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## Article

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## The Labor Market from Romania from the Perspective of Migration Phenomenon

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**Abstract** Population migration is a real phenomenon that has amplified over the last two decades and will continue to grow as major disparities between regions develop. There are many reasons that generate the trend of population movement. The reasons/motive that are frequently invoked are the conflictual situation related issues that primarily affect individual security, political and social fragility, economic instability with effects in all areas of activity, degradation of living conditions, and the high risk of terrorism in certain areas. The population migration is not necessarily a bad thing if we are looking through the perspective of chances it offers to both people and the economy as a whole, being also an important factor for the growth of national and international trade. But, the lack of some decisions to control this phenomenon creates long-term imbalances. These imbalances are already extremely visible in the Romanian labor market. Numerous work field have a major staff lack and are need of solutions for doing business under normal conditions. Therefore, the present paper aims at highlighting the main features of the labor market, the country's risks, as well as identifying viable solutions for reducing economic and social imbalances.

**Key words** Staff shortage, population migration, country risks, labor market, lack of staff

**JEL Codes:** J21, J61

### 1. Introduction

The population migration is not a novelty for the states of the world, the phenomenon being practically from the emergence of people who have moved constantly from one area to another either from the need to survive or in the search for the best living conditions.

Some authors (Pop, 2013) believe that *"migration has always existed, beginning with the great Greek colonization and Roman conquests, to the Roman empires, to the great migrations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continues nowadays, being a challenge that is requiring an integrated management by all the states of the world."*

In the current socio-economic and especially political context, the migration phenomenon has seen new dimensions, developing with an unprecedented pace. Europe has been - and still is - assaulted by waves of immigrants, creating in this way a discrepancy between the capacity of responsiveness and resolution of this issue of European countries and the intensity of the phenomenon.

There are two major categories of factors that have contributed to the exponential growth of migration over the past two decades: *reactive factors*, or a reaction of the population under different pressures and *proactive factors*, which highlight the desire of people to go to another area to meet the objectives.

*The main reactive factors* that contributed to the amplification of migration are represented by: *the conflict situation that endangers the individual's security*, especially in the areas of the Middle East; *the high risk of terrorism* that has become a problem today; *political and social fragility* that influences investor decisions; *economic instability and degradation of living conditions*, some areas are being characterized by extreme poverty; *the lack of a correlation between the education system and the labor market* in the sense of the emergence or disappearance of specializations or crafts and the impossibility of finding a job based on vocational training.

Among the *proactive factors* we can include: *the phenomenon of globalization*, with all its influences on legislative relaxation and the elimination or reduction of barriers for border movement of goods and services, capitals and human resources; *the unprecedented development of infrastructure and transport*, as well as the communications sector; *implementing interstate agreements and inclusion policies*; *the development of inter-institutional cooperation mechanisms*, or the *dynamics of economic and social life*.

In corroborating the above considerations, we understand the reasons why *international migration*, whether voluntary or forced, has become an extremely important part of global existence, as mentioned in various official documents for monitoring migration flows and social inclusion.

Although the need for integrated management is felt globally and has become an objective of national migration strategies, the evolution of population movement indicators shows that some countries have failed to control the phenomenon and are currently facing with various imbalances in economic and social terms.

Unfortunately, Romania is a negative example when we talk about an efficient migration management, especially if we are making references to the analysis of economic indicators on the labor market. All activity sectors front on a major workforce deficit and employers complain that they do not find employees for their necessity and always have vacant jobs. Given that

statistics show a high degree of aging population and the analysts demonstrate potential difficulties creating the general budget for long-term payment of pensions, labor migration has become a challenge for our country. This is why we consider that the issue of labor migration needs to be approached two-dimensionally, both from the export perspective and from the perspective of labor force import for activity sectors with increased labor deficit.

This paper aims at highlighting the main features of labor market in the current economic context, the main country risks generated by labor export and import, and also tries to identify some viable solutions for reducing the economic and social imbalances, especially for the activity areas where labor migration effects are more and more significant.

