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OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION. THE CASE OF ROMANIAN MIGRANTS IN ITALY

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at the relationship between migration and occupational changes in the case of Romanian economic migrants, focusing on Italy as destination country. Using quantitative data and comprehensive literature review it offers insights into how migration contributes to changes of migrants' occupational status in the home country and at destination. I showed that Romanian migrants in Italy were generally employed in the secondary sector and that, through lack of institutional support, informal networks took over the responsibility of assisting labour market integration. Following the occupational history from home, to destination and back, I also noted that a significant percentage of migrants were unemployed before going abroad. On the contrary, on enquiring about the occupational status at destination, very few migrants declared having been unemployed. The few Romanians temporarily out of work abroad were active job seekers. However, when returning to Romania, ex-migrants were less likely to get a job as compared to the pre-migration period. The unemployed returnees would generally plan another travel for work.

KEYWORDS

- labour force migration
- dual labour market
- negative selection
- occupational mobility
- informal ties
- labour market integration

Introduction

International migration flows are constantly changing and it is not rare that destination or origin countries find it difficult to manage the rapidly shifting patterns of human mobility. While forced migration is disruptive and unexpected for migrants and receiving states, making integration difficult, voluntary migration, such as labour force mobility, should be more responsive to policies and easier to predict. However, migrants do not always enter a country as a result of pro-migration policies, nor do they leave when they appear to be no longer needed. Many migrants do not rely on formal networks to find an employment abroad but

on individual capabilities and informal ties. Such ties usually include relatives, friends and acquaintances that are part of homogeneous status groups in the host country. This generates specific patterns of integration of the newly arrived migrants as these networks can only support integration in the secondary labour market.

The reasons for migrants' employment in the secondary sector lie not only in the use of such networks but also in several characteristics of the home and host countries' economy and politics. They cause migration flows from less developed states to more advanced economies, affecting leaving rationales in the country of origin and indicating which occupational gaps require foreign labour in the destination country. Politics and economy are probably the most important structural factors that decide the context of international movements and influence integration patterns. Within this macro context shaping push and pull factors, migration is generally guided by the quest for a better life which oftentimes means a better job. This paper will present the *better jobs* that convinced Romanian migrants to go abroad while assessing the occupational history from the moment of their departure, to their job abroad and their return home. In the first section, I will refer to some theoretical issues that will be helpful in understanding the context of this paper (dual labour market and network theory). I will then point to the three quantitative sources of information that made this study possible. I will then continue by presenting Romanian migration figures, a picture of the labour market in Italy, occupational changes of Romanian migrants before migration, at destination and after return, legislative gaps and the role of informal ties in employment patterns. I will conclude with noting three research directions that I consider relevant for future research in the area of migration and occupational mobility.

Context and theoretical background

A brief assessment of the economic environment shortly after the 1989 Revolution against the communist regime, would reveal among costs of the economic transition gross medium salary of approximately 100 EUR in the early 90s, a GDP decline to -12.9% in 1992 and a 256.1% inflation rate in 1993. Many workers lost their jobs when large enterprises were restructured and construction sites closed. As economic distress and job insecurity became widespread, many individuals whose social position deteriorated were among the first international migrants. The issue of a large migration potential among the categories most affected by the long and frustrating transition to democratic capitalism is in line with other studies targeting the former communist space in Central and Eastern Europe such as the research of Okolski (2004) or Marokvasic (1999).

Two theoretical approaches shape the framework of analysis of the present paper: the dual labour market as an important particularity of the Italian economy and the network theory, linking origin and destination countries. Before discussing about the occupational changes of Romanian migrants I will briefly describe these perspectives.

The first travels abroad were short distance, targeting either neighbouring countries such as Hungary and Yugoslavia or Turkey, which were often visited for petty trade. As international mobility developed, migrants reached countries further afield such as Italy and Spain and petty trade was replaced by circulatory labour migration. These two Mediterranean countries are presently pulling the highest numbers of Romanian migrants. To find an employment abroad, migrants had to adapt to the local labour market requirements. One such requirement is the acceptance of low skilled jobs, sometimes without regular contract arrangements. These are the jobs no longer accepted by the local population. The reason for this opening towards migrants' inclusion on the labour market is, "economic dualism", or the polarization between secondary and primary labour markets. This particular market development was the result of economic development and demographic changes. As population ages and more women get full time jobs, there are fewer local workers willing to accept low skilled employment. The gap between the primary sector including capital intensive, stable, well paid jobs and the secondary sector, associated with low skilled, unstable and labour intensive jobs is gradually increasing¹. Some occupations in the secondary sector have been labelled "immigrants jobs", and are often considered 3D jobs, „dangerous, demanding/ difficult and dirty"². In fact, they are low-paid, insecure and boring³. Bohning⁴ adds the informal employer-employee relationships to the perspective of economic dualism. In his view, labour markets can be primary, secondary or informal. In Southern European Countries there is a strong polarization between primary and secondary sector as regards migrants' employment, many being selected for the lowest levels of the labour market. This happens because the local population refuses to accept low paid, difficult jobs. Most informal labour relationships are in the secondary sector and they are mainly related to employment of non-OECD migrants⁵.

The last theory framing this analysis refers to network connections between migrants and non-migrants. Networks have a complex impact on migration, influencing decisions to migrate, direction and persistence of migration flows,

¹ DS Massey, J Arango, G Hugo, A Kouaouci, A Pellegrino & JE Taylor, 'Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal'. *Population and development review*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1993, pp. 431-444.

² Skeldon, 1997, p. 75 & Stalker, 2001, p. 23

³ Bohning, 1995 *apud* Skeldon, 1997, p. 75

⁴ „Primary relationships obtain where there are durable jobs with good promotion possibilities, high remuneration except at entry points, many fringe benefits and a below average danger of unemployment. Secondary employment relationships involve much less stable, more precarious or marginal jobs, with limited promotion possibilities, low remuneration, fewer fringe benefits and an above-average exposure to unemployment. As regards informal relationships, one or another aspect of the employers' or workers' economic activities contravenes the legislation in force. [...] If one adds together all enterprises' primary, secondary and informal employment relationships one can call the resulting macro-economic aggregates primary, secondary or informal labor markets. (Bohning, 1998, p. 78).

