

ADAPTATION STRATEGIES OF THE ELDERLY MIGRANTS IN DESTINATION COUNTRIES – A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

A d r i a n L u c i a n L u p u *

Abstract

Romania faced four main emigration waves so far, and most Romanian immigrants went to western European countries (Ulrich *et al.*, 2011). The phenomenon deeply affects the Romanian society and generates unbalances in the demographic structure and on the labor market, implicitly, (Sandu, 2005, 2006, 2009; Bodvarsson, and Van Den Berg, 2009). For instance, there are localities especially in rural areas where over 50% of the population migrated and formed compact groups in various sites in destination countries. This has several negative effects: ageing of population (Black and Sward, 2009), the decrease in active work force, family structure dysfunctions, increased dependency on social services, etc (Bolzman *et al.*, 2006). The objectives of the study are as follows: 1. Identifying migration models and patterns specific to persons over 60; and 2. Identifying the adaptation strategies used in the countries of arrival and the resources mobilized within the adaptation process. The method used in this study is based on a grounded-theory type of approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Creswell, 2007) and it involved the application of interviews to persons over 60 who went through a migration experience.

Key words: *adaptation strategies, elderly migrants, social life, social services, migration patterns*

Résumé

La Roumanie s'est confrontée avec quatre vagues de migration jusqu'à présent, et la majorité des immigrants roumains ont choisi les pays de l'ouest de l'Europe (Ulrich *et al.*, 2011). Le phénomène a affecté considérablement la société roumaine et il a généré des déséquilibres dans la structure démographique et sur le marché du travail, implicitement (Sandu, 2005, 2006, 2009; Bodvarsson et Van Den Berg, 2009). Par exemple, il y a des localités, surtout dans les zones rurales, où plus de 50% de la population a migré et a formé des groupes compacts dans de différentes localités des pays d'arrivée. Cela a produit plusieurs effets négatifs: le

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vieillessement de la population (Black et Sward, 2009), la baisse de la force de travail active, des dysfonctions dans la structure familiale, dépendance élevée des services sociaux, etc. (Bolzman *et al.*, 2006). Les objectifs de l'étude sont les suivants : 1. Identifier les modèles et les patterns spécifiques aux personnes âgées plus de 60 ans; and 2. Identifier les stratégies d'adaptation utilisées dans les pays d'arrivée et les ressources mobilisées pendant le processus d'adaptation. La méthode utilisée dans cette étude est basée sur une approche de type théorique reposant sur les faits (Strauss et Corbin, 1990; Creswell, 2007) et elle a inclus l'application des interviews à des personnes âgées plus de 60 ans qui ont passées par une expérience de migration.

Mots-clés: *stratégies d'adaptation, migrants âgés, vie social, services sociaux, schémas de migration*

Rezumat

Până în prezent, România s-a confruntat cu aproximativ 4 valuri principale de emigrație, iar cei mai mulți dintre cetățenii români s-au stabilit în țările din Europa de vest (Ulrich *et al.*, 2011). Fenomenul afectează profund societate românească, producând dezechilibre în structura demografică și, implicit, pe piața muncii (Sandu, 2005, 2006, 2009; Bodvarsson, and Van Den Berg, 2009). De exemplu, există, în special în mediul rural, localități din care au emigrat peste 50% din populație, formând grupuri compacte stabilite în diverse localități din țările de primire. Acest fapt a produs câteva efecte negative: îmbătrânirea populației (Black and Sward, 2009), scăderea participării la forța de muncă, disfuncții la nivelul structurii familiale, creșterea dependenței față de serviciile sociale, etc (Bolzman *et al.*, 2006). Obiectivele acestui studiu sunt: 1. Identificarea modelelor și paternurilor de migrație specifice persoanelor cu vârsta de peste 60 de ani; și 2. Identificarea strategiilor de adaptare în țările de primire și a resurselor mobilizate în procesul de adaptare. Metoda utilizată în acest studiu rezultă dintr-o abordare de tipul grounded-theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Creswell, 2007) și a presupus aplicarea unor interviuri persoanelor cu vârsta de peste 60 de ani care au avut o experiență de migrație.

Cuvinte cheie: *strategii de adaptare, migranti vârstnici, viață socială, servicii sociale, paternuri de migrație*

1. Introduction

Romania faced four main emigration waves so far, and most Romanian immigrants went to western European countries (Ulrich *et al.*, 2011). The phenomenon deeply affects the Romanian society and generates unbalances in the demographic structure and on the labor market, implicitly, (Sandu, 2005, 2006, 2009; Bodvarsson, and Van Den Berg, 2009). For instance, there are localities especially in rural areas where over 50% of the population migrated and formed compact groups in various sites in destination countries. This has several negative effects: ageing of population (Black and Sward, 2009), the decrease in active work force, family structure dysfunctions, increased dependency on social services, etc (Bolzman *et al.*, 2006).

