could change a migrant trajectory in unknown ways. Abukar had a story that fits in this category and he was willing to share it with me:

“The first time when I tried to enter in Romania, the border police caught me and my fellow migrants and they sent us back to Serbia. I decided to wait for a few days and then I tried to get in again. The second time, I managed to enter in Timisoara and I applied for asylum. They transferred me to Giurgiu, where I got my refugee status.” (Abukar, 22/05/2018)

His statement persuaded me to do a little bit of follow up research on the topic. After several discussions that I had with key experts in the field of Romanian migration, I came to the conclusion that Romania is a rather permissive country in granting the refugee status to a high percentage of people coming from countries with ongoing conflicts such as: Syria, Yemen or Somalia. This means that Romania has the potential to become a destination country for migrants coming from specific regions of the world. However, this topic will be covered during the next chapters.

The events that Abukar encountered at the Romanian frontier raise a set of questions about the implementation of the national migration policies. In theory, the officers should offer basic medical assistance and, if needed, information about the asylum process. However, the different attitudes, depending on the entrance point, create an unusual “border lottery” phenomenon, which can lead to further vulnerabilities for an individual looking for immediate protection.

4.4 Geographical isolation: An impediment for fast connections

In the first fragment of this chapter, I have presented the insightful stories of Ahmed and Abukar and their trajectory to Romania via the Western Balkan Route. However, the majority of my interviewees had the possibility and chose to travel to the European continent by plane. Although at the first glance, this might seem like a more facile option, given the fact that flights are the fastest ways to travel from one city to another, the reality that have been told to me is slightly different than what I expected. In order to make myself clearer, I would like to reintroduce the story Christian from Congo. I have met him during my trip to a small student city, called Craiova. Even though he traveled by plane, his trajectory to Romania was rather unusual:

“It usually takes 3 days to travel from Congo to Romania. I had to change 4 planes before arriving at the destination. My route was: Kinshasa – Nairobi – Darfur – Cairo – Bucharest. The conditions were extremely bad.” (Christian, 16/05/2018)

His statement seems to be supported by a series of articles and websites. The main reasons behind the poor transportation are related to communication, airport facilities and infrequency of the flights: “Poor safety records continue to bedevil its aviation industry, thanks to low standards, inert supervision and old and poorly maintained planes. The airports too suffer from poor maintenance and offer shoddy and expensive service, says the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the global airlines group. While revenue from airports and air traffic is probably adequate to finance essential investments, politics and weak management are interfering with how the money is used.” (Tafirenyika, 2014) In the migration context, these factors lead to inconveniences and sometimes vulnerabilities which might discourage or endanger the people who migrate to an European country.

Furthermore, there are additional factors that must be taken into consideration. One of them was pointed out to me by Liliane. She complained about the issue that:

“The costs for getting to Europe were about 3000 dollars for me and my child. This is very expensive for a normal family with usual income.” (Liliane, 16/05/2018)

As stated in the second chapter, she had to take her only daughter and come to Romania to reunite with her husband. Liliane didn't request the services of any migration broker.

However, she pointed out another debatable aspect of the African flights to Europe, namely the costs. In a recent article written by Adeniyi Ogunfowoke, he interviews the vice president of International Air Transport Association (IATA) for Africa, Raphael Kuuchi, who acknowledges the fact that: “the cost of air travel in Africa is far more expensive than anywhere else in the world, and the reasons are this includes very high operating costs from the airport ends, high taxes and charges that are imposed by governments and other institutions on passengers and airlines.” (Ogunfowoke, 2018) A proposed solution is represented by tax breaks to airlines or the creation of an air transport fund granted by the national governments. However, this restrictive factor seems far from being solved.

All these empirical details represent a valid confirmation for the paper of Quamrul Ashraf and Oded Galor. According to their research, some regions of the world still suffer from a higher level of isolation than others. The findings suggest that:

“In particular, the baseline regression specifications all include fixed effects for Sub-Saharan Africa, that generally exhibits both relatively high levels of geographical isolation and relatively low levels of cultural diversity and economic development, as well as Middle East and Central Asia, that on average exhibits relatively low levels of isolation (due to its greater accessibility given its centralized location on the Eurasian landmass) and moderate levels of diversity and economic development.” (2011, p.39)

As I have seen already, the geographical isolation mentioned before has negative effects on the migration trajectories to the European continent by forcing the traveler to constantly deviate from one place to another instead of having a direct route to the destination. Moreover, the highly unaffordable prices of the flights should also represent a question mark in an interconnected world where travelling by plane has become vastly accessible. A possible recommendation in order to soften the transition process would be to convince the airline companies to facilitate a more direct transport from these areas of the world at a more reasonable cost. Mobility should be safe and reachable for everyone regardless of their financial status or geographic provenience.

Conclusion

The diverse and detailed trajectories of my interviewees demonstrate that it should not be forgotten to consult the source in order to offer the suitable response to a political or social debate such as migrants entering on the European Union territory. The images and videos often presented by mainstream media fall short of reporting the actual stories of the people in cause. Regardless if the migrant entered in Europe regularly or irregularly, the research findings point towards the idea that a migrant journey is most of the time permeated with unexpected routes, events and challenges depending on legal, economic, social status of the person or personal preferences.

To sum up, the migrant trajectories to Romania could be seen as extremely complex and unpredictable due to a series of factors that facilitate or restrict a certain route to a certain place. As stated in the beginning, the aim of this particular chapter was not to identify how is Romania influencing the Sub-Saharan mobility inside the EU, but rather what is the role of the Romanian state together with other actors in shaping the migration routes to the old continent. As I will also demonstrate in the next chapter, the academic dreams can drive migrants to exotic places, regardless of their status. However, the main restrictions that I have indicated and analyzed earlier, namely the “border lottery”, the geographical isolation and the diplomatic absence are supposed to raise a series of question marks to the policy makers which should act accordingly and implement a new set of policies meant to reduce the unequal treatment.

Chapter 5 - Migrant integration level in Romania

Introduction

In the past chapter, I wrote about the main migrant trajectories to Romania and how different actors could facilitate or restrict the access of migrants on the Romanian territory. In this part, I would like to continue my study by presenting and analyzing the level of sub – Saharan migrant integration in Romania. I consider this to be relevant in the context of discovering to what extent transit migration in Romania could be explained through a lack of long-term integration.

The chapter will be divided in five different topics represented by the indicators that I've considered to be the most relevant in the field of integration, namely: Access to labour market, Education, Accommodation, Culture and Language, Civic Participation. Inside every part there will be a short summary of the facts and in the end, I will present my conclusions and analyses in a larger framework.

In order to obtain my results, I will use a different approach from the previous chapters. The starting point of the sub-chapters will be represented by the conceptual and societal relevance of the indicator that I will analyze, followed by a series of quantitative data provided by surveys of the national and international institutions such as: European Commission, The Romanian Center for Migration Research (RCMR), The National Institute of Statistics (Romania), the Ministry of Regional Development, Center for the Comparative Study of Migration etc. The statistics will bring a comparative image between the EU situation and the position of Romania in that context.

Then, I would like to introduce my personal findings in order to confirm, complete, contrast and bring new insights to the already existing knowledge about migrant integration in Romania. Considering that, the quantitative data will be presented in an impersonal style, they will be followed by a subjective manner provided as a result of semi-formal discussions and observations that I had during the interviews. Furthermore, the surveys consist of a general framework of migration in Romania, whereas my research is focused only on a geographical category. This aspect will also contribute to the enrichment of the already existent knowledge and a better understanding of the situation.