⁵ WR Bohning, 'Top Down and Bottom End Labor Import in the United States and Europe. Historical Evolution and Sustainability' in JMM van Amersfoort & J Doomernik (eds.), *International Migration: Processes and Interventions*, Het Spinhuis Publishers, Amsterdam, 1998, Accessed on <<http://books.google.ro>>.

supporting transnational communities, settlement and incorporation⁶. Palloni *et al.* defines networks as “sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants to one another through relations of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin”⁷. In a later section – *Informal networks and occupational mobility* – I will show that most Romanian migrants went abroad relying on informal migration networks able to provide employment in the secondary labour market. These networks are often “strong ties”⁸ including relatives and close friends. Just as in the case of weak ties, when networks include more distant acquaintances, they still bring little or no advantage as regards occupational positions since they are generally part of peer status groups. Thus, although they lowered the costs of migration and favoured rapid integration into the labour market, networks provided modest chances for upward social mobility.

Data and method

To understand occupational mobility of Romanian migrants, I have to follow migrants’ employment history from the moment they decide to leave to the moment they return to Romania. I have therefore selected data from three surveys that could provide significant information for this subject. The most important of these studies was conducted by the Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS) in March 2005. This will be the groundwork of the paper. 1199 migrants who returned after working abroad were interviewed. Some migrants stated that they were back in Romania permanently (44%), while others intended to leave the country again (44%). The sample had a national distribution. Migrants’ households were selected using a snowball technique in 132 rural and urban localities. For a reliable distribution, several quotas were set in accordance with previous migration research, such as a census like assessment of migration in rural area and small towns⁹. The remaining two studies are referred to for additional information, in specific parts of the paper. One was conducted by Metromedia Transilvania and the Agency for Governmental Strategies (ASG-MMI) in December 2007 with 1066 Romanian migrants who were in Italy at the time of the research. Interviews were distributed proportionally among 14 Italian regions (6 out of the 20 regions were excluded due to a low number of estimated migrants). Quotas were set regarding the number of registered migrants

⁶ JM Hagan, ‘Social Networks, Gender, and Immigrant Incorporation: Resources and Constraints’, *American Sociological Review*, vol. 63, no. 1, 1998, pp. 55.

⁷ A Palloni, DS Massey, M Ceballos, K Espinosa & M Spittel, ‘Social Capital and International Migration: A Test Using Information on Family Networks’. *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 106, no. 5, 2001, pp. 1263–1264.

⁸ According to Granovetter strong ties include close friends while weak ties refer to acquaintances. He posits that individuals with few weak ties will be confined to the opportunities offered by close friends, which brings a disadvantageous position on the labour market. Labour advancement depends on having the right weak ties. This happens because strong ties are sets of people with dense social relations having access to similar information, little connected with the latest news or job information. See: M Granovetter, ‘Strength of Weak Ties: a Network Theory Revisited’, *Sociological Theory*, no. 1, 1983, pp. 201–202.

⁹ This assessment implied collecting data from all rural localities and small towns with support from local teams including formal and informal leaders of the community. More information about this study can be found in Dumitru, Sandu, ‘Migrația transnațională a românilor din perspectiva unui recesământ comunitar’, 2002, *Sociologie Românească*, 3-4, pp. 5-52 and on <<http://sites.google.com/site/dumitrusandu/bazededate>>.

in each region and locality type¹⁰. As in the previous case, migrants' households were selected using a non-random procedure (snowball technique). The third study reunites several monthly sections targeting migration as part of an omnibus study organized by the Institute for Marketing and Polls (IMAS). The omnibus survey is a monthly research conducted nationwide in Romania on representative samples of 1000 cases. Questions about migration were included in the survey from October 2010 to March 2011, some being replaced every two months. During the research, 10% to 12% percent of the respondents declared they had been abroad. This meant that, every month, approximately 100 migrants could be selected out of the nationwide sample of 1000. Given the low number of monthly cases with migration experience, calculations required adding two or three months of cases in common databases, leading to subsamples of 208 to 333 migrants.

The inaccuracy of migration data has probably been mentioned so often that it has become a cliché. To point this out, some authors stated that demographers show a certain embarrassment when discussing migration data since they are much more imprecise as compared to regular demography events such as birth rate, mortality or even divorce and marriages¹¹. However, I must warn once again that the three surveys should not be read as exact mathematical data or be seen as precise surgical tools. The non-random procedure and the necessity to impose quotas relying on previous estimations and not on statistical data in the first two cases, and the small sample size in the third case are some of the reasons why a prudent reading of the results is advised. Nevertheless, the three surveys can undoubtedly be considered a satisfactory estimation of the patterns of migration and an important contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon.

Brief assessment of Romanian international migration from 1990 to 2011

There are various ways to discuss about migration trends after the fall of communism. For example, outflows can be described in terms of destination countries, migration peaks, changes of migrant' profiles, evolution of the legislative context, modification of migration routes, and duration of stay abroad. Here, I will briefly refer to migration peaks in relation to legislative milestones.

While assessing migration trends I will not only consider periods when most migrants left the country (source country standpoint) but also how official statistics in destination countries reflect migration trends (host country standpoint). The second aspect also targets policy changes in host countries. Regular immigrants are definitely easier to count, while irregular labour migrants are not visible in official statistics. Hence, peaks in migration numbers in host countries might not entirely

¹⁰ Irregular migrants were not included here. However, their distribution is probably very similar since residence oftentimes depends on migration networks.

¹¹ T Rotariu, & E Mezei, 'Asupra unor aspecte ale migrației interne recente din România', *Sociologie Românească*, no. 3, 1999, p. 5.

reflect an increase in the number of migrants but an increased visibility of some migrant categories.