Research shows that the main reasons for Romanians' migration are lack of jobs and low level of wages, thus confirming various theories (Potot, 2003; Sandu, 2005; Bodvarsson and Van Den Berg, 2009). Job insecurity, the impossibility to ensure children a decent future, low living standard, precarious housing, etc. adds to this. In many cases, the decision to migrate is not individual, but taken within the family (Boccagni, 2015), and this projects a secure future for children as a central concern (Ambrosini, 2015; Bolibar et al. 2015).

After having stable jobs in the host country, immigrants from the first waves eased the migration of other family members (elderly included), but there are sufficient cases of elderly family members left alone.

The objectives of the study are as follows: 1. Identifying migration models and patterns specific to persons over 60; and 2. Identifying the adaptation strategies used in the countries of arrival and the resources mobilized within the adaptation process.

In this study, I designed an analysis framework that includes 3 situations/patterns specific to elderly migrants from Romania:

1. The elderly person is settled in Romania, in a rural or urban area, he or she has children settled abroad and he or she lives with them for brief periods;
2. The elderly person is settled in Romania, in a rural or urban area, he or she has children settled abroad, migrates to work abroad for brief periods, but not in the country where children are settled;
3. The elderly person is settled in Romania, in a rural or urban area, has children settled in Romania, and migrates to work abroad for brief periods.

To attain the aforementioned objectives, I formulated the following research questions: 1. What are the formal and informal strategies used by the different groups of Romanian migrants to fulfill their welfare needs? And 2. What is the role of Romanian elderly migrants in the provision of informal, voluntary welfare provisions in the country of origin and at the destination?

2. Method

The method used in this study is based on a grounded-theory type of approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Creswell, 2007) and it involved the application of interviews to persons over 60 who went through a migration experience. To this end, I designed an interview guide that allows identifying of migrations models/ patterns specific to elderly migrants and outlining the experience of migrants throughout the phases of the migration process. Thirteen interviews were applied, and subjects were selected based on *snowball sampling*. Discussions with the research participants included the following topics: motivation for leaving abroad, organizing the departure, details on their stay abroad, the way they found a job, their experience at the workplace, adjustment to the workplace, communication with employers and coworkers, leisure time, relationship with the family, relationship with other Romanians abroad, accessing

various sources within that country (social services, assistance services provided by NGOs, help from family, relatives, or friends) to solve various problems, motivation and preparation for returning home, identification and description of daily-life issues (economic, medical, social, communicating with relatives who remained abroad, etc), and describing a normal day in respondents's life.

The selection of participants to research took into account the following criteria: 1. Inclusion criteria – the possibility of including the migrant's experience into one of the three afore-presented models/situations, sex, age, education, background, duration of stay abroad. 2. Exclusion criteria – settling abroad on an indefinite basis or permanently, staying abroad for less than three months, not being able to communicate due to medical dysfunctions.

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of research participants, the country of arrival, the duration of stay abroad, and the inclusion of migrant's profile into one of the migration models mentioned above.

Table 1. Demographics of the research participants

No.	Participant code	Gender	Age	Background	Education	Model	Total duration of stay abroad in years (approximation of)	Frequent destination
1	R1	m	60	u	10gr	3	5	Italy
2	R2	f	67	u	10gr	1	3	Italy
3	R3	f	67	u	11gr	2	12	Italy
4	R4	m	73	r	10gr	1	2	Germany
5	R5	f	62	u	8gr	3	6	Italy
6	R6	f	74	r	10gr	2	5	Spain
7	R7	f	65	u	col.	1	4	Italy
8	R8	m	66	u	col.	1	5	Italy
9	R9	m	67	r	v.sc.	2	2	Canada
10	R10	m	69	r	h. sc.	1	6	Germany
11	R11	f	73	u	col.	1	4	Italy
12	R12	f	62	u	col.	1	4	Italy
13	R13	m	67	u	v.sc.	1	2	France

Legend: R- participant code, f-female, m-male, u-urban, r-rural, 10gr-10 grades, col.- higher education, h. sc. – high school, v.sc.- vocational school

I collected the data after setting a meeting with the research participants. Before doing the interviews, participants were presented the study objectives, the interview guide, and the discussion topics. In addition, I asked the participants' consent for recoding the conversations. The research instruments were discussed and validated by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Political Sciences ("Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University Iasi).