5.1 Access to labour market

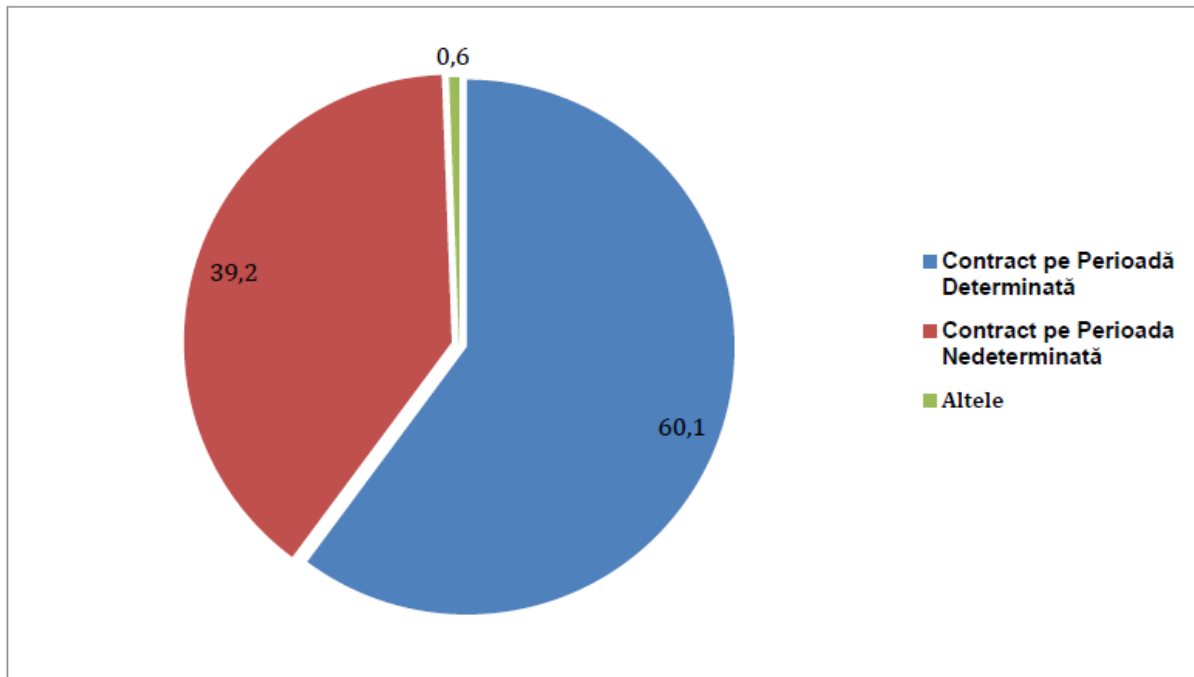
Integration into the labour market is a gradual process that takes place over a longer period of time and depends on public policies, the context, immigrants' skills and the reasons for migration. Immigrant workers generally have a disadvantage in terms of socio-economic integration. Lower labour force participation among women, a steadily higher rate of unemployment (both for male and female migrants, regardless of education levels) and a high concentration in the category of salaried jobs (especially for non-EU citizens) are realities in most EU labour markets. (Cangiano, 2013) However, the economic situation of migrants varies significantly across European countries (Dustmann and Frattini 2012, Eurostat 2011, Münz 2007).

Integration into the labour market in Romania takes place in the context of an evolving institutional, social and economic environment. One third of all immigrants in Romania have had or have a job. The highest level of insertion in the labor market is those with a non-EU citizen family member, those who have come with the right to work and those who have a Romanian citizen's family member without being able to establish a link between the country origin and insertion level. Those who have graduated from a vocational school have a much better job prospects compared to higher education graduates, most of them having a job that corresponds to training and professional qualifications. Unfortunately, there is no existing data on sub-Saharan African migrants and their integration into the labour market of Romania.

In order to determine the percentage of migrants who worked or currently have a job in Romania, a national questionnaire was realised in 2016 and applied both online and face-to-face. Of the respondents, only 27.9% had or have a job in Romania. Almost 60% of respondents came to Romania for studies. Of this category, 88.6% did not and did not have a job, while 11.4% of those who came to study said they work or have work experience in Romania. On the other hand, persons who have come to Romania with a work permit or who are here with labor law work or have taken a job of 90.2%, who probably came to Romania through a work permit, a recruiting program or the possession of highly professional qualifications that are currently being valued in the local labor market. (RCMR, 2017, p. 144)

Unlike the local population, most immigrants benefit from fixed-term employment contracts. According to Graphic 1, 60.1% of migrants with a legal form of international protection have signed a fixed – term work contract while only 39.2% benefited from an undetermined time employment contract. An important aspect that needs to be mentioned here is that the study doesn't mention anything about specific geographical groups of migrants.

Graphic 1: Type of employment contract for migrants with a form of international protection



Source: Center for Comparative Migration Studies, 2017

Blue – Fixed Term Work Contract

Red – Undetermined Term Work Contract

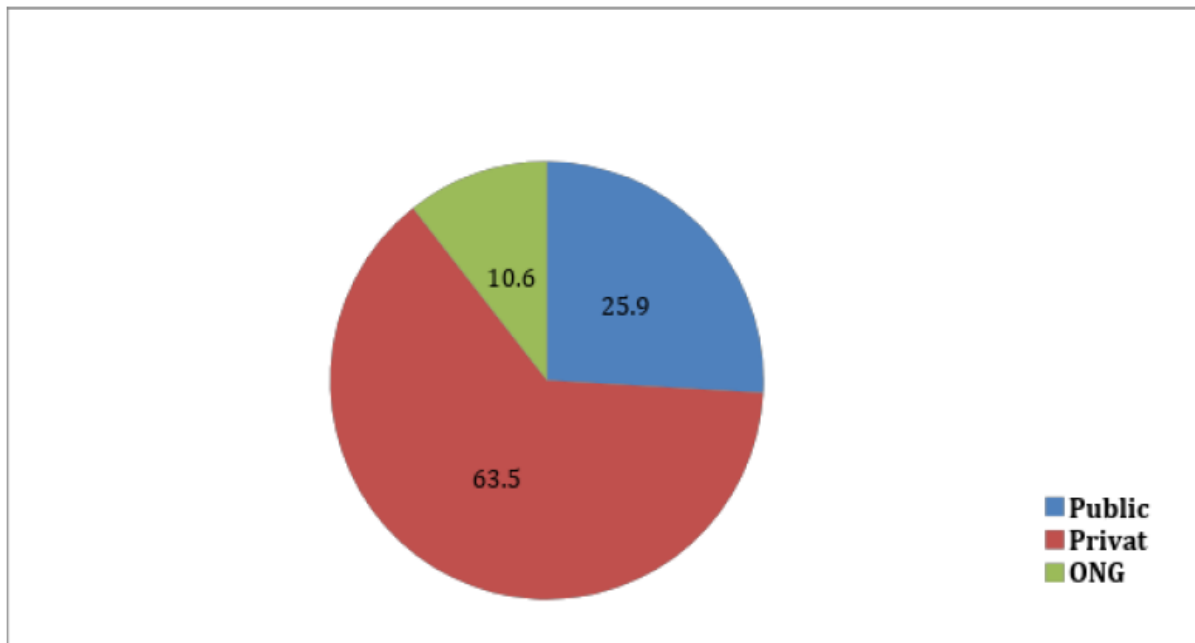
Green - Others

Therefore, a limited and defined term for the employment contracts (most of the times meaning between six months and one year) can lead to further insecurities since they cannot guarantee a long term stability for the migrant and its household. On the other hand, an undetermined term agreement generates a certain level of trust and confidence that the employee is seen as more than a commodity and he would be able to design a stable future.

Regarding the sector where they work, most of them work in the private sector, immediately followed by the public sector, similar to the situation of the local population. Unlike the

European trend, they have a monthly income similar to that of the local population, but are much more precarious than the local population in terms of job stability and wage income.

Graphic 2. Occupation of migrant respondents regarding their sector of activity (% of respondents)