Let's first look at what happened in Romania during the last 20 years of migration. In a study published in 2006, Sandu (coord.) observes three stages of international Romanian migration in the period preceding the EU accession: 1990-1995 with a migration rate of not higher than 5‰, 1996-2001, with a migration rate of 6-7‰ and the period following the lifting of the visa restriction in 2002 to 2006, with a migration rate of 10 to 28‰¹². Sandu later explains that most migrants left the country in the 2002-2006 interval, the increase in the number of migrants after the EU accession being less notable and probably adding 500.000 more migrants to the approximately 2.2 million estimated before 2007¹³. In line with previous observations I could refer to the post accession period as being a fourth stage of migration. I could safely say that the gradual increase of outflows was the result of intensifying migration networks and of what Massey *et al.* called cumulative causation. According to this view, migration is cumulative because it has the capacity to sustain itself, each act of migration making additional movement more likely¹⁴. Also, the lifting of the visa restrictions and the EU accession has clearly facilitated circulation, lowering the costs and allowing easier back and forth circulation.

The stages of total Romanian migration discussed above are also reflected in Italian statistics. These figures do not only reveal the evolution of Romanian outflows, but also the policy making process in Italy. There are 4 visible pitfalls in the evolution of the number of Romanians in Italy: 1995, 1998, 2002 and 2007 (figure 1). In the first three years, amnesty acts were passed, the impact of the regularization procedures being clearly visible in the following years. In 2007, Romania acceded to the EU and many migrants probably seized the opportunity to formalize their stay.

In the early 90's, Romanians in Italy accounted for only 1% of the total number of foreigners with approximately 8.000 statistically documented migrants¹⁵. In 2002, the lifting of the visa regime and the Bossi-Fini Act favoured a significant increase in the number of Romanian migrants in Italy: 147.947 Romanians were granted amnesty as a result of the Bossi-Fini regularization program, while in previous years a little more than 35.000 Romanians legalized their stay¹⁶. In fact, it was only after 2000 that Italy became the most important host country for Romanian migrants, after a decade of exploration of diverse destinations such as Germany, Hungary,

¹² D Sandu, *Locuirea temporară în străinătate. Migrația economică a românilor 1990-2006*, Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă, Bucharest, 2006, p. 18.

¹³ D Sandu, *Lumile sociale ale migrației românești în străinătate*, Polirom, Bucharest, 2010, p. 38.

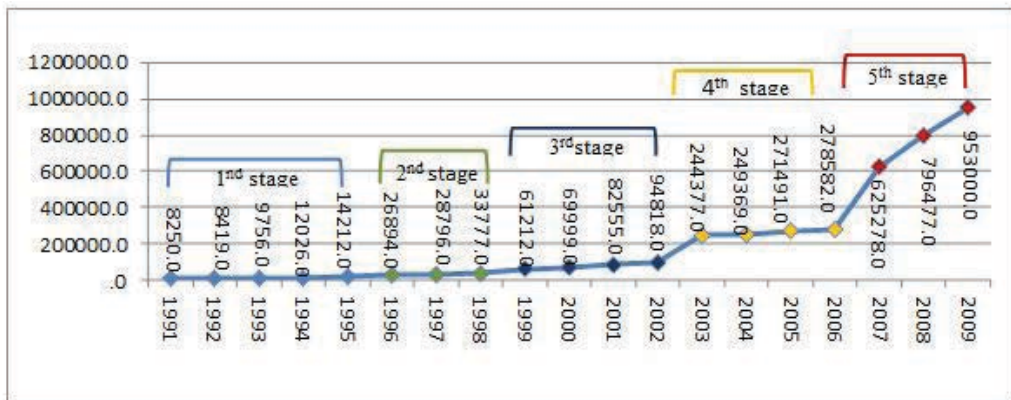
¹⁴ DS Massey, DS, J Arango, G Hugo, A Kouaouci, A Pellegrino & JE Taylor, 'Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal', *Population and development review*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1993, pp. 448-450.

¹⁵ F Pittau, A Ricci & A Silj (eds.), *Romania. Immigrazione e lavoro in Italia, Statistiche, problemi e prospettive*, Idos, Roma, 2008, p. 86.

¹⁶ P Cingolani, *Romeni d'Italia. Migrazioni, vita quotidiana e legami transnazionali*, Mulino, Bologna, 2009, p 47.

Yugoslavia, Poland or Turkey¹⁷. It is now estimated that more than 1.000.000 Romanians live in Italy¹⁸. They are the most numerous group of immigrants, with a more notable presence than Moroccans and Albanians¹⁹.

Figure 1. Evolution of Romanian migrants in Italy 1991-2009²⁰



Source: Antonio Ricci, in Pittau, Ricci and Timșa. (coords), 2010: 20

General context of labour force migration to Italy

Compared to the USA, Canada or Germany that resorted to guest worker programs in the post World War II period, Italy did not have an explicit pro-migration policy. On the contrary, rather than receiving, it was sending migrants to European countries, North and South America. Its long history of emigration started with the massive waves to the USA in the late 19th century. From the mid 1970s, it gradually became an immigration country for migrants originating in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, immigration had not been required by explicit policies. In lack of institutional support, labour demand in Italy and the supply of immigrants were connected with help from

¹⁷ D Diminescu & S Lăzăroiu, *Migrația circulatorie a românilor*. IOM, Bucharest, 2002.

¹⁸ Cingolani, op. Cit, p. 47.

¹⁹ For more information please see Diminescu and Lazaroiu, 2002, the chapter on destinations of circulatory migration (“Destinații ale migrației ciculatorii”).