3. Data analysis and findings

After transcribing the interviews I verified the accuracy of transcriptions. Data analysis included codifying the text and outlining certain categories that express the elements and phases of migration process and of migrants' experience in their space of arrival. Codification took into account the topics outlined in the interview guide (Şoitu & Bârsan, 2012; Şoitu *et al.*, 2013), the research questions, the discussion themes not included within the research instrument and the models specific to the research framework.

3.1. History and motivations of migration

Research participants have a vast migration experience. Some of them have begun their migration process right after the 1989 Revolution. The first departures concerned closer countries and they were more like an experiment (Sandu, 2005; Sun, 2012). History of travels confirms the existence of four migration waves pinpointed by scientific literature. According to research participants' reports, the main reasons for leaving abroad were the following: lack of money for decent standard of living, lack of jobs, wish for adventure, with to travel, etc. The reasons reported by respondents changed from one migration phase to another.

R2: I got my first job one week upon my arrival, concerning a 90-year-old male. I took care of him. It was not very hard work, but I just had to get used to some things I had never done before; however, I focused upon earning money and I did them. Three months after, the old man died and one month after his passing I resumed housekeeping in the old man's house, for his daughter and his granddaughter. The money I earned, I used them to pay rent (the old man's house). My next job was for a family with three children. They had a really big house and I would clean it every day (including the yard), I would wash, iron, and babysit the three children. After I returned home, I realized that it was not possible for me to just stop working, so I left again, but for shorter periods.

Therefore, whereas the first migration waves were motivated financially, the more recent migration waves have mostly social and psychological motivations (Krzyszowski and Mucha, 2014). They coincide with the transformation of migration process from the pioneering phase to the phase specific to reuniting family. Hence, some migrants no longer leave for working abroad, but for helping their children who live abroad. There are migrants who continue working to support themselves or to help their children (Baldassar *et al.* 2007). This situation is specific to rural women with low education level. Urban migrants with high education level travel mostly to be with their family.

For rural male and female migrants with low education level, the decision to migrate is not always motivated by the lack of survival means, but rather by the lack of money. Rural migrants benefit from enough resources to provide them

with a satisfying standard of living. They migrate to earn money, in order to renovate their houses or to purchase various goods (appliances, brown goods, etc). Urban migrants with low education level motivate their decision to migrate by lack of money and resources for decent living. Urban migrants do not have households that include agricultural activities, or pensions to ensure a decent life. Urban migrants with high education level travel abroad to spend more time with their children and grandchildren. However, some elderly respondents reported living abroad because their children took care of them.

3.2. Organizing departures and mobilizing resources

In the first phases of the process, most migrants knew nothing on the country of arrival. For organizing their departure, they contacted acquaintances or friends, to collect information on the country of arrival (Sandu, 2009). To cover the travel costs, migrants either used the money saved or they borrowed money from various sources. Urban migrants with high education level were better informed on the country of arrival and they had the financial resources to cover their travel and relocation costs. In their turn, the children of migrants within this category have high education level and they had been supported to apply for scholarships and stages abroad during their study years; they were also encouraged to settle abroad. Urban and rural migrants with low education level and extended experience built relationships with persons within the space of arrival and they managed to find seasonal jobs (Serban, 2011). The migrants within this category travelled more especially after the adherence of Romania to the EU. Travel costs are supported either by the children settled abroad, or out of their savings during previous stays abroad.

3.3. Stay abroad

Currently, the duration of stay abroad varies from 3 months to approximately one year, depending on the activities conducted by migrants in the space of arrival.

The main activities conducted abroad are the following:

1. Homecare for disabled and/ or senior citizens;
2. Cleaning and housekeeping services (houses, hotels, restaurants, etc);
3. Agricultural work;
4. Housekeeping and babysitting within the households of their children, settled abroad;
5. Tourism.

People who work outside the households of relatives settled abroad found a job either through the said relatives or through the connections they made in the country of arrival over time (friends, employers, etc). Most respondents do not work legally, but some of the migrants did manage to become residents at a certain point; they worked legally and they have benefits (Bolzman *et al.*, 2008). Most female migrants with a rural or urban background with low education level work in the homecare domain, for disabled and/ or senior citizens.

R5: ... I worked for two months for an 80-year-old man, a job I had found through a friend of mine. It was not very hard, because I basically had to keep him company and not much else. I was pretty satisfied. If I had such an opportunity again, I would accept such a job occasionally; but I would have to be sure of the job beforehand, not just go without being sure.