Source: Survey realized by the Comparative Study of Migration, 2017

Blue – Public

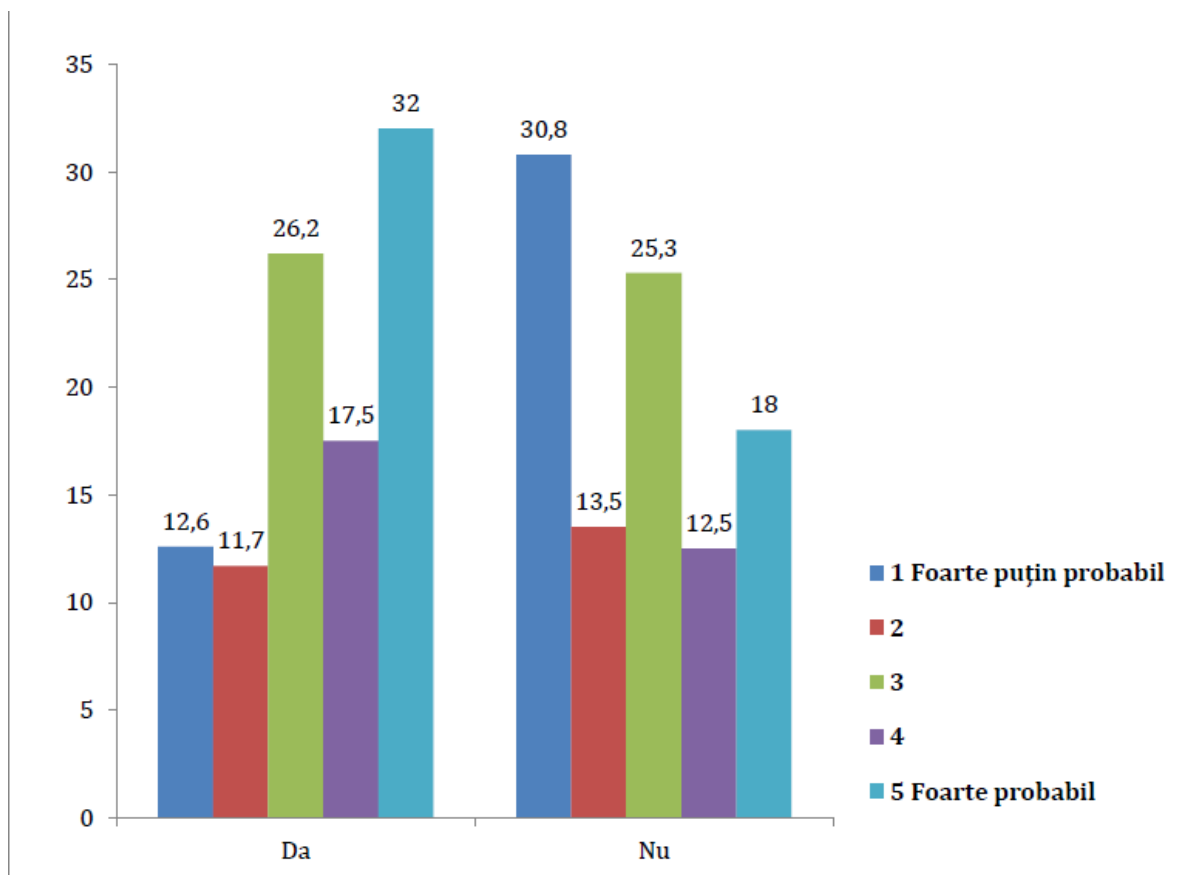
Red – Private

Green - NGO

The story of Christian, mentioned in Chapter 3, comes as a confirmation of the fact that Romanian private companies are usually more interested in recruiting personnel regardless of their country of origin. Furthermore, from his information it can also be understood that fixed term contracts are preferred by the employers, in spite of the alternatives. On the other hand, the role of other institutions such as the ecclesiastical groups, which seems to be overlooked by the statistical data, appears to play an important role in migrant integration, at least in some cases.

Regarding the intention to stay in the long run, Graphic 3 has an explanatory role in that sense. On the left side, there are migrants who benefit from employment contracts. According to their answers, 32% are very likely to remain in Romania. However, on the other side, 30,8% of the people who didn't have a job at the moment of the interview said that it is highly unlikely for them to remain in the same place. To conclude, it can be seen in that those who are already working or have a job in Romania consider this possibility of remaining in a higher proportion than those who came for studies.

Graphic 3: Intention of remaining in Romania according to occupational status



Source: Survey realized by the Comparative Study of Migration, 2017

1 – Highly Unlikely

5 – Very Likely

The linguistic argument is missing

The study provided by the Romanian Center for Migration Research focuses too much on the link between the level of education and the job perspectives that the migrant might have on the Romanian labour market. Nevertheless, the foreign languages that a labour seeker speaks and understands (be it an immigrant or a national) has a growing influence on the possibilities that he or she might have to get hired.

Here are some examples which can confirm the affirmation:

“It is very easy to find a job in Romania if you have a high school certificate and you speak a foreign language. I have a job in Bucharest at a call center.” (Pauline, 16/04/2018)

Furthermore, Romanian employers have the tendency to prioritize Romanian language knowledge instead of degrees, qualifications and other skills.

“Romanian employers prefer to ask and at the same time require Romanian language in spite of qualifications.” (Hussein, 12/04/2018)

“A friend helped me to find a job but the work environment was very chaotic. On the other hand, the employer took good care of me. Finding a job depends on your field of study but if you lower your expectations you can easily find a place to work. Speaking Romanian in a small city represents a clear advantage, because people here don't know English.” (Redson, 16/05/2018)

From all these testimonials it can be concluded that the linguistic factor should not be neglected in an analysis about migrant access on the Romanian labor market. On the one hand, having the knowledge of two or more foreign languages can easily facilitate the process of finding a job, even in a smaller city. On the other hand, the absence of bilingualism usually leads to fewer opportunities for work inside the Romanian borders. Migrants should take this factor into account and start looking for proper educational opportunities, in order to have better perspectives.

5.2 Education

Ager and Strang (2008) have developed a conceptual map that includes the key dimensions of the integration process of immigrants. In this report, education is considered to be one of the important dimensions of integration because education develops the skills and competences needed to integrate into the labor market and helps immigrants become more active and more involved in society, and also has a socializing role.

Jacobs (2013) conducted a study on the effect of education on cultural and social capital and on the possibilities for socio-economic integration of immigrants in any society. Moreover, in most cases, linking with school is the first interaction that migrants have with the host community, playing a role in developing such important relationships in the integration process.

De Paola and Brunello (2016) show that investment in human capital is profitable in the context of immigrants arriving in the destination countries being accommodated and learning the language of the new country as soon as possible so that access to the labor market is as simple as possible. Nusche (2009) states that education prepares migrant children and immigrants for the labor market and for society in general, both by being able to learn the language of the host country and by being socialized with the values and culture of that society. Starting from this premise, Nusche aims to find out which educational policies provide equal opportunities for immigrants and how education systems should be adapted to reduce the gaps within societies. In this respect, educational policies should be complemented by measures taken by each school in order to reduce segregation within classes / schools and teachers should be prepared to take account of the profile of immigrants.

While equipping migrants with the skills needed to have successful integration is of major concern to all those proposing public policies at European level, there are still a number of problems and gaps between immigrants and the host country population. Among these, we can mention: a higher rate of school dropout and lower graduation among migrant children. (Sugarman, 2015; Hippe & Jakubowski, 2018) Therefore, I believe that the dimension of Education is an essential one in understanding how migrants are integrated in Romania.

Literature studies that show that young people and immigrant children undergoing schooling in the host country are more easily adapting to the new culture and have a much greater chance of finding a job in the future well paid. (Portes & Rivas, 2011) Another interesting discussion concerns the availability of immigrants to attend courses in the host country (especially language courses and cultural accommodation). In this respect, openness to language courses or vocational training and training in different fields is an element that facilitates access to the labor market and integration into society. In the analysis below were used data obtained from a national survey conducted by the Center for the Comparative Study of Migration, as well as the official data received from the County School Inspectorates and the Ministry of National Education. In order to understand the data related to Romania in a wider context, reference was also made to the data contained in the OECD Report (2015) on the indicators measuring education.

Almost 80% of immigrants declare that they are or have been involved in various study programs taking place in Romania. Moreover, in all regions of Romania, most immigrants are or have been involved in various study programs. This data can also be understood considering the fact that many of the questionnaire respondents came to Romania and followed a form of education here or turned to Romanian language services offered by state institutions or NGOs. (RCMR, 2017)

In the context of Romania, in 2013 (according to Eurostat) we had only 21.8% of 30-34 year-olds with higher education, while the EU average was 34.6%. Moreover, the percentage decreases with the inclusion of older people (only 13.6% of Romania's population aged 25-64 has higher education). The situation in Romania seems completely different because most immigrants come here for studies, especially university ones. Thus, more than 64% of respondents are undergraduate and 5% doctoral.

Moreover, as reported by the same source, almost 45% of immigrants said they had completed their university studies in their country of origin before coming to Romania. A significant percentage, 35%, completed high school before immigration, and nearly 9% had post-secondary studies. Thus, in addition to the studies already completed in the country of origin, most immigrants enroll in Romania in an institutionalized form of schooling, whether it is Romanian, the completion of secondary education, high school or specialization in certain fields by following university courses. Unfortunately, the statistics do not present any particular information about the African migrants in Romania. (Eurostat, 2016)

However, my findings come to support the idea that most of the migrants who came in Romania, already have at high school education completed and, as I have described in chapter 2, some of them even graduated a university in their home country or elsewhere in the world.

Therefore, concerning the higher education segment, it can be said that compared to the situation of immigrants at the level of EU Member States, immigrants in Romania are a special situation. For example, about 80% of immigrants declare that they are or have been involved in study programs taking place in Romania. Much of the immigrants come to Romania with a high level of education, about 45% said they had completed their university studies before coming to Romania.

However, even though there are a lot of migrants who decide to come to Romania for study purposes, the reasoning and the dynamic laying behind those decisions is far more complex than it might seem. One missing aspect from the surveys is the rapport between the quality of the education and the accessible tuition fees, especially in the field of medicine. These aspects were confirmed by some of my respondents from Craiova and Bucharest during the interviews that I had with them:

“Finished high school in Nigeria. I really wanted to study Medicine, but it is really difficult to get accepted in the University of Medicine in Nigeria. I applied to University in Ukraine (through an agent) and then I heard about Romania from a friend whose father is working at the Nigerian embassy in Bucharest.” (Mercy, 16/05/2018)

“I checked medical schools on the internet. I checked Ukraine, Poland, Bulgaria but Romania was the cheapest country for this type of studies.” (Redson, 16/05/2018)

From their statements it can be concluded that the “special situation” of Romania didn’t come out the blue but rather in accordance with a balance of multiple elements which led to immigration of Medicine Students to Eastern European countries in the past century. According to Sadaf Maruf (2017): “Romania, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic are among the destinations for substantial numbers of students over the last few years. Agencies have also sprung up to encourage this migration.”