The main objectives of the paper are:

- establishing the deployment framework and identifying the causes of population displacement from one area to another;
- observing the evolution of the migration phenomenon at international level and fitting into the national specificity;
- analysing and interpreting of statistical indicators on the labor market in Romania;
- identifying of the main risk factors in terms of export and import of labor;
- developing proposals to reduce staff deficit and restore balance in the market.

### 1.1. The migration phenomenon on the international context

International population migration is not a novelty. The effects of this phenomenon are known, analyzed and debated frequently in the scientific manifestations, in the attempt of specialists to produce forecasts on imbalances that can occur in economic and social terms. Studies represent an important starting point for creating a multidimensional general picture as well as for developing immigrant integration policies in all areas of activity.

At international level, population migration has been particularly developed after 2011, resulted from the intensification of conflict situation in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as other countries in the Middle East or North Africa. A recent study by Coface Company - an expert in commercial risk assessment- and a world leader in credit insurance - demonstrates that the country risk generated by the conflictual situation doubled between 2007-2015<sup>1</sup>, and is an upward trend.<sup>2</sup>

For Europe, the migratory flow increase has become a real fact that involves great efforts to identify the best solutions, an additional resources allocation, a concern about new situations generated by terrorism, a fear that terrorism will have new valences and states do not yet have the necessary force for prevention and combat. Looking from another direction, from the affected areas to Europe, population relocation is the only remaining solution for survival and for the improvement of living conditions.

The possibility to go to another country and to establish residence on its territory is a universal right of peoples, governed by international normative acts. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 10, 1948) establish in Article 13, Paragraph 1, that *"everyone has the right to move freely and to choose their place of residence within the borders of a State"* and within paragraph 2 the fact that *"every person has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."*

International jurisprudence is complemented by different Treaties or Directives developed on the reciprocity principle at the level of the unions of states. For example, at the EU level, states have implicitly assumed and encouraged migration under the European Union's Fundamental Charter - Title IV on the free movement of persons, services and capital. Freedom of movement at the border is the most important factor that has stimulated the acceleration of the migration phenomenon. This removal of displacement barriers is corroborated with other factors such as transport networks development, falling prices in this sector and the development of telecommunication networks that have facilitated the exchange of information and impressions about other states.

There are supporters of the idea that, as a rule, population movement from one area to another implies a flow of about 200 million people. Once with the opening of borders and with the reduction of legislative restrictions, the number of migrants worldwide has doubled, most of them choosing the developed world. It is appreciated that many migrants live in North America, Europe and Asia.

Over the past three years, there has been a general upward trend in EU migration. Macroeconomic analysts appreciate the increase in migratory flows by direct reporting to the economic prosperity and political stability of the European Union. The EUROSTAT reports show that, at least between 2013 and 2015, the increase of the people's number who has immigrated to one of the EU Member States is progressive.

The table below shows that the number of people who have immigrated to one of the EU Member States is more than doubled in 2015 compared to 2013. This source indicates that about 3 million people chose to leave the European Union.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.coface.ro/Stiri-Publicatii/Stiri/Noul-indice-de-risc-politic-Coface-pentru-159-de-tari>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.coface.ro/Stiri-Publicatii/Stiri/Riscuri-la-nivel-de-tara-si-de-sectoare-in-intreaga-lume>

Therefore, we conclude that the European Union area remains an extremely attractive area for people who decide to leave their country of origin, in whole or in part.

