

THE PATH FROM ROMANIA TO THE ITALIAN DOMESTIC CARE SECTOR: THE FIRST STAGE OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS ON LABOUR MIGRATION

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ABSTRACT. This paper aims to propose a multi-stage model for the decision-making process on labour migration that takes into account both individual agency and structural dimensions along political-institutional, economic, and social factors. While it is focused on the case of Romanian women's migration to the Italian domestic care sector, it can be applied for the analysis of other types of labour migration too. From a historical perspective, Romania underwent major political, economic, cultural, and social transformations after 1989 and throughout the years of EU integration and membership, that influenced transnational labour migration. With the help of relevant population statistics and qualitative interviews with Romanian women working in Italy, I illustrate how the three structural dimensions contribute to the start of the individuals' decision-making process on migration. The political-institutional dimension both enables a culture of labour migration and conditions or disinhibits the possibility of migrating abroad for work. Through a series of disruptions, the economic dimension creates distress, which brings certain individuals in a state of needing alternative solutions to ensure their livelihood. As they search for solutions, these people will be exposed to the option of labour migration. This exposure, however, takes place in the social dimension, which represents the aggregate of individuals' social relationships. Finally, by assuming the roles of mentors and/or migration facilitators, social actors influence individuals to become aspiring migrants and to follow a migratory destination. Considering working abroad as an option (available, needed and possible) represents the first stage of a decision-making process that the individuals go through. At the end of it, the actors will become from aspiring migrants- novice labour migrants.

Keywords: labour migration drivers, structure-agency dialectic, decision-making process, Romania, Italian domestic sector

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Introduction

International labour migration has become an important aspect of nowadays society, and its impact cannot be denied. As such, this phenomenon has been picked and probed for decades, especially when it comes to the question “why do people migrate?”.

This Gordian knot has been approached both from macro or micro perspectives or through including and adapting theories from other scientific domains, each of them having its merits for explaining the phenomenon. But as society developed, the explanatory power of theories decreased and “why do people migrate?” remained an unconquered battle, leaving contemporary researchers with the quest to find a different approach.

As most of today’s knowledge is based on the cumulative stock of past empirical approaches, let’s take a step back in time and go through the major theoretical frameworks regarding labour migration.

Theoretical frameworks in researching labour migration

The first contributions came from economy. Neoclassical economic theory (Ravenstein, 1889, 1976; Hicks, 1932; Lewis, 1954; Harris and Todaro, 1970), attributed migration to wage differences between markets. From this perspective stemmed the push and pull factors (Bogue, 1969), according to which macro structural contexts from two countries generate specific conditions that attract and drive migration from one to another.

In an attempt to reconcile the individuals’ evident capacity for agency with structure (Porumbescu, 2015), the new economics of migration theory emphasized the interdependence between actors involved in migration as opposed to the previously assumed individual independence (Stark, 1991). Labour migration was seen as a behaviour aimed to avoid financial deprivation caused by collapses in labour, credit or social security markets (Massey et al., 1993) and to diversify incomes. The household, as a directly affected social unit, was considered both a production and consumption unit, self-regulating through the migration of its members to other labour markets.

The dual labour market theory assigned migratory dynamics to the fragmentation of labour markets into two segments: a primary, well-regulated and remunerated one, appropriated mainly by natives, and a secondary, precarious segment, avoided by the natives and left for lower status groups such as ethnic minorities and migrants. Despite its precarious nature, the secondary labour market is nevertheless more profitable for migrants than

working in their countries of origin. One could consider these as attraction factors similar to those proposed by the economic theory (apud. Piore, 1979 in Massey et. al, 1993).

The world-system theory (Wallerstein, 1974), attributed migration to transformations in markets, which in turn occurred due to the penetration of capitalist organizations from developed countries into peripheral and poor countries. The purpose of these capitalist octopuses was to ensure the global circulation of exploited natural resources, to access cheaper labour and to create new markets (Massey et. al, 1993). Eventually, individuals from the peripheries or the semi-peripheries of the global capitalist world-system would migrate towards “the core” of developed countries in order to access precarious jobs there.

Originating in biology and introduced to migration research in 1970 by Mabogunje (apud. Willekens, 2021), systems theory views the world as a series of interconnected elements. It argued that international migration forms a connected geographical network of migratory flows, capital, information and goods (Willekens, 2021: 6). Willekens (2021: 3-4) equals migration systems with migration networks, as asserts that the study of migration through the lenses of systems theory implies a processual approach, whereby “structuration and development (becoming)” is emphasized over “structure (being)” (Willekens, 2021: 4). At the same time, he stresses that migration networks should not be confused with migrant networks. The latter refers to the ways in which “migration is embedded in the life course and migrants are part of social network” (Willekens, 2021: 46).

From this perspective, migration network theory remains actually focused on migrant networks as it explores “the interpersonal ties that connect migrants, ex-migrants or non-migrants, in both countries of origin and destination, through ties of kinship, friendship or community” (Massey et al., 1993: 448). Starting from a moment t_0 , migration perpetuated and developed through human connections that facilitated its reproduction. These linkages gradually reduced the costs and risks of migration until migration became accessible to newcomers, at which point it would decelerate (Massey et al., 1993: 449).

Other attempts to explain the dynamics of migratory flows in relation to the development of migration networks have resulted in the fragmentation of migration into phases. Faist (2009) divided migration to Germany in the 1960s into two phases. The initial phase of migration was led by pioneer migrants who engaged in migration processes through institutional or individual forms of recruitment