Lastly, the high percentage of immigrants taking up a form of education in Romania can be rather deceiving after a superficial analysis. For example, although many of them sign up for a

language course offered by national and international institutions or NGO's, they have a hard time attending the classes and respecting a strict schedule. As a consequence, the percentage of graduating the language classes or other special course that involve constant attendance is rather low. In my experience as an intern at the IOM Romania, the percentage of graduation for the Romanian language classes was between 20-25%. My assumption is that in spite of the efficiency in registering people in the classes, the system is not designed to keep students long-term engaged in the subject. The responsible institutions should make a thorough analysis and come up with more productive teaching framework.

5.3 Accomodation

Living is a dimension that measures one of the fundamental rights that immigrants must benefit. Although the implementation of this right is within the competence of the EU Member States, the European Commission together with the European Investment Bank has allocated special funds to create social housing construction programs at reasonable prices. Thus, three loans amounting to 800 million euros have been approved so far, of which around 250,000 refugees will benefit. (European Commission, 2016)

This section presents the situation of immigrant housing conditions using data from the national housing strategy of the Ministry of Regional Development and data collected from the national survey conducted by the Romanian Center for Migration Research. This study aims to observe the conditions in which immigrants live in comparison with the local population. Eurostat indicators have been used that include housing, agglomeration and income loading, as well as minimal living conditions.

On average, according to survey results, immigrants live in two-room apartments or homes. In Romania, the average number of rooms in a dwelling is 2.5. The vast majority of immigrants live in rent (74%), unlike the Romanian citizens who according to Eurostat data live in a proportion of 4.5%. Only 12% of respondents live in private or family-owned dwellings.

Furthermore, 13% of immigrants say they receive financial support from public institutions to pay rent, and 5% say they receive financial support for rent payments from NGOs. it is important to note that 18% of immigrants do not receive any help for rent. Moreover, most

(36%) of the immigrants say they receive family help, and 1% say they get help from their friends. So, as declared by immigrants, their family is the most important financial support in terms of rent payments. After the family, the second financial support is received from public institutions and NGOs. (RCMR, 2017, pp. 71-72)

Generally, immigrants live in more precarious conditions than the local population in the urban area, but in better conditions than those in rural areas. Compared to the local population living in their own homes / families, almost all immigrants live in rent and spend a large part of their income on renting and maintaining the dwelling.

Interview insights

First of all, when it comes to the special funds for housing allocated by the European Commission to be implemented at a national level, in Romania the projects were successfully applied by the local NGO's.

During my discussions with Ahmed and Abukar I have learned that for the first 6 months after the arrival in Romania, they had a full accommodation covered in a hotel in Giurgiu through a project implemented by JRS, a local NGO which is very active in the migration field.

After a more detailed research of their activity on the website of the organization, I discovered their housing project named: "Accommodation for illegal immigrants – an alternative to detention and a chance to a worthy life ". According to the same source, the main objective was represented by providing accommodation to vulnerable migrants as an alternative to the detention measure. As for the outcomes:

- Rejected refugees can access basic social rights, including housing and can have a dignified life in Romania, to avoid detention;
- Alternative to detention is promoted and offered as the solution and an example of good practice.
- Alternatives to detention is introduced as a concept in legislation and funding considers it as an eligible service due to "its effectiveness, lower costs in terms of human rights standards. (JRS Romania, 2013)

Second of all, even though the provided statistics offer a detailed result of the main places where migrants choose to live, a major aspect that seems to be missing from the data is represented by the student dorms. The accommodation of the immigrants who come in Romania for study purposes tend to be ignored by the surveys. 4 out of 8 interviewees who came in Romania for studying replied me that they had stayed or at least applied for a form of accommodation provided by the university.

“I’ve lived in the student dorms of Craiova for 4 years in a row. The university provided accommodation and the conditions were very good. Also the prices were affordable even for a student.” (Redson, 16/05/2018)

“When I started my studies, I applied for a dorm but I got rejected because the university prioritizes Romanian students.” (Mercy, 16/05/2018)

Last but not least, a rather vague element of the surveys is expressed by the migrants’ choice of living with “other people” instead of their families or alone. In other words, the quantitative analyses seem to have a limited approach when it comes to the social network of the migrants coming to Romania. The results of my fieldwork confirmed the role of social connections in accommodating, at least for a limited period, a newcomer who has limited knowledge and resources for finding a place to stay alone or with his own family.

5.4 Culture and Language

Cultural integration is basically one of the most important dimensions of integration. Thus, bilingualism should be promoted, possibly even trilingualism (the language of the host state, an international language, and the mother tongue). The fact that individuals speak multiple languages is a resource for them, not just a measure of linguistic integration (IFA 2013). The same report mentions the fact that education is very important in the context of linguistic and cultural integration, preferring to employ migrant teachers, integrating migrant children and promoting diversity. Spain, for example, does not have a clear concept of integration, but the lack of an essential national identity and the presence of regional overlaps (and sometimes opposed to national ones) has made discriminatory reactions to migrants not occurring. Thus, identities are fluid, and cultural integration issues have been decided on a case by case basis.

Religion is also important - the exercise of religious freedom - because it brings about contact with the religious community of the migrant in the country of destination.

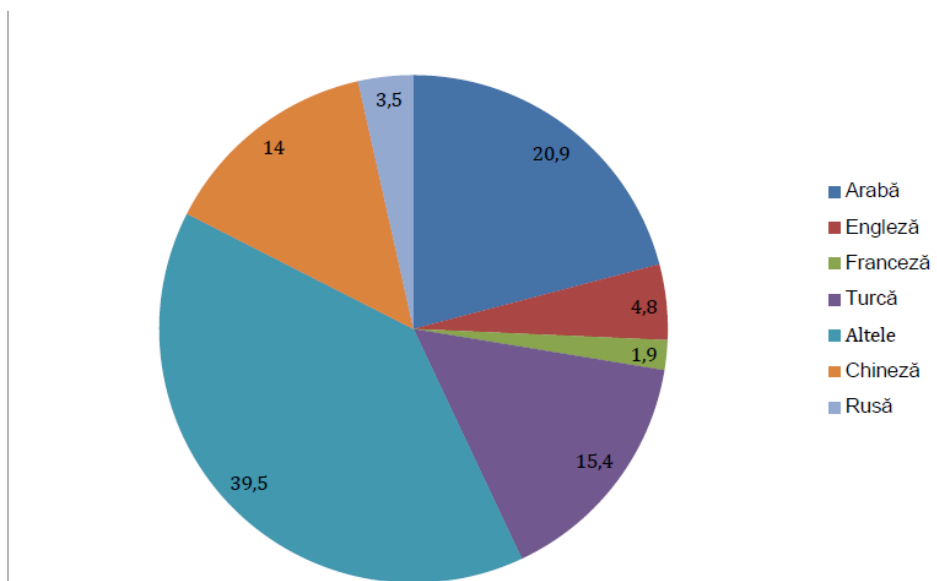
An European consensus when it comes to an integration policy based on ideas which can be found in the academic paper of Krumm and Plutzar (2008), published in a partnership with the Council of Europe:

- Integration of migrants in the country of destination requires special measures to help migrants and their families learn the language of the country of destination.
- Integration into the country of destination requires an adjustment of the legal, social and economic conditions in which migrants live at the time of their arrival, so as to reflect the standards applied to the native population.
- Integration includes respect for the languages and cultures of migrants' countries of origin; educational tendencies must be developed through which they are preserved;
- Integration is an opportunity for the host society to make use of the presence of migrants and their families for cultural opening;

The authors also point out that these principles have sometimes been implemented with different purposes: for example, mother tongue teaching has been done to return migrants to their countries of origin rather than from a human rights perspective (p.5)