Table 1. The evolution of immigrants' number in the European Union

Countries of European Union	2013 <sup>3</sup> (thousands)	2014 <sup>4</sup> (thousands)	2015 <sup>5</sup> (thousands)	Significant increases
Belgium	120.1	123.6	146.6	
Bulgaria	18.6	26.7	25.2	
Czech Republic	30.2	29.9	29.6	
Denmark	60.3	68.4	78.5	
Germany	692.7	884.9	1543.8	
Estonia	4.1	3.9	15.4	
Ireland	59.3	67.4	76.9	
Greece	57.9	59.1	64.4	
Spain	280.7	305.4	342.1	
France	332.6	339.9	363.9	
Croatia	10.3	10.6	11.7	
Italy	307.4	227.6	280.1	
Cyprus	13.1	9.1	15.2	
Latvia	8.3	10.3	9.5	
Lithuania	22.1	24.3	22.1	
Luxembourg	21.1	22.4	23.8	
Hungary	38.9	54.6	58.3	
Malta	8.4	8.9	12.8	
Netherlands	129.4	145.3	166.9	
Austria	101.8	116.3	166.3	
Poland	220.3	222.3	218.1	
Portugal	17.5	19.5	29.9	
Romania	153.6	136.1	132.8	
Slovenia	13.8	13.8	15.4	
Slovakia	5.1	5.3	7.0	
Finland	32	31.5	28.7	
Sweden	115.8	126.9	134.2	
The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	526.1	632	631.5	
<b>TOTAL IMIGRANTS</b>	<b>3401.5</b>	<b>3726</b>	<b>4650.7</b>	

Source: EUROSTAT database, available online at [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr\\_imm1ctz&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_imm1ctz&lang=en)

Data in the table above is also important for highlighting another phenomenon: it is noted that the most significant increase in the number of immigrants is recorded in the member countries of the *Schengen* area.

We note that: *Germany* - whose growth is the most significant and is mainly due to policies to receive refugees from conflict zones (increase over 100% from 2013 to 2015); *Austria* - over 60% growth for the same interval; *Hungary* is close enough to double the immigrants number; *Spain* - remains attractive and gains 22%; *Belgium* - 22% - growth due to the strategic importance of the country towards the European Union.

Practically, *migration is a result of the comparative analysis of the political, economic, social and environmental factors in the country of origin with the country of destination*. The literature (Predonu and Orheian, 2013) noted that a migratory flow is quite complex, having multiple valences and being made up of a series of decisions, from the decision to emigrate to the decision to stay in the host country or return home, as shown in the figure 1.

<sup>3</sup> [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr\\_imm1ctz&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_imm1ctz&lang=en)

<sup>4</sup> [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr\\_imm1ctz&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_imm1ctz&lang=en)

<sup>5</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration\\_and\\_migrant\\_population\\_statistics/ro#Fluxuri\\_migratorii](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics/ro#Fluxuri_migratorii)



There are a number of factors that have contributed to this explosion of labor export. The economic and financial crisis of 2008-2009 led to the implementation of highly repressive measures for employees, both in the public and private systems. The Romanian business environment has been characterized only in terms of negative aspects such as: job losses due to massive restructuring; blocking posts in the public sector; the reduction of wages, bonuses and other salary rights by Law 118/2010 on some measures necessary to restore budgetary balance; the removal of financial incentives (e.g. tickets for food, telephones, transportation settlement etc.).

The results generated by various researches on the emigration issue show us worrying figures. A study conducted in 2015 by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy - IRES, accomplished for Journal of Culture and Strategic Thinking "SINTEZA" shows that "in almost half of the Romanian families there is at least one person left abroad". Countries of residence are generally Italy, Spain, Germany, and more recently the United Kingdom.

In this context, we can appreciate that labor migration generates economic and social imbalances, even if the figures demonstrate that the money sent abroad by foreign workers exceeds the level of foreign direct investments, therefore it represents a significant contribution for funds on the Romanian market. However, we can assume that if figures continue to grow (and there are all prerequisites for this to happen), Romania will pass from labor shortages, to a real human resource crisis.

## 2. Literature review

The National Immigration Strategy for 2011-2014 and the current 2015-2018 Strategy highlight that "*migration is a process to be managed and not a problem that needs to be resolved.*" Given the continuity and the amplification of the situation, it is obvious that the management process is one with a high degree of complexity.