In most cases, such jobs do not imply a legal working agreement. Migrants reported that they found such jobs through relatives or friends. Such an arrangement ranges between 3 and 6 months, and the person providing these services lives with the beneficiary and/or the beneficiary's family. Such a job usually requires teamwork. A migrant finds a job for another migrant and he replaces the first after period set before, thus ensuring job stability (Serban, 2011). Some migrants did report, however, not living with the person in their care. In this situation, a migrant can take care of up to three persons, but the work volume and the living costs during the stay increase significantly. Migrants who fall into this category also work in the field of cleaning or housekeeping in houses, hotels, or restaurants. Male rural migrants with low education level usually work in agriculture. Such jobs are provided to them by relatives or friends, but respondents also report being offered such jobs in railways stations, markets, or parks (for Italy or Spain). The length of such jobs varies (by seasons specific to agricultural work).

3.4. Job-specific issues (for models 2 and 3)

This section includes an analysis of migrant-specific issues, included in models 2 and 3 mentioned in the introduction. Migrants who live with their families do not perceive their activities within the family as a problem. The main issues reported by migrants at their workplace are varied, depending on the type of job. In this sense, the following issues were reported: work schedule, failure to communicate effectively with the employer and the coworkers, work conditions, discrimination, failure to pay wages in time, job uncertainty, conflicting situations with employers and coworkers, extra hours paid as regular hours.

Work schedule is an issue for all categories of migrants. The most affected ones are the migrants working as caregivers for senior citizens and disabled people. All research participants working in this field mentioned that the structure of work schedule varies by the needs of the person in their care. In most cases, migrants did not benefit from leave days during a contract between 3 and 6 months and they did not benefit from extra hours paid, implicitly. Discrimination, job uncertainty, or conflicts with employers are not issues for migrants who work in this field (Bloch *et al.*, 2014). Work specifics are the issue for this category of migrants, not because of the efforts, but because of the responsibility for the person in their care.

The issues evoked by persons working in agriculture and in the field of housekeeping or cleaning in houses, hotels, or other spaces were as follows:

working schedule, job uncertainty, discrimination, conflicts with employers and coworkers, and extra hours paid as regular hours. Job uncertainty represents an issue especially for persons who work in agriculture (Sandu, 2006; Black and Sward, 2009).

R10: At the beginning, things were always tense because we were concerned about... we were afraid that authorities might get us, mostly given that we had no papers; so at the beginning I was not able to find a stable job... I hardly knew anybody and I was away from home.

R4: ... they would come and they would see me resting a bit, they would make me go back to work, claiming that it had not been properly done. I was not allowed to rest, I was not allowed to talk, and I was not allowed to get out anywhere. I was simply a slave, always available, 24/7, I had no freedom; in other words, I was in a prison where I had to work my ear off.

However, some migrants did sign working agreements for up to 3 years. In these situations, migrants were respected all rights, and the only issues they complained of was job specifics. The migrants who worked in this field based on a legal contract did not access or require social services either because they were not aware of the country's legislation, or because most of them did not wish to settle definitely in that country. In addition, quite a few respondents reported that health issues mad them lose their job and forced them to return home. However, there is a difference between the situation of persons who work in agriculture and the one of persons who take care of disabled or older persons, because those of the second category benefitted from consistent help from the employer when they had health issues. Situations were reported when, though the persons had no legal contract, the employer paid for all medical services when the person got sick.

3.5. Social life of the migrants

The consistency and content of migrants' social life varies by their classification into the three aforementioned models and by the specifics of activities conducted by them in the countries of arrival. The elements making up the image of migrants' social life refer to the nature and frequency of their interactions or/and activities within their free time. In addition, the nature and consistency of social life represent a measure of psychological costs involved by the migration experience. The lack of contact with the family, friends, or relatives amplifies the psychological costs of a migrant (Boccagni, 2015). A consistent social life should compensate for the negative effects generated by workplace experience, because they represent an important element of migrants' adjustment strategies in the space of arrivals. The essential factors that influence the social life of a migrant are: number of migrants and duration of stay in the space of arrival, speaking the country's language, keeping contact with the family,

relatives, or friends within that space, the existence of cultural or/and religious institutions to satisfy specific needs, and a migrant's wish to access the services of those institutions, cultural compatibility and citizens' desire of interacting with the migrants, etc. In this sense, there are significant differences between the situations of migrants in Italy and Spain (Serban, 2011), where there are many Romanian migrants, compared to that of migrants in Germany, France, or Canada.

In order to highlight the image of migrants' social life, in the interviews I used discussion topics related to communication with family, relatives, or friends, to activities conducted by migrants in their free time, and to accessing institutions in the country of arrival that provide cultural and religious services. In the following lines, I present an analysis of migrants' social life, structured depending of migrants' classification into one of the three models presented above.