The local context

Graphic 4: Maternal language of migrants in Romania

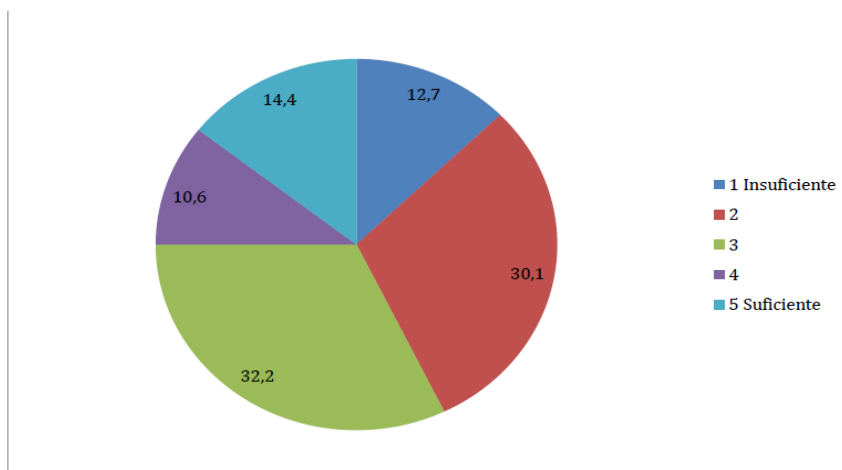


Source: Center for Comparative Study of Migration, 2017

Arabic
 English
 French
 Turkish
 Others
 Chinesse
 Russian

Regarding the maternal language of the foreigners who settle in Romania for a longer period of time, the largest group is made up of Arabic speakers, over 20%, followed by Turkish, Chinese, English and Russian speakers. The largest category includes a large number of other native languages. Approximately 8% of respondents have 2 or more mother tongues. As for the languages spoken by immigrants most speak the following foreign languages: English, Romanian, French and Arabic. It is important to note that Romanian was most often mentioned as a foreign language. (RCMR, 2017)

Graphic 5: On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being insufficient and 5 being sufficient, how do you evaluate your knowledge of romanain history and culture? (% of respondents)



Source: Center for Comparative Study of Migration, 2017

1 – Insufficient

5- Sufficient

When it comes to the cultural awareness of the host country, based on the above information it is easy to see that only a minority (about 25% of the respondents) considers that it has a

relatively high level of knowledge regarding the history and culture of Romania. This result may suggest a need for training or workshops in which significant elements of history and culture can be transmitted. Also the same result can be interpreted as a lack of interest among migrants, probably due to the perceived perception of integration in Romania as little needed, since many migrants consider Romania only a transit country.

The acquisition of linguistic skills, though sometimes less accentuated in literature, compared to other indicators (eg economic ones), is an essential component of integration. The most important conclusion regarding the analysis of cultural and linguistic integration is that the provision of Romanian culture courses is extremely important in facilitating integration and the data show that migrants choose to take such courses if provided.

On the other hand, as described earlier, the old school type of learning might not as be as efficient as it is often considered. For example, I did not expect my interviewees to know anything related to Romania before their arrival in the country. However, some of the respondents were relatively familiar with aspects regarding the Romanian culture through various sources of information. The first time when I encountered that was when I was asking Hussein about his idea of Europe:

”My preferred destinations were Germany and Norway. But I have also dreamed of visiting Brasov (a famous touristic city in Romania) after watching the movies with Dracula (the urban legend).” (Hussein, 12/04/2018)

After that discussion, I started to realize that there could be various ways to familiarize a migrant with a local culture and language. A few weeks later, my beliefs were strengthened by another discussion that I had at the headquarters of IOM Romania.

“I just wanted to visit countries like UK, Russia, Israel and Romania because of Gheorghe Hagi (the most famous Romanian football player).” (William, 07/05/2018)

The statement of William underlines one more time the role of a public figure in one’s portrayal of a foreign country. In some cases the national personalities, touristic cities and urban legends can have an impactful role on someone’s level of understanding about a local culture and history. Therefore, I believe that taking advantage of the digital network, which is present everywhere and took the global interconnection to a new level, might be a solution

when it comes to bring a deeper cultural and linguistic integration of the migrants coming to the European countries.

5.5 Civic Participation

With regard to the options for civic involvement of migrants, there are three categories of participatory acts, depending on the arena of activity or the aim pursued:

- At home / local level, migrant involvement in civil society organizations in the host country (for example, DeSipio (2011) in the context of civic and political participation arenas in the United States of America).
- Migrant organizations that militate for the integration of migrants in the host state (as Ostergaard-Nielsen (2009) shows in a study on the integration of Morocco in Catalonia).
- Organizations dealing with home-country issues, especially in the context of globalization and transnationalism (Martiniello 2009).

As migrants can engage in civic engagement in both the host society civil society and the state of origin, there have been questions about the legitimacy of the latter from the perspective of the loyalty of migrants as citizens of a country countries, but residents of another (Baubock 2003). Thus, the concept of civic bina- nality / multinationalism is outlined, which refers to migrants involved in all types of organizations. In the literature, these bi-national organizations have been approached from two perspectives:

- They can harm integration - because participants can be perceived as loyal to the home state, which may threaten integration (Portes 1999).
- They can facilitate integration because they make migrants primarily participate in ethnic affiliation, but they can become citizens involved in the destination state over time. Research shows that transnational civic participation has contributed positively to civic participation in the destination country (Fox and Bada 2011).

Trust in political institutions is a fundamental dimension of trust in society and shows how satisfied citizens are with the functioning of the political system (Stokes 1962, Hetherington 1998). Factors such as corruption, inefficiency, or lack of transparency of institutions make trust in institutions low. In Central and Eastern Europe, institutional confidence is low in all countries, compared to Western Europe's consolidated democracies. In the context of the

institutional trust of migrants, it is interesting to see how they relate to institutions, whether they have knowledge of the opportunities they pose for them, and whether due to migrant status and language barriers, they have felt discriminated.

Data analysis creates a mixed picture. Approximately 35% of immigrants are involved in student organizations, over 30% in education, art and music organizations and over 25% in organizations in their home country. The least popular organizations are trade unions and professional associations. High participation in student organizations can be explained by the generous offer of participation in various associations existing among universities. With regard to volunteering, over 30% of immigrants volunteer in student organizations and over 25% in the following types of organizations: those in the country of origin, humanitarian and charitable ones, those related to education, art and music and sports and recreation.

Regarding institution trust, Police ranks first (with about 45% of respondents) closely followed by non-governmental organizations, with over 40%. The vast majority of migrants (about 80%) do not participate in activities related to their country of origin, be it volunteering or donations to and to non-governmental organizations focused on issues specific to the country of origin of the migrant. Concerning transnational political participation, the number of immigrants involved in different activities related to the country of origin, the number of immigrants participating in protests or events related to the country of origin is low, with the exception of petitions, in which case more than 40% of respondents said they were doing this. About 60% of immigrants keep contacts in their country of origin or only about 20% have sent home money, at least once since they live in Romania, and about 10% say they send money monthly. (Center for Comparative Study of Migration, 2017)

Personal findings: A lot less trust in Police

It seems like the percentage of trust in Police is unexpectedly high compared to what I have encountered in the field. There are a lot of stories that seem to contradict the trend of general trust in the people wearing uniforms. The most powerful of all, was told to me by Aischa:

“When things got worse in my country, I asked for help but the authorities refused to help me because they don’t want Africans in Europe. Even though I explained them my situation they were reluctant ‘We don’t have a solution for you’ and extremely suspicious ‘You just want to

go to Germany'. Moreover, I saw a policeman assaulting a man in the train and since that moment, I became really afraid of them." (Aischa, 30/04/2018)

To my mind, even though her statement could be considered biased and subjective, I think that the description of Aischa encompasses some of the major problems that the Romanian police forces face nowadays. As it can be observed at the law enforcement units of other EU countries, they are characterized by reluctance and suspicions when it comes to migrants asking for a form of international protection. What is more, Romanian Gendarmes (a structure which is also subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs) have a tendency to be overly aggressive with both migrants and local population. This issue was in the attention of local media for years and lately their situation is also analyzed by the Court of Justice of the European Union.

In conclusion, the migrant experiences doubled by personal observations made me question the accuracy of the survey realized by the Romanian Center for Comparative Study of Migration. The results should be taken as premise for further quantitative research in order to find out if the data will match or contrast.

Conclusions

To sum up, this chapter attempted to offer an answer to one of the main sub-questions of the thesis namely: To what extent transit migration in Romania could be explained through a lack of long-term integration in order to answer that, I decided to have an overview of the statistical data regarding the migrant integration level in Romania. Using five indicators and a series of surveys and statistics as guidance, I attempted to offer extensive answers and a new perspective about the situation of Romania by bringing in my own fieldwork analyses and observations.

When it comes to the integration in the Romanian labour market, even though most of the migrant population suffers from precarious conditions in terms of job stability and wage income, there is a higher chance of integration for multilingual speaking individuals, due to the international call center agencies. In contrast, the education field indicates that migrants who come in Romania for studies benefit from accessible tuition fees and also from languages courses which could, at least theoretically, facilitate the integration process. As for their

accommodation, the high dependence on their social network should raise serious questions about individual security and exposure to future risks, especially considering the fact that most of them are interacting with a foreign culture which is not properly promoted and thus even harder to integrate in. Last but not least, the civic participation and relation with authorities provide a mixed picture about their perception of integration and trust in the local institutions.