Interestingly, more and more authors are analyzing the migration phenomenon in terms of challenges and the opportunities it offers. Socol (2015) appreciates that the attitude of countries towards this phenomenon will be directly and decisively reflected on how to shape Europe's future. The author, though skeptical that this will happen, highlights that if migration is smartly approached, Europe will be able to gain multiple benefits. Integration of immigrants is an impetus for long-term economic development. Germany is already trying to do this through the integrating policy of refugees and vulnerable groups. Opening borders for this category of people, most of them young people and children, can help the state cope with the demographic challenges of aging populations. Thinking is a strategic one and it is a challenge for other states, including Romania.

## 3. Methodology of research

The research carried out for this paper consists of two stages: *documentary research* and *qualitative study on the evolution of the labor market* from the point of view of labor migration.

- *documentary research*, was realized through extensive documentation from the literature in an attempt to collect the most relevant information on the movement of population from one area to another. The main reasons why people choose to leave their origin country were analyzed in accordance with the risks of imbalances in economic and social terms. In this respect, various sources of information available in electronic or printed form were studied (studies, research reports, activity reports of governmental and non-governmental institutions, statistics elaborated by institutions responsible for monitoring economic and social phenomena, as well as normative acts in force or treaties ratified by our country). The overall aim of this documentation is to highlight the risks of a strong labor shortage in various activity sectors that are important for the sustainable growth of the Romanian economy and to develop proposals for restoring the balance on the labor market.

- *a qualitative study* on the labor market evolution from the perspective of labor migration was made by analyzing the impact of labor shortages in sectors such as agriculture, construction, medical services, IT. The purpose of this study is to highlight the extremely dangerous situation in Romania's labor market. In the next ten years, the sectors of activity in which we currently find staff shortages will be heavily affected by this phenomenon, the quality of services will be greatly diminished, and the less developed areas of the country will be characterized by extreme poverty. Considering the massive emigration of highly qualified and unqualified personnel, we believe that attention should be directed to people entering Romania. Therefore, urgent measures are needed to integrate immigrants into the labor market to reduce the deficit.

## 4. Data analysis and statistical indicators on labor migration

Public statistics indicate that most Romanians working abroad work in areas such as *construction, vulnerable people care, transport, agriculture, public health, public nutrition and health.*

It is sad that these sectors of activity have many difficulties related to the labor shortage. Until 2010, we blamed the economic instability and the financial crisis. But, the financial crisis has gone for ten years and the labor market is far from being balanced. Alexandra Pele (2014), analyzing the statistical data of the National Institute of Statistics (INS), reported

that between 1989 and 2012 Romania's stable population decreased by more than 3.1 million inhabitants, most of them choosing to go to countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain, as shown in the map below.

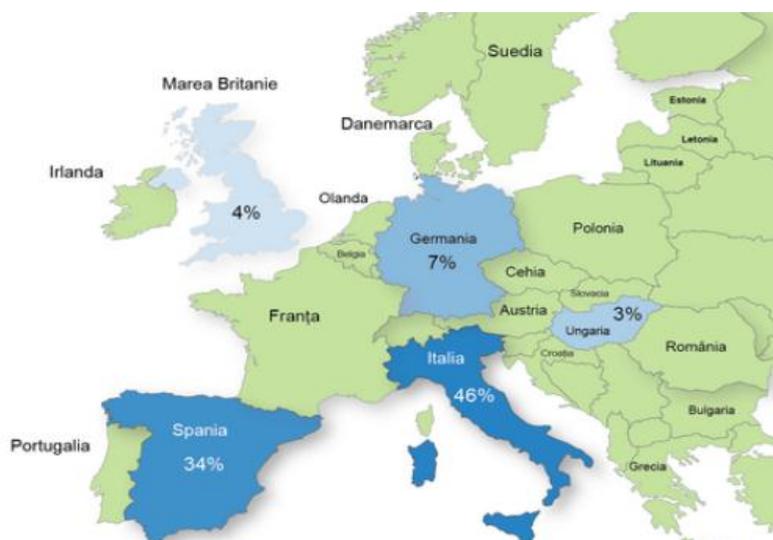


Figure 2. Map of the countries where most Romanians emigrated

**Source:** Pele A. 2014. *Câți români au plecat din țară în ultimii 25 de ani*, published in *Gândul Journal*<sup>6</sup>