²⁰ 1991-2006 statistics rely on Home Affairs data. Starting with 2007, data have been collected by the Italian Institute for statistics (ISTAT). Migration stages in Italy are based on personal interpretations and Sandu’s assessment of total Romanian migration stages (Sandu, coord, 2006). As noted before, Sandu classifies the stages of Romanian migration in 3 periods 1990-1996, 1997-1999 and 2000-2003. These periods are actually very similar with Figure I representation. Some differences come from the more extensive second interval in Sandu’s assessment and from the option to register data considering the 31st of December –not the 1st of January - as reporting date for the yearly Italian statistics.

informal networks. Labour market integration was actually the result of a process of “social construction”²¹.

Unlike North EU countries or Canada that favour highly skilled migration, Italy and Spain, rely mostly on low and medium qualified migrants to fill in the labour gaps. Immigrants are generally negatively selected to work in the secondary sector²². On the other hand, Cingolani notes that in Italy there is a close connection between informal economy and immigrant labour. Negative selection of human capital is a consequence not only of the dual labour market segmentation but also of the extent of the informal economy. On the one hand, an immigrant labour force is demanded for the secondary labour sector, on the other, the occupational niches associated with immigrants generally account for a significant percent of the informal economy²³.

Nevertheless, it is not only the demand side that influences occupational status and mobility chances but also the strategies that migrants use to find an employment. Before migration policies, many of the first non-EU migrants travelling to Italy went through difficult periods of unemployment, short, informal or exploitative jobs, and lack of accommodation. This was also the case for Romanian migrants who left for Italy shortly after the fall of communism. They would wait in specific public markets or visit local construction sites in the hope of finding an employment. These job search solutions could only favour employment in the secondary labour market, often without appropriate documentation. It was these migrants who later became the core of social ties that facilitated labour circulation, connecting the newly found occupational niches with intending migrants. They provided access to a limited occupational area, where upward mobility was unlikely. Newly arrived migrants would generally work in the same sectors as those who first arrived, with the difference that access to employment became easier and periods of inactivity shorter. In this article, I posit that the reliance on informal networks to mediate job arrangements led to specific employment patterns of Romanians in Italy, and that such networks were commonly useful for employment in the secondary sector. I will further develop this subject in a later section dedicated to informal networks.

Occupational status: from Romania to Italy and back

Who were the migrants before going abroad; what was their occupation? What did they do at destination? Did they find/get employment back home? These are the three questions I will answer in this section.

²¹ M Ambrosini, ‘The Role of Immigrants in the Italian Labour Market’, *International Organization for Migration*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2001, pp. 61-62.

²² According to Borjas, negative selection of immigrants happens when migrants have below average earnings in both countries. Migrants are negatively selected when host countries attract and repay less skilled workers. Negatively selected migrants are also likely to be less skilled than the native population in destination countries. See: GJ Borjas, ‘The Economic Analysis of Immigration’ in OC Ashenfelter & D Card (eds.), *Handbook of Labour Economics*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1999, pp. 1697-1760.

²³ Cingolani, op. cit., p. 49.

As tables A1 and A2 in the appendix show, about a quarter of the Romanians working in Italy were unemployed (23%) before going abroad. For the most part, those who had a job worked as plant or machine operators, assemblers (20%) or as sellers in markets, shops or service providing firms (12%)²⁴. As regards the sector of activity, one quarter of all migrants worked in construction (14%) or agriculture (10%)²⁵. Migration was an opportunity for unemployed people to find a job and for lower and medium skilled workers to get higher wages.

These data may suggest that there is a somewhat equal transfer of skills between origin and destination country. However, a survey inquiring about the consistency between the occupation abroad and the professional qualification of migrants show that perceived downward occupational mobility is quite frequent among migrant workers. According IMAS research, 40% of the migrants interviewees in Romania stated that the job abroad was much or somewhat lower than their skills (IMAS, 2011a). The same question addressed to the general public, show that 68% of all Romanians²⁶ consider that people working abroad have occupations below the achieved level of competencies (IMAS, 2011b). Also, more than half of the migrants (59%) interviewed neither had a similar job back home nor had ever tried to find one (69% of those who had never had a similar job in Romania) (IMAS, 2010²⁷).

²⁴ Please read table A1 in appendix for the distribution of migrants by occupation before migration, at destination and at return - CURS, Survey conducted by the Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS) in March 2005 on a sample of 1.199, *Romanian migrants who were in Romania at the moment of the interview*, 2005.

²⁵ Table A2 in appendix shows the distribution of migrants by sector of activity.

²⁶ The percentage cumulates “*much lower*.” and “*somewhat lower*.”

²⁷ A section about migration was repeatedly introduced into a survey representative of the adult population of Romania. For this question, the sample of migrants cumulates over two research months (November-December 2010). 229 respondents answered the first question (never had a similar job back home) and 136 to the second (never had a similar job at home and had never tried to find such a job in Romania).

Table 1. Perceptions regarding consistency between professional qualification and the job abroad

The occupation abroad is/ was *	% Migrants	% Total Population
...much lower than the professional qualification	18	35
...somewhat lower than the professional qualification	22	33
...in accordance with the professional qualification	54	25
...somewhat higher than the professional qualification	4	2
...much higher than the professional qualification	2	1
Total**	100	100

Source: IMAS 2011a for migrants' sub-sample and IMAS, 2011b for total sample.

Note. Migrants sub-sample, N=333. (January-March 2011). Returnees come from different destinations, not only from Italy. Total sample: N= 1040 (April)

* The question asked to returned migrants was "To what extent was the last occupation abroad consistent with your professional qualification"? The question for the total population was: "Do you generally think that the occupations of Romanians abroad are...?"