The social life of migrants within model 1 (the elderly person is settled in Romania, in a rural or urban area, he or she has children settled abroad and he or she lives with them for brief periods) is consistent and it compensates for the psychological costs of the process. The contact with family, relatives, or friends represents a decisive element in this sense, and it compensates for the migrants being away. Whereas they may be caregivers in the houses of children settled abroad, most migrants interviewed report that experience like a long vacation.

What was your schedule while abroad?

R7: Well, you know, like a vacation! A vacation! To be honest, since I retired, at 8, 8 something, I was up! Now that I have been taking care of Mihaela, when she left, at 8, we would have breakfast! My husband woke up in the morning to walk the dog! He took one child to kindergarten and the other one to preschool. And then, if there was any need for cooking (every other day I would), I would and took lunch there, and then every Sunday we would go to church. Oana does not go that often, but that is not my business; I am going anyway! I may not understand the words, but I know the mass!

Often enough, they access cultural institutions (especially the ones providing religious services), they make excursions, they meet with friends, etc. The great number of migrants settled in Italy and Spain contributed to the development of standards that allow a consistent social life in these spaces.

The situation of migrants within model 2 (the elderly person is settled in Romania, in a rural or urban area, he or she has children settled abroad, migrates to work abroad for brief periods, but not in the country where children are settled) is significantly different. In this case, the lack of contact with family represents a decisive element. Furthermore, because of the working schedule and the efforts made, most migrants use their leisure time to rest. The situation of

migrants who work in Italy and Spain is better than that of people working elsewhere, because the former can meet their relatives or friends in their free time and they also have the chance of going to church. A better situation is also reported by caregivers for senior citizens and disabled people. In some cases, employers organized leisure activities for migrants, such as sight-seeing and excursions or they facilitated their access to various cultural events. The leisure time activities evoked by persons working in agriculture and housekeeping services in houses, hotels, or other spaces were the following: walks to the park, meetings with friends, shopping, and going to church.

The migrants whose profile matches model 3 (the elderly person is settled in Romania, in a rural or urban area, has children settled in Romania, and migrates to work abroad for brief periods) reported a similar experience to those within model 2.

4. Conclusions

Research participants are experienced in migration, built throughout periods ranging from 2 to 12 years. The decision to migrate was determined, in most cases, either by lack of money/means necessary for a decent life, or by the desire of being closer to the other members of the family, who settled abroad.

The outlining of the three models enabled a distinction between the factors influencing the experiences of research participants. In this sense, there are significant differences between the situations analyzed. The factors determining such differences are the presence or absence of family members (in this case, children) in the country of arrival and the migrant's education level.

Migration experience is also influenced by a series of additional factors, such as age, gender, profession, background, knowledge of local language, migrant's psychological profile, cultural compatibility, etc.

Thanks to linguistic compatibility, most migrants preferred Italy and Spain as destinations. Linguistic compatibility was an issue in the first phases of migration, but most research participants managed to learn the language of the countries in time. This enabled the migrants to adapt better to the new spaces.

It is worth highlighting that not even one research participant expressed a desire to settle abroad for good. Migrants with children settled abroad avoid discussing a possible scenario where they should move abroad for good, to benefit from care. Most migrants whose profile fits models 2 and 3 reported they would continue working abroad for as long as they were healthy enough. The decisive element in their decision, which makes their stay abroad bearable, is the short period of contracts (between 3 and 6 months). In some cases, migrants are also persuaded by the friendship they built with their employers. This is mostly the case for people who take care of children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities.

The persons whose profile matches models 2 and 3 reported that they sustained various types of abuse during their stay abroad (not being paid wages or extra hours, verbal abuse, discrimination, etc). None of the migrants reported it to authorities. The reasons invoked in this sense were as follows: fear of being repatriated, ignorance about their right, low level of the country's language, and fear of losing the job. Furthermore, no participant to the research accessed services destined to migrants in risk. Some of the migrants know that such institutions exist, but they cannot name them specifically, they do not know the types of services provided to migrants or how to access them. In the same sense, it must also be added that working agreements were usually short term. Migrants assume their status and they hope to have their issues solved, but the solution is yet to be determined.

When they are in the country, most research participants benefit from support from their relatives abroad. Such support includes money, food, medication, and other goods necessary in a household. However, some migrants reported that they did not keep contact with their children. These aspects will be analyzed in a future study.

Acknowledgement

This study was founded by the project "Romanian Ageing migrants and the Welfare State" (RAMWEL) Code No. 9 RO-CH/RSRP/01.01.2013 within the Swiss-Romanian Co-operation Programme to Reduce Economic and Social Disparities within the Enlarged European Union.

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