All in all, based on the presented findings, it could hint to the idea that Romania is a secure country for most of the migrants, regardless of their ethnicity, religious beliefs or geographical place of origin. Moreover, those who come from the French speaking countries have higher chance to integrate linguistically, and also to find a workplace with a decent wage. All these elements usually lead to a decision of remaining. However, the absence of institutional steps in facilitating the integration process will keep the country as mainly a transit space to other nations inside the European Union. Based on their quantitative research, the Romanian migration centers concluded that the general lack of high paid job opportunities and long-term contracts as well as an inadequate cultural integration are some of the reasons which cause further migrant mobility, regardless of any criteria such as country of origin or maternal language. Nevertheless, my own findings have shown that when it comes to sub-Saharan African migrants, most of them managed to find decent paid jobs with proper working conditions. As a result of this variation, the lack of integration cannot be considered a driving factor in explaining transit mobility through Romania. In the following chapter, I will capture the full dynamics of out-migration and the motives behind that.

Chapter 6 –Imagined mobility after Romania

Introduction

In this chapter I will write about the possible reasons that migrants have when they decide to take a future step in their journey from Romania to different destinations inside the space of the European Union. The final goal is to identify the answer to the last sub-question of the research:

“What are the future aspirations for migration after Romania?”

Following a critical approach to transit migration (Collyer, Duvell and de Haas, 2012), it is important to not see aspirations as the rationale for onward movement. In other words if somebody expresses the aspiration to move out of Romania, he/she is not necessarily put this in practice in the near future. The motivations and aspirations of migrants therefore only shed a light on someone’s imagined mobility. The purpose of this part is to outline a couple of key factors, generally overlooked by quantitative analyses, which could potentially offer a set of answers and motivations for a possible out-migration from Romania to another country inside the EU space or further to a more distant destination. In order to achieve that, there will be fragments used from the 15 interviews with the sub-Saharan African migrants, as well as academic articles to support the empirical findings.

Although the dynamic of migration is more present nowadays than ever before, I would like to distinguish between three different types of aspirations encountered frequently in my discussions. These different types of aspirations do have a geographical connotation. This means that it refers to the direction of the imagined movement. I distinguish the following: Migration to another European Union state, Migration to the former British colonies and the Return to the countries of origin. By the end of the chapter, there will also be a critical view of the research sub-question represented by the reply question: “Are there any aspirations for migration after Romania?”

6.1 Further migration inside the EU – Factors in decision-making

When it comes to the EU mobility, there are always some country names such as Germany and France that always seem to come up as targeted European locations by all types of migrants, including the sub-Saharan Africans. This sub-chapter is presenting the responses of the interviewees regarding this sensible and also highly debated topic.

Firstly, I would like to have a deeper look at Germany and the proclaimed role of “Major Migrant Magnet” inside the EU. It seems like the European media along with policy papers are constantly portraying the country as an important immigrant destination for people from all over the world. (Rietig& Mueller, 2016) The statements are made based on statistics provided by the governments and international organizations and tend to present the fact that migrants choose this destination thinking only about the future economic advantages that they might have once arrived there. Germany has the biggest European economy and the lowest unemployment rate. (McDonnell, 2015)

Therefore, catch phrases like “a desired location” or “the safest choice” appear to describe the migrant options after arrived on the old continent. Although it might be true for some people, the reasons and dynamics behind a migrant trajectory are far more complex. During my study on sub-Saharan African migrants, I discovered that financial reasons are not enough to convince a person to move to a different country. Based on the interviews that I had, the first factor that seems to count in the decision of a possible destination is the native language of the country.

That being said, 8 out of 15 respondents told me that communication is a key factor when one migrates to a new location. Therefore, the sub-Saharan migrants tend to have a strong inclination towards moving to places where the locals speak and understand a familiar language or dialect with one of their own. Using the same logic 3 of 15 respondents felt like sharing their complete rejection of the idea of moving to Germany.

“A dream would be to visit other European countries especially SPAIN or ITALY, the main argument being the linguistic resonance with French and Romanian” (languages that she

already knows).“I will never move to Germany as well because the language is too complicated.” (Denise, 11/04/2018)

From these words, I could clearly understand from Denise that although her personal economic situation in Romania is far from being stable, she never took into consideration a movement to a different country based on financial projections. On the contrary, Denise is determined to experience the presence in a different country under the condition that she can adapt easier in the new environment.

“I’ve visited Germany two times. I consider UK as a possible destination because I have friends there and I know the language.” (Hussein, 12/04/2018)

Although he already had a brief contact with the German territory, it seemed to me that the words of Hussein resonate a lot with those of Denise. He doesn’t exclude the possibility of moving with his family, but there is a set of criteria that he follows before moving and the main request seems to be related to the communication and the possible level of interaction with the locals.

“I only consider countries who speak French (Not Belgium because of that airport experience). German language is too complicated for me.” (Aischa, 30/04/2018)

The last example presented by Aischa speaks about the same thing as the two fragments above. Her country preferences stand behind the linguistic knowledge that she possesses. That being said, Germany doesn’t represent an aspiration for the young Togolese in spite of the financial possibilities and the prosperous lifestyle that she might obtain once settled in there.

To conclude, it can be clearly observed that migration doesn’t occur only out of financial motivation and a decision to move to a different country might be heavily based on the possibility of communication with the locals or different communities of foreigners. To be more precise, even though, according to statistics, Germany appears to be a top destination for a high number of migrants, when it comes to people from the sub-Saharan Africa things are slightly different with preferences varying from Spain or Italy to United Kingdom.

Secondly, when it comes to France, the coordinates of the situation seem to be slightly different. The argument in favor of the statement is determined by the fact that, unlike Germany, France already has numerous sub-Saharan African communities spread around the country, especially coming from the former colonies. However, as stated in the conceptual framework, these so-called “strong ties” don’t have the same effect as expected. The findings of M. Collyer in his paper entitled: “When do social networks fail to explain migration? Accounting for the movement of the Algerian asylum seekers to the UK.” sustain this change in the dynamic of social networks.

In the paper, the researcher starts by remarking the recent shift in the geography of migration to Europe. The main argument is that social network theory needs to be challenged in order to better understand the mobility dynamics towards and inside the old continent. (2006, pp. 699-700) At the end of his research, Collyer concludes that based on the situation of the Algerian asylum-seekers in Europe the way in which social networks are used has developed over time:

“Weaker ties become more important as stronger ties become less attainable. As may be expected for refugee movement, political factors play a choice in the selection of destination as well as the decision to leave. [...] economics is also significant.” (Collyer, 2006, p. 715)

The results of the paper seem to be partially confirmed by my research. Out of my 15 respondents, there were two respondents who confirmed the analysis of M. Collyer.

“Although I know French, I would never move to France because of the superficial attitude of my sister.” (Denise, 11/04/2018)

“I don’t want to go to France although my father is there.” (Yawne, 30/04/2018)

Both Denise and Yawne have the opportunity to move to France. According to their stories, their relatives already have a stable situation in the receiving country, which would hypothetically facilitate an attainable and smooth transition. However, in both cases they decided to remain in Romania and follow the integration course. In the first situation, Denise explained that her sister has a different vision about life and other people and this is the main reason why they will not be able to live together in spite of the fact she is the member of the family that she loves the most. Moreover, she feels like her economic situation has good chances of getting better. The same feelings were expressed by Yawne during our meeting.

Unsafe and instable were the key words when she described a possible future in France. Nevertheless, Romania looked like a better option for her at the moment of our interview.

In conclusion, I have identified that the social ties which are often presumed to be the strongest between two individuals, might not be decisive in cross-border mobility. To be more precise, in spite of the family bonds that my interviewees have, some of them are not tempted to reconnect with their strong ties if the political and economic climate is not safe and stable enough to allow a sustainable integration. Policymakers and analysts should take that perspective into account in order to come up with better solutions for migrant mobility inside the European space.