** Rounded cells and DK/NA account for the differences to 100%.

I previously noted that Italy mostly pulls immigrants in the secondary labour market, encouraging employment of low skilled foreign workers²⁸. Due to an increasingly aging population and to a strongly segmented labour market requiring cheap, low skilled workers, sectors such as construction, agriculture, manufacturing, housekeeping and elderly care have gradually been occupied by immigrants. Some jobs are now so strongly associated with immigrants that there are only a few natives who would compete for such positions. This probably explains why in Mediterranean countries, such as Italy and Spain, immigration increased in spite of the significant number of unemployed citizens. Romanian migrants in Italy account for approximately 22% of all immigrants, and they are mostly represented in the five sectors enumerated above. As the MMT-ASG survey shows, 23% of the Romanians in Italy were employed in construction, 19% in housekeeping or cleaning services, 10% in the care of the elderly or children care and 14% had an industrial activity. These sectors account for 66% of all employed migrants. Agriculture has also been

²⁸ According to the Italian Institute for Statistics (ISTAT), 2008, statistics regarding labour force in Italy showed the following distribution: 6.2% of the non-EU immigrants working in Italy were professionals ("qualificate"), 17.8% worked in services and retail trade ("attività del commercio e dei servizi"), 45.3% were qualified workers ("operai") and 30.6% were unqualified ("non-qualificate"); for EU workers the percentages were 43.4%, 22.9%, 16.6% and 17.1% and for Italian citizens 38.2%, 27.1%, 26.8% and 7.9%. Data are valid for 2006. As for education, the 51.1% of the non EU immigrants had low education ("fino licenza media"), 40.1% had medium education ("diploma") and 8.8% were highly educated ("laurea"). The percentages for EU citizens in Italy were 20.4%, 43.7% and 35.9% and for Italians 39.7%, 45.2%, and 15.1%. (ISTAT, 2008: 71, 88).

an important employment niche for Romanians, especially in Southern Italian regions. However, at the time of this survey only 5% of the Romanian migrants were working in agriculture. The explanation for the low percentage probably lies in the fact that the research was conducted in winter time when the demand for agricultural workers is almost non-existent.

Working abroad sometimes means changing several employers and spending weeks or months in finding employment. However, it rarely happens that a migrant does not eventually find at least one acceptable job in a migration cycle²⁹. Almost all returned migrants interviewed by CURS stated they had an employment abroad³⁰. Actually, less than 1% referred to their status abroad as jobless. Thus, one could safely say that migration reduces unemployment pressure in Romania while at the same time weighing little on the social security system in destination countries³¹. From this point of view, migration has a positive impact on the economy in both sending and receiving countries: on the one hand, the number of unemployed persons in Romania decreases, on the other, migrants fill various gaps in the Italian labour market. Migrants and employers also win in this situation: the first get higher returns on the skills required for the jobs abroad³² and the latter get the job done at lower costs.

Let us now look at what happens at return. In a paper assessing the selection of migrants and returnees, Ambrosini, Mayr, Peri, and Radu (draft version, March 2011) posit that returning migrants are positively selected. This means that those who return are not the ones who failed abroad but those who expect to get a higher wage premium when arriving in the home country. Return migrants are actually better prepared than non-migrants and their home coming is meant to maximize income. The authors note that this is usually valid for returnees from states that positively select immigrants, such as the USA but not for countries whose immigrants are negatively selected, such as Spain. Negatively selected immigrants are less likely to have a higher wage premium at return as they are also less likely to invest in education and skills at destination.

²⁹ I refer to one migration cycle to describe the period starting with the moment a migrant enters the host country and ending when the migrant decides to return home temporarily or permanently back home. Return for holiday does not end the migration cycle.

³⁰ I used the term “return migrants” to refer to Romanians who had at least one labour migration experience at the moment of the interview. In this paper, the term should not be confused with voluntary repatriated migrants or with forced return.

³¹ This situation may have changed during the economic crises. As an example, according to FADERE (The Federation of Romanian Associations Abroad) quoted in *ziare.com*, the unemployment rate for Romanians in Spain reached more than 42% (<http://www.ziare.com/diaspora/romani-spania/somajul-in-randul-romanilor-din-spania-a-ajuns-la-42-la-suta-1130442>). However, at the time this information was published in the media, no data were available regarding the basis of the estimation. Also, it is likely that not all jobless Romanian migrants receive unemployment benefit. Those who do receive unemployment aid were full contributors, paying the regular taxes and fees, which means that the benefits they receive were paid for during the working period.

³² Most migrants invest the money earned abroad in the home country. However low their salaries may seem in the destination country, migration money has a higher value at return because of the development differentials.

Just as Spain, Italy received lower qualified immigrants, often working without documents and facing integration difficulties. As a consequence, return to the home country does not generally lead to upward occupational mobility. Actually, 42% of the migrants interviewed by CURS who returned from Italy were unemployed at the time of the interview³³. In fact, there was a 19 point increase in the number of unemployed persons as compared to the pre-migration figure of 23%. This effect is even more visible if I assess the total number of jobless persons by adding the unemployed, the inactive population (pensioners, students and housekeepers). If before migration to Italy 29% did not have employment, after migration the percentage increased to 56%. (See table A1 and A2 in the appendix). The figures for the total sample of returned migrants –migrants from all destinations, not only from Italy—are similar: the percentage of unemployed migrants rises from 19% to 32%. There is also an increase in the number of persons without an occupation from 27% to 48%³⁴. These results may indicate that while migration temporarily reduces unemployment pressure in home communities, return migration causes a rise in the unemployment rate. However, this may not be the case, as long as migrants manage to stay mobile, using both home and destination spaces for their occupational strategy. Unfortunately there is little data for reaching a conclusion on this subject, although I may safely say that usually migrants return permanently to their home community not only when they manage to find a satisfactory employment but also when they accomplish the projects/ goals that motivated their going abroad in the first place. Thus, it is likely that the lack of occupation back home is not an actual increase of the unemployment pressure but an extension of the occupational strategies of the migrant who no longer limits job search and life strategies to the national space but sees oneself as part of the larger international labour market. Actually, out of the unemployed returnees, 71% in all samples and 74% in the Italy sample state not to be back permanently. Also, most of the ex-migrants who plan to return abroad are among the unemployed migrants: 51% in all samples and 64% in the Italy sample³⁵.