In this context, we are not surprised by the constant increase on the vacancy rate in the 2014-2017 periods, even though in the 3rd semester of 2017 there is a slight decrease trend, as the INS states.

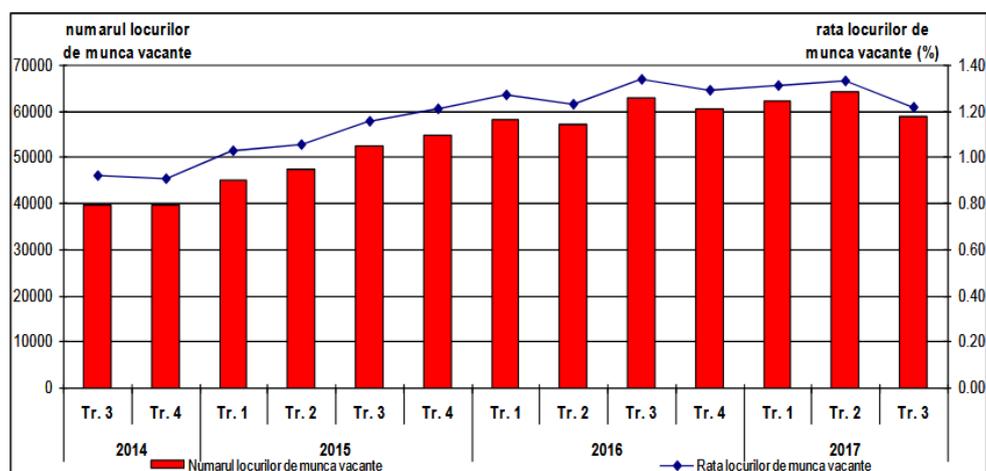


Figure 3. Rate and number of vacancies in trim. III 2014-2017

**Source:** National Institute of Statistics, report of the vacancies number evolution<sup>7</sup>

#### 4.1. Labor market in Romania from the perspective of migration. Risk factors for Romania

The workforce shortage for some sectors of activity is also recognized at the governmental level. In a recent interview given by the Labor Minister for a press agency, it is noted that the most significant labor shortage is found in IT, medicine, agriculture and construction.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.gandul.info/financiar/harta-emigratiei-cati-romani-au-plecat-din-tara-in-ultimii-25-de-ani-topul-destinatiilor-preferate-12334771>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com\\_presa/com\\_pdf/lmvac\\_trim3r17.pdf](http://www.insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com_presa/com_pdf/lmvac_trim3r17.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Interviu Agerpres 27 noiembrie 2017.

The main risk factor for Romania is the *emigration of the young population*. With an increased aging rate, the negative effects will be visible by *modifying the size and structure of the workforce*. Some authors have signaled this risk factor and highlighted the importance of raising the employment rate of the young population on the Romanian labor market (Isăilă and Predonu, 2015). This source appreciates the increase of this important indicator by accomplishing the following specific labor market conditions. Thus, the authors highlighted: the importance of promotion and remuneration based on competitiveness principles; enhancing social dialogue and encouraging economic agents to promote the idea of wage bargaining in the private environment; increasing the access degree to specialization programs and continuous professional training adapted to the current requirements and to the future of the labor market; increasing quality standards for social security, occupational risk coverage and unemployment insurance.