6.2 Student mobility to the former British colonies

Another point that I would like to bring up in this chapter is related to migrant students and their global vision of mobility shaped by the extended possibilities that are offered to them once they get a degree from an internationally recognized university of an EU country. Out of the 15 interviews that I had during my fieldwork period, 5 of them were students in Romania. Their responses to mobility and future destinations offered a new perspective from I have encountered before:

“Last year I went to Germany with Erasmus (half a year). I want to do my residency studies in Canada but I need practical experience in order to apply so I will go back to Nigeria for one year. After I will finish my residence in Canada, I will go back to Nigeria and work there.” (Mercy, 16/05/2018)

“I never visited other countries because my friends are usually not around to travel with me. In the short term, I am interested in Bulgaria and Serbia but just to visit. In the long term, I am considering migrating to Ireland to do my residence and work there. In Ireland I don't need to pay for my residency while in Romania it costs 7000 euros. My back up plan would be Australia, but I need to pass extra exams.” (Redson, 16/05/2018)

As it can be seen from their answers, the frequency of mobility for different purposes is more present at this category of migrants than other. Another unique characteristic might be represented by the diversity of destinations, including some distant locations such as Canada

or Australia. Lastly, the dynamics which could be found in Mercy's plans also be interpreted as a complex form of circular migration.

Those responses helped me to build up on the research of Edward Baryla and Douglas Dotterweich published in 2001. Their paper, "Student migration: Do significant factors vary by region?" have a national approach and one of the main conclusions of it was that: "Nonresident students are, at best, indifferent to nonresident tuition fees and, in some instances, are not dissuaded by nonresident tuition fees." (2001, p. 278) However, the study presents some limitations and suggestions for further research such as: "A very interesting area of research yet to be explored is non-resident student migration dynamics across countries. There has been no research to date that distinguishes between international and national student patterns." (2001, p. 279)

My interviews on international students might represent a helping hand to the comparison between the internal and cross-border migration of this type. Based on the responses of Mercy and Redson, tuition fees are an important reason when considering a future international migration for studies/practice/specialization courses/residency. When they choose their future academic path, international students tend to look closely at the taxes that the universities impose, especially for people coming from different countries. As a result, the dynamic of their mobility is broader than in the case of other migrant categories and often exceeds the borders of one continent to more distant locations such as Canada or Australia.

6.3 Coming back to the country of origin

When it comes to the topic of coming back 10 out of 15 respondents take into account coming back to their home country if the political, economic and social factors will get stabilized.

In this sub-chapter I would like to emphasize a little bit on the story of William. As I presented him in the previous chapters, I've randomly met him and soon became good friends. He came from Ghana, first as a student then applied for family reunification after the marriage with a Romanian wife back in his home country. At the moment of our interview, he worked at a local coffee shop in Bucharest. According to William, the salary was rather low but he considered himself a hard worker. As a result of that, he benefited from a lot of

appreciation and financial bonuses from his employer. Those factors brought stability for everyone, including his wife and the newborn child. When asked about other future destinations, William replied:

“I would like to be in a country where I can communicate. Ghana is a better country for me, the only reason I am still in Romania is my wife, so I don’t want to leave this place.” (William, 07/05/2018)

I consider his statement to bring in some interesting observations for the research. Apparently, in spite of the fact that he doesn’t feel adapted to the conditions and the current situation, William doesn’t consider leaving Romania in the immediate future. Moreover, the fact that he is dedicated to his job, partially confirms the theory of O. Galor and O. Stark (1990). According to their remarks, migrants who consider the possibility of eventual return to their (low-wage) country of origin might have an incentive to work harder in their (high-wage) country of destination. Their paper establishes a link between the likelihood of return migration and migrants’ work effort (1990, p. 403). Although the theory seems to apply in the case of William (considering that he would like to go back to Ghana), the analogy appear to be overly simplified. The analysis doesn’t take into consideration other relevant factors such as family. In my example, the reasons for hard work ethic may also be represented by providing the best for the close ones, not only a hidden desire to move back to Ghana.

6.4 Probability of remaining

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, the last part questions the fact that there is always a future aspiration when it comes to migration after arriving on the Romanian territory. Although Romania is generally considered a transit country in the intra EU space, there are certainly exceptions from that trend, especially when it comes to sub-Saharan African migrants:

10 out of my 15 participants in the interview mentioned the intention to remain in Bucharest or other Romanian cities.

“I want to remain here because I think I can find a job very easy.” (Gloya, 23/04/2018)

As presented in the past chapters, Gloya is a young student from the Republic of Congo. She already has a job at an international call-center where she can use her native language. The working conditions and the salary convinced her that Romania is an optimal choice for her future.

“I want to learn the Romanian language, continue my studies and make a better life for myself here.” (Yawne, 30/04//2018)

Unlike Gloya, the journey of Yawne in Romania was only at the beginning. Nevertheless, her plans revolved around the idea of settling in Timisoara (the city where she was staying at the moment of the interview).

“I don’t want to leave because I know the language. When I look at the Western countries, they all seem to fall apart slow and steady. I consider Romania a developing country and I feel like more and more companies are coming to invest here.” (Christian, 16/05/2018)

All the above words mentioned by my respondents tend to revolve around the same notions of pragmatism and predictability. Based on these results, it seems like migrants, once arrived in a safe country inside the European Union, tend to have a more conservative approach when it comes to further mobility inside this relatively open space. This doesn’t necessarily mean that they settle in the first country of their arrival for an indefinite amount of years, but there are some additional considerations before taking a step further into the European continent.

The above stated results come as response to the academic article of Hernandez – Carretero and Carling (2012) about West African Migrants and their willingness to pursue dangerous journeys. In that paper the authors analyze how prospective migrants relate to the risks of migration. They conclude by saying that: “Risk acceptability is mediated by life opportunities” and “Pirogue migrants are not fatalistic, as the <<kamikaze>> label would imply, but actively engage with the risks and see the perilous journey as a purposeful and justifiable step towards a better future.” (2012, p. 415) Even though the findings might be considered correct for African migration towards Europe, dynamics tend to change once arrived at the shores of the EU.

Conclusions

All things considered, it seems like the future aspirations for migration after Romania are far more complex than it is usually perceived. However, the chapter was structured in four different parts in order to obtain a set of logical responses to the research sub-question.

The first part looked into the intra-EU mobility, with a special focus on Germany and France, which are often considered top destinations inside the old continent due to the financial opportunities that one might have once arrived there. The interviews taken during the fieldwork research, hint to the idea that none of these locations are actually extremely desired by the sub-Saharan African migrants. When it comes to Germany, the main reason is most of time related to the complicated language of the locals. On the other hand, the reluctant attitude towards a migration to France is based on a different set of reasons. My respondents pointed the growing importance of the weaker ties, thus endorsing the work of Collyer. Moreover, migrants offered alternative possible destinations arguing that the financial gain and blood ties are not decisive criteria when moving to a distant location.

The second part approached the migration outside the European Union. It had a special focus on the student mobility and uncovered the fact that destinations such as Canada, USA or Australia are extremely attractive to youngsters who dream of completing their studies especially in the medical field. The third part covered the probabilities of coming back to the countries of origin and revealed that two thirds of my limited number of interviewees would consider returning to their initial homes, if the political, economic and social climate would allow for a secure and sustainable way of living.

Last but not least, the fourth part questioned the idea that there always has to be a future destination after Romania, and also positioning of the country as a transit space inside Europe. The empirical results suggested that is not the case for those who manage to integrate into labor market, pragmatism playing a decisive role in the decision-making process.

To conclude, even though the aspirations for migration are diverse and in a continuous change, I think that this part of the paper answers a few of the whys behind the sub-Saharan African migration from Romania to other EU member states and further. The final conclusions will present a set of policy recommendations which can be drawn from this chapter.

Chapter 7 - Concluding remarks

While research into migration patterns, have a strong focus on the outcomes of movement into fixed locations, this research shows the necessity of mobility research in order to better understand the mobile and dynamic lives of migrants nowadays. Although the external borders of Europe have been closing over the last few years, migrants keep literally crossing, but also figuratively by maintaining economic and social connections with other people around the world.

The trajectories of African migrants while trying to reach the European Union countries are full of shortcomings and hustles, but also infringed by many factors. Whether certain elements, such as social networks or institutions could restrict the migrant mobility, the course of actions proves that they also influence a trajectory in different and unexpected ways. Romania in this case, a transit country considering the geographic position inside the European Union, might represent an initial destination for many migrants. Nevertheless, based on a set of diverse factors such as: linguistic adaptation, pre-existing social networks, employment and study opportunities and so on, they decide their short- and long-term future. These cause people to be mobile and search the best city to live in, but also another place within the European Union. To conclude, however, a series of influential elements creates highly interesting migratory patterns for today's migrants, as their dynamic trajectories might change the main ideas we have towards a transnational citizen, who usually moves between a place of origin and destination. This research shows that the mobility patterns of the African migrant are far more complex and most of the times hardly predictable by other people.

The research goal of the thesis was to identify the mobility trajectories of the sub-Saharan African migrants through Romania and possibly further into the intra-EU space. By doing so, the migrant an active role instead of the strong fixation of migration in a macro-level research. Transit migration was used as an analysis tool in order to achieve the research objective. Therefore, the main research question intended to find out:

How can transit migration explain the mobility trajectories of sub-Saharan African migrants through Romania?