Summing up the answers to the three questions raised at the beginning of this chapter I note that:

- about a quarter of the total number of migrants to Italy did not have a job in Romania at the moment of their first migration cycle.

- Romanian migrants to Italy are negatively selected and generally employed in the secondary sector. While there are no survey data to explore changes in employment patterns after the EU accession of Romania, previous studies show

³³ All CURS survey data are presented considering returnees from Italy as compared with returnees from all destinations.

³⁴ The increase seems to result from the changes altering the number of housekeepers, and, to a lesser extent, from the rise in the number of pensioners.

³⁵ Surely, it is also likely that the pressure to migrate is higher for those who are not able to find an employment back home. Thus the interpretation of these data undoubtedly requires a more in-depth approach.

that for the last 20 years, Romanians working in Italy have mostly been employed in the secondary sector.

- returning migrants are less likely to have a job in Romania as compared to the pre-migration period. To some extent, this is explained by the number of returnees whose employment projects target re-migration.

Legislative gaps and labour market integration

In the early 90's Romanian migration legislation lagged far behind the emerging labour force mobility. At the same time, fearing a labour exodus, Western countries imposed restrictive migration regulations targeting former communist countries. I previously stated that Italy has only had a short history of immigration as compared to the emigration period when many Italians settled abroad. Migrants started to come to Italy before they could be offered formal employment opportunities and without being openly requested by employers³⁶. Migration policies, such as the repeated amnesty acts, were meant to catch up with a phenomenon that was growing with support from informal networks. Every time a new regularization procedure was initiated, it was an attempt not only to reduce undocumented migration, but also to improve previous policies³⁷. Nevertheless, given the higher expenses for employers, it is likely that many migrants could not benefit from such provisions. Also, amnesty programs might have only caused temporary corrections; after the expiry of the labour permit issued at regularisation, some migrants would return to the informal economy. It thus happened that many migrants who benefited from one regularisation program would go back to the underground economy after the labour permit expired, waiting for another amnesty act³⁸. On this issue, Sciortino, remarked that the immigration reform based on amnesty procedures had actually successfully diminished the number of irregular active workers but it has failed to prevent the reproduction of irregularity. In spite of the enactment of the repeated attempts to curtail informal employment, it seems that “the best strategy for a prospective immigrant to Italy is still perceived to be to enter the territory through whatever mean available and to find an informal employment while “waiting for the papers”³⁹.

As regards labour market mobility, the Migrant Integration Policy Index attributes Italy a slightly favourable score-69% on a scale from 0 to 100%. This position is better than the average EU 27, showing the openness of the Italian migration policy to support immigrants' integration with respect to equal access to the labour market, support and rights. However, Italy is rated lower than most EU countries in terms of skill selectivity of incoming immigrants and the opportunities of equal transfer of capabilities between origin countries and Italy. The jobs of

³⁶ Ambrosini, op. cit.

³⁷ For a description of immigration policy see for example Zincone and Caponio, 2005.

³⁸ Reyneri, 2004 *apud* Levinson 2005, p.4.

³⁹ G Sciortino, *Fortunes and miseries of Italian labour migration polic.*, CESPI, 2009, p. 11.

non-EU residents are likely to be undocumented and to require skills below their qualification⁴⁰.

It was not only Italian migration policies that lagged behind migration trends but also Romanian legislative provisions regulating outflows. Employment agreements between Italy and Romania were rare and covered an insignificant amount of the migration potential. If I look, for example, at the number of labour contracts mediated by the Ministry of Labour in 2002-2005, I note that only 76 contracts have been signed for Romanian workers in Italy. During the same period, the Ministry mediated a total number of 140.716 contracts, most of them with Germany and Spain⁴¹.

Apart from the absence of regulations targeting migration movement between Romania and Italy, some of the existent policies were an impediment to free circulation of labour. In Romania, the strict sanctions for overstayers⁴² had gradually been reinforced and had even led to the annulment of the right to bear a passport in 2005 (Government Ordinance No. 28/2005)⁴³. These measures, as well as others targeting close control of exits, were part of the governmental efforts to prove that it could control irregular migration⁴⁴. However, the set of regulations did not mind the long migration history built on account of informal ties. Therefore, they proved to be little effective in curbing irregular flows⁴⁵. The visa regime, lifted in 2002, and the transition periods still in force for 10 EU members, including Italy, also had an important impact on migration patterns⁴⁶. Given these restrictive regulations, many migrants tried to escape sanctions and elude rules by circulating back and forth between origin and destination, every 3 months. Others overstayed

⁴⁰ On this issue, ISTAT shows that 36.9% of the foreign workers (EU 39.2%, Non-EU 36.7%) have jobs inferior to their skills as compared to only 16.4 Italians. It is interesting that the EU workers are also negatively affected as is the case with non-EU workers. Also, women are more affected than men by the negative job-skill differential (46.0% of all women foreign workers as compared to 31.4% men) (ISTAT, 2008: 94-95).

⁴¹ Many private labour mediation agencies were also founded. These agencies took over some of the migration potential, mediating contracts between Romanian workers and foreign employers. - Office of Labour Force Migration data reported in SAR, 2006, p. 33.

⁴² Migrants who were abroad for more than 3 months without the proper documentation.

⁴³ This sanction was also imposed for migrants who did not commit other offence besides the prolonged period of stay abroad. As a result of civic society and media protests, the implementation of this law was soon revised, giving migrants the opportunity to present documents proving the necessity to overstay the regular 3 months period (Lazaroiu and Alexandru, 2005).

⁴⁴ Other such measures were the request to have enough financial resources for the travel and stay abroad (100 EUR per day), having a medical insurance, a return ticket or a green card car insurance. Travels were limited to 90 days in a 6 months period.

⁴⁵ S Lăzăroiu, & M Alexandru, *Controlling Exists to gain Accession. Romanian Immigration policy in the Making*, CESPI, Roma, 2005, p. 8.