This risk factor is also mentioned in other publications. Nicolae (2009), analyzing the labor market from a migration perspective, pointing out that the imbalances are precisely influenced by the *"decline of the active population (direct loss and effects over time, due to the imbalance of age structures and as a result of the migration of the young population)"*.

The literature highlights the complexity of this indicator linked to the change in the workforce size and structure. It is appreciated that the majority of elderly population have an activity rate decrease. Experts believe that, if no action is taken to keep young people in the country, raise the elderly's activity rate, or attract other young people to compensate for their departure, the most devastating effects will only be felt after 2020.

For Romania, we also identify the *exodus of qualified staff* as a risk factor. "Brain migration" will put the Romanian labor market into difficulty. Competitive salaries and high-standard working conditions are the main reasons why staff such as well-trained doctors, programmers or engineers chooses to work in other countries. Some authors (Sinescu and Trofin, 2009) believe that migration, in particular, "brain migration" has positive effects on the economy of the destination countries. The question that arises in this context is *"what does the country of origin compensate for?"*

Perhaps it is time to turn our attention to the opportunities to import labor, including refugees' integration, whom if we have received, we also offer them the possibility of achieving a better standard of living. Pop (2014) highlights that through the immigrant integration measures undertaken by our country are included: support for education and training, language learning courses and preparatory actions to facilitate access to the labor market. Therefore, there are legislative levers and international support. In order to strengthen these words, we add the statement of another two authors (Sinescu and Trofin, 2009) who, in the cited paper, emphasized that "the opponents of migration forget too easily that in some countries half of the economic development is due to the foreign working hand."

## 5. Conclusions and proposals on reducing staff shortages and restoring balance on the Romanian labor market

In the attempt to efficiently manage the labor migration phenomenon, most states have taken specific measures or developed cross-border cooperation, based on the principle of reciprocity and non-discrimination. And our country is making efforts in this respect, but internally, the situation is far from being conducive to development and sustainability.

Romania has failed to correlate the labor market with the education system and to implement a coherent strategy to reduce labor shortages in areas such as IT, construction, public health care or agriculture. From the point of view of this imbalance, reducing labor migration would result in an increase in the unemployment rate and occurrence of economic turmoil. Remember that the money sent to the country by the employees that work in a foreign country exceeds the volume of foreign direct investment.

At the same time, the lack of programs to reduce the labor migration and help at least the areas mentioned above will further encourage migration in these sectors. High labor force exports can generate imbalances in the economic and social environment, if we look through the workforce size and structure. The young employees migration will be directly reflected in the difficulty of creating the budget needed to pay pensions and social security. If we aren't able to establish the balanced, the phenomenon can create significant gaps, which will also affect the remaining employees in the country, by increasing the fiscal pressure on the accomplished revenues.

It is interesting to look at this picture as a whole:

- the IT and health care are sectors where highly qualified, specialized and highly skilled workforce is dominated. This training and improvement of our employees costs us a lot and the investment recovery often non-existent. Salaries and working conditions far exceed the level in our country;
- the other two sectors, agriculture and construction, highlight the need for unskilled labor. It is increasingly difficult to find people who know the profession and have availability. Employees in construction and agriculture have chosen either building sites in Germany or the UK, for higher salaries and safer working conditions, or plantations in Greece, Spain or Italy. At present, it is often a real challenge to find professional electricians or plumbers.

In recent years, Romania's economic situation has been progressing, but without a coherent labor market recovery strategy, carefully pursued and monitored, so, we will find ourselves in a position to bear the repercussions. Competitive salaries remain the main reason for moving to another country.

Until we find the best macroeconomic solutions for keeping young people in the country, we could reduce labor shortages in sectors such as agriculture and construction by importing workers. We can even use temporary import until these sectors are enough developed and will become attractive for Romanians who choose to go abroad. There are less-favored areas in Asia, where the main activity is in agriculture, wages are much lower and working conditions are extremely heavy. These workers can represent a solution for Romania, even seasonally.

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