After a thorough observation and analysis of the available data and the experiences of the migrants that took part in my interviews, I can come up with a set of responses.

First of all, based on the empirical findings, one can come to the conclusion that transit migration doesn't really seem to explain the mobility trajectories of sub-Saharan African migrants. There are numerous arguments in favor of the statement. One might be represented by the fact that there is a high possibility that those migrants who transited Romania have already left to other European destinations or even further. As a result, a better way to document and present the role of transit migration through Romania, would be to do the fieldwork research in a different EU country such as Germany or France. There would be a higher probability to encounter migrants that only stayed Romania for a limited period of time and therefore would be more able to contribute in this type of research.

Second of all, following the critical approach to transit migration (Collyer, Duvell and de Haas, 2012), I have started by stating that Romania, or any other state inside Europe, cannot simply be pointed out as a transit country as well as any person cannot just be called a transit migrant. I have also underlined the importance of understanding their different lived realities in order to investigate how they themselves see their position in a particular society. Now, I can conclude that Romania's reality is too complex to be labeled as a transit space, regardless of the group of migrants that was analyzed in the paper.

For example, the reality of a migrant worker is highly influenced by the nature of the employment. A short time contract might turn into a longer agreement and an initial place of work might change, especially in the case of multinational companies. A similar situation might be found in the case of students. However, what is interesting about students is that they have a particular position in society that lasts for a small period of time, namely the time of their studies. So, in a way, any international student is in transit.

To sum up, transit is almost present in all the stories that I have listened to during the fieldwork time. Therefore, this is not a one-in-between phase, but rather a usual step in a long process. In addition, even though transit is part of every migration trajectory, not every migrant feels in transit. After putting the highly politicized notion of transit migration into perspective by relating to a larger group of migrants, I can conclude that the individual realities behind every migrant story are much more different than it may seem. Therefore, as it

will be suggested in the recommendations section, the transit character of Romania should continue to be questioned in further researches.

7.1 Fieldwork remarks – A personal journey

As mentioned in the introduction of the paper, the fieldwork period took place in four different cities of Romania between the first day of March and 30th May 2018. It was not only a time of finding out information about mobility trajectories of migrants, but it also turned out to be a period of discovering more about myself as a researcher and as a person.

I started out with nothing but theoretical preparation for that new challenge who stood in front of me. I came from a background of political science, with a three-year experience of conducting research papers exclusively based on quantitative data. Therefore, I haven't done anything similar before. However, I was not discouraged by the lack of necessary skills, knowing that the preparatory trainings doubled by my social abilities will facilitate the journey of studying and completing this stage of the research.

Even though the first interview represented a major challenge which took me out of my comfort zone, I successfully adapted and made the most out of it. As time went by, I got used to the in-depth discussions with the various categories of migrants. I learned to be patient in the moments when they didn't feel like talking about their story, I learned to listen carefully to the subtle words and interpret them.

At the end of the fieldwork research, my views about this particular topic have changed a lot. I started out thinking that Romania is seen as nothing but a temporary place by those who seek to find a settlement inside the European borders. I thought that migrants would never discover anything appealing to their set of values and expectations. I was convinced that most of my interviewees experience a hard time living in the small cities of the country due to the linguistic barriers between them and the locals.

But I was wrong!

By the end of my time in the field, I started to see everything from a different perspective. I discovered that Romania could also be a desirable destination as much as other places for some people. It could also be perceived as an extremely safe place, regardless of the regions, with a relatable culture. In short, during those three months I managed to discover Romania through their eyes and find out that it has much more to offer to different groups of migrants than I was ever expecting.

To conclude, now I am a different person. I know how to relate to issues that might come up in the field and I am more aware of the variety of situations that one could encounter before, during or after an interview. However, I must admit that there is still plenty of space for improvement and things could have been done much better. This is one of the reasons for presenting the recommendations for further research.

7.2 Recommendations

The research into the transit migration and mobility patterns of the African migrants currently living in different cities of Romania has brought about findings that could trigger further research or aspects to take into consideration within policy-making process. As the broad field of mobility research is in a constant change, I will try to keep my suggestions short and focused on the specific topic that I have presented during the paper. I hope that the arguments that will be presented are good enough to conclude my study with useful and insightful ideas for further research and policy-making related to this topic.

For further research

The focus of the thesis was the sub-Saharan African migrant in Romania. Although I achieved reaching a good number of respondents, accessing different types of migrants has turned out to be a challenge from time to time. Therefore, a fascinating focus for further research could be to study the role of circular migrants within this research topic, as it will definitely display a different view to the transit migration and at the same time question the transit character of the Eastern European region. This would require a sampling from more European countries, so focusing on only one nationality might be the best approach for this kind of research.

Furthermore, I have studied the trajectories of the sub-Saharan African migrants through a mobility-lens. The way of looking at a fixed phenomenon in relation to particular groups of migrants has brought about findings that would have been drastically altered when not considering mobility in this research. It would have missed the dynamic processes that are highly relevant for the migratory trajectories of the migrants. Although I have tried to stress the importance of trajectory focus in migration research (chapters 3, 4 and 6), it requires a more advanced level of research into mobility approaches and theories than I was able to do in this research, to be able to properly find the most useful way of studying mobility themes. The usage of several approaches on one study might be valuable in order to be able to structure the conclusions about how these approaches contribute to mobility research today.

For further policy-making process

Although I am aware that policy making depends on many factors nowadays, as on a large scale the European Union is constantly trying to find new ways to cope with migration towards Europe, while trying to take into consideration the separate views of EU-member states as well, I assume it would bring value if mobility studies in general could be taken into consideration. We have a tendency to forget the source of debates on migration as they are highly politicized, which induces us to think in large group of persons instead of unique stories of individuals when debating policies about migration.

The personal stories that I have emphasized in my thesis show that, although one can identify similarities, they are all unique due to the unpredictable elements along the way. Intensive researches into the dynamics of trajectories should be analyzed in order to comprehend the life realities of migrants in Europe. Understanding these lives, to my mind, could bring a contribution to the humanization of the discussion in order to keep up the focus of this debate, which is trying to create policies that smoothen overall migration processes for countries, but also migrants themselves in order to prevent them taking more endangered routes every time. Closing both internal and external borders in this sense will clearly paralyze highly mobile migrants or will pursue them to take greater risks in order to cross borders. To avoid such consequences, policies on both transnational and local level should consult researches that got information from the fields and the persons in discussion. This would be a better solution in order to avoid losing sight of what the debate revolves around and to be able to react adequately.

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Appendix 1 – Overview Respondents

Name and migration status:	Date of conversation	Origin	Aspirations for coming years
1. Denise (refugee)	11/04/2018	Cameroon	Join a university and find a job. She wants to visit other countries, especially Italy and Spain.
2. Hussein (family reintegration)	12/04/2018	Nigeria	Consider moving to UK because he has friends there.
3. Pauline (refugee)	16/04/2018	Cameroon	Will probably stay because she has a stable job. She also wants to bring her daughter.
4. Gloya (international student)	23/04/2018	Congo	She wants to remain because she is convinced that she can find a job very easy.
5. Aischa (asylum seeker)	30/04/2018	Togo	Would like to study Economics. She also takes into consideration moving to France.
6. Yawne(asylum seeker)	30/04/2018	Congo	She is very interested in the Romanian language and hopes that will learn most of it soon.
7. William (International student =>family reintegration)	07/05/2018	Ghana	Will stay in Romania because of his wife and children. He would rather move back to Ghana because of the strong ties that were created there.
8. Christian (economic migrant =>refugee)	16/05/2018	Congo	He will probably remain because he sees a lot of economic potential that Romania might achieve in the near future.
9. Mercy (international student)	16/05/2018	Nigeria	After finishing the studies, she plans to do gain some practical

			experience back in Nigeria and then follow-up the studies in Canada.
10. Redson (international student)	16/05/2018	Zimbabwe	Plans to move to Ireland to work there.
11. Liliane (family reintegration)	16/05/2018	Congo	Will revisit Congo in the future to see if the situation improved. If not, she will stay in Romania.
12. Fidelis (international student)	16/05/2018	Zimbabwe	Will move to Bucharest in the near future and then he seriously thinks of moving to the UK.
13. Abukar (refugee)	22/05/2018	Somalia	Will stay and get the Romanian citizenship.
14. Ahmed (refugee)	22/05/2018	Somalia	Wants to be as mobile as possible and get work experience around many countries inside the European Union.
15. Serge (asylum seeker)	22/05/2018	Congo	Will not stay because he wants to go to France and reunite with his sister.