⁴⁶ The 10 states maintaining the transition period are Germany, UK, Ireland, France, Austria, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, Holland and Malta. The Italian labour market is partially opened for some sectors highly associated with immigrant labour such as agriculture, hotels, care, constructions, and mechanics; Spain has also recently reinstated restrictions for the Romanian migrants after allowing free circulation of labour in January 2009, thus becoming the 11th state limiting labour circulation for Romanians.

the legal period and then postponed return for some years, waiting for regularization to become possible.

While these gaps in migration policy led to the structuring of informal ties that would support mobility, they also made integration on the formal labour market difficult. As long as migrants remained undocumented they did not have equal opportunities to employment, to satisfactory labour conditions and benefits. Thus, many migrants remained what I could call *welcomed outsiders* for the Italian labour market. It was because of this that Marxist migration theories labelled immigrants as a new “reserve army” easily employed when economy is expanding and laid off in times of economic downfall⁴⁷. Although suggestive for the status of irregular migrants, this view may be rather extreme. As the current economic crises revealed, the economic demise did not lead to massive returns of Romanians but rather influenced remittances and savings patterns, consumption preferences or labour market participation⁴⁸. In and out migration definitely depends upon more factors than macro economic developments.

Informal networks and occupational mobility

As Massey, *et al.* say: “the greater the barriers to movement, the more important should network ties become in promoting migration”. Networks are not the primary cause of migration but, as the migration process develops, they may become the factors that contribute to its development⁴⁹. Migration ties are an important capital for labour market integration, influencing employment opportunities, sectors of activity and further mobility. Ambrosini notes however, that as useful as such networks may be, they also restrain occupational mobility of migrants; once employed for low skilled jobs, migrants can rarely reach a higher occupational status:

In Italy, network activism also explains immigrant movements throughout the country; the differential «successes» related to different national groups and immigrants concentration in some sectors which vary from town to town. [...] Paradoxically, their efficiency in some niches of the labour market can contribute to creating processes of closure and ethnic segregation. Filipinos, thanks to channels integrated with their ethnic networks, can easily find jobs within the domestic sector, but can rarely leave it. In a dull labour market, especially for immigrant supply, capacity to operate in a particular sector in connection with specific immigrants and employers is not easily extendible and transferable to other sectors⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ Castles and Kozack, 1985 in Avci and McDonald, 2000, pp. 195.

⁴⁸ SOROS-IASCI, *Maximizing the Development Impact of Migration*. Research Overview, Selected Findings, Case Study, <http://www.soros.ro/en/program_articol.php?articol=286> accessed at 10th of June 2011.

⁴⁹ Massey, 1993, pp. 460, 448.

⁵⁰ Ambrosini, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-69.

Employment of Romanian labour force developed within the same framework of informality. Family and friends' ties offered support for finding employment. As Table 2 shows, 31% of the returned migrants who worked in Italy state having been supported by relatives and 35% by Romanian friends. Other actors who contributed to their integration are also part of informal networks, while only 3% point out an organization as support partner. These data are consistent with the low number of contracts mediated by state actors, as I previously showed in this paper. Deprived of formal networks migrants built their own "social bridges" that cross borders and link supply with labour demand⁵¹.

Table 2. Actors supporting migrants' employment

Who helped you settle down (find a job) in the destination country?	% Returnees from Italy	% Returnees from all destination
Family, household members	16	11
Relatives	31	24
Friends from my country whom I already knew	35	33
Acquaintances I made while abroad	12	11
Citizens of the country where I worked	6	6
The organization which helped	3	9
Members of my ethnic community	2	4
Citizens from my country	13	7
Employer	2	4
No one helped me	10	10
Other	1	3
Total (multiple response question; % of cases)	130	121

Source: CURS, 2005.

Reading example (multiple response question ; %: of cases) 16% of the Romanians who returned from Italy and 11% of all returnees were supported by family and household members in the settlement process.

Some concluding remarks and research perspectives

The present article considers labour market mobility of Romanian migrants relying, for the most part, on the CURS migration survey that was conducted before the EU accession date. While this perspective may be useful considering the fact that most Romanian migrants arrived in Italy years before the accession, it also fails to portray eventual changes in migrants' occupational status or labour market mobility after 2007. Given the fact that Italy maintains the transition period, there have probably been no significant changes in terms of human capital selectivity in

⁵¹ Portes, 1995 *apud* Ambrosini, 2001, pp. 66.

the last 4 years. However, it would be interesting to examine if, gradually, Romanian migrants will start to be positively selected, as it happens with migrants from old EU member states working in Italy.

The study explored Romanian migration flows to Italy and investigated occupational mobility by revealing policy gaps and migrants' response to the legislative changes. I concluded that Romanian migrants in Italy were mostly employed in the secondary sector and that, through lack of institutional support, the development of informal networks took over the task of supporting integration on the labour market. The same ties that linked labour supply and demand might also have contributed to the increase in the number of Romanians doing jobs requiring skills inferior to their capabilities. Informal networks can facilitate entry into the labour market in specific occupational sectors such as construction, agriculture, cleaning or the care sector, but they can do little to support upward occupational mobility. I also noted that migration from home to host country had been a win-win process since it reduced unemployment pressure in home communities while contributing to host country's economy. The majority of Romanians in Italy were either active on the labour market or were active job seekers with short periods of inactivity. Lastly, I noted that when migrants return to Romania, they were less likely to get a job as compared to the pre-migration period. While many of the jobless returnees planned to return abroad, there is little information about the professional prospects of those intending to stay in the country. If this aspect will not be explicitly targeted by the policy making process, it might represent one of the losses of the migration process especially if the number of returnees will increase during the current economic crisis.

I close this paper noting three subject areas that would require further research as regards economic migration of Romanians and occupational mobility:

- *Skill transferability.* Presently there are insufficient data as regards the skill selectivity of migrants and policies' impact on this issue. When going abroad, the transfer of capabilities between Romania and Italy is unequal. At return there are also divergences between the skills acquired abroad and the demand shaping the Romanian labour market. More research efforts should be directed into understanding what the losses and gains are of the present unequal transfer of skills and to assessing how the occupational changes between the two migration spaces could be used for the benefit of individual migrants and subject countries.

- *Labour market integration of returned migrants.* Presently, more than 2.500.000 people are abroad. Some of them will return while others will remain mobile for as long as possible or necessary. As regards those who return, studies need to be conducted so as to assess how best to encourage the use of the skills accumulated abroad for the benefit of both migrants and the Romanian economy. In lack of targeted employment policies, integration on the labour market and consistency between skills and the job opportunities will probably be difficult, especially for

those returning to relatively isolated rural communities where there is little chance of employment.

- *Assessing irregular migration and its impact on labour market integration* remains a must. There is no recent estimation of the number of undocumented Romanian labour migrants in Italy. It is probably safe to say that a decrease has been registered after the accession. However, considering the current economic crises the number of irregulars might have increased again. Undocumented migrants are *welcomed outsiders* on the labour market in host countries: they are gladly employed by economic actors but given few opportunities for upward mobility and integration. The absence of documents hinders access to equal opportunities, rights and governmental support. It also enhances vulnerabilities of the pension and social security systems in the home country since these migrants are non contributors.

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Databases

- CURS, Survey conducted by the Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS) in March 2005 on a sample of 1.199, *Romanian migrants who were in Romania at the moment of the interview*, 2005.
- IMAS, Omnibus survey conducted by the Institute for Market Research and Polls (IMAS) in November-December 2011 on nationwide representative samples of 1.040 respondents. Migrants sub-sample N=229, 2010.
- IMAS, Omnibus surveys conducted by IMAS in January- March 2011. Nationwide representative samples of 1.040 respondents. Migrants sub-sample N=333, 2011a.

IMAS, Omnibus survey conducted by IMAS in April 2011. Nationwide representative sample of 1040 respondents, 2011b.

ASG-MMT, Survey conducted by Metro Media Transilvania for the Agency for Governmental Strategies in November-December 2007, Sample size: 1.066 *Romanians residing in Italy at the moment of interview*, 2007.

Weblinks

Migration census 2001, <<http://sites.google.com/site/dumitrusandu/bazededate>>.

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<<http://www.mipex.eu/italy>>.

Șomajul în rândul românilor din Spania a ajuns la 42%. <<http://www.ziare.com/diaspora/romani-spania/somajul-in-randul-romanilor-din-spania-a-ajuns-la-42-la-suta-1130442>>, accessed on 29 Octombrie 2011.

Appendix

Table A1. Occupation before migration, at destination, and at return

	Before migration		At destination**		At return	
	All %	Italy*%	All %	Italy%	All %	Italy%
Legislator, senior official and manager	2	4	0	0	4	4
Professional	5	4	2	0	4	3
Technician and associate professional	4	4	1	0	2	2
Clerk	3	4	1	1	2	2
Service worker or shop and market sales worker	10	12	14	14	8	7
Skilled agricultural or fisheries worker	2	1	6	7	1	0
Craft or related trades worker	1	1	2	1	1	0
Plant or machine operators assembler	25	20	17	17	10	4
Unskilled worker	6	3	26	27	3	5
Agriculture	6	8	-	-	9	9
Unskilled agriculture worker	-	-	21	19	-	-
Housekeeper	-	-	-	-	6	8
Armed forces	1	1	0	0	0	0
Student	6	3	1	0	4	1
Unemployed	19	23	0	1	32	42
Retired	3	3	0	0	5	5
Other	9	12	19	26	10	9
Total	100	100	110	114	100	100

Source: CURS, 2005.

Note. All sample database: N=1199; Italy database: N=308 Reading example: 42% of those who worked in Italy were unemployed at the time of the interview.

* the sample of migrants who worked in Italy included the individuals who had only one migration experience and those with more migration experiences whose last job abroad was in Italy; migrants who left for Italy but later had work experiences in different countries were excluded; this reporting choice was necessary because the question about the occupation abroad referred to the most recent occupation.

** multiple response question; % of cases 0% cells represent cells with less than 0.5%. Null cells are marked with “-“.

Table A2. Employment sector before migration, at destination, and at return

	Before migration		At destination***		At return	
	All %	Italy*%	All %	Italy%	All %	Italy%
Agriculture, hunting and forestry	10	10	28	26	10	9
Fishing	-	-	0	0	-	-
Mining and quarrying	1	-	0	0	0	0
Manufacturing	4	3	3	2	3	1
Electricity, gas and water supply	2	3	2	1	1	1
Construction	18	14	36	38	8	6
Wholesale and retail trade	7	9	4	2	9	5
Hotels and restaurant business	3	2	12	11	1	2
Transport, storage and communications	4	5	4	3	3	2
Financial services	1	2	-	-	0	1
Real estate, renting and business activities	0	0	-	-	0	-
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	3	4	1	1	3	4
Education	4	4	1		2	3
Health and social work	2	4	2	3	2	3
Other community, social or personal service activities	0	-	0	1	0	-
Private households with employed persons	0	0	15	25	1	0
Extraterritorial organization	-	-	0	1	0	-
I was not employed	27	29	-	-	-	-
Other	13	10	7	5	9	9
NC, doesn't work**	-	-	-	-	48	56
Total	100	100	115	119	100	100

Source: CURS, 2005

Note. All sample database: N=1199; Italy database: N=308;

Reading example: 48% of those who worked abroad did not have a job at the time of the interview; *the sample of migrants who worked in Italy included the individuals who had only one migration experience and those with more migration experiences whose last job abroad was in Italy; migrants who left for Italy but later had work experiences in different countries were excluded; this reporting choice was necessary because the question about the sector of activity referred the most recent travel abroad.

** "NC, doesn't work" includes unemployed people, pensioners, students and housekeepers

*** multiple response question; % of cases

0% cells represent cells with less than 0.5%. Null cells are marked with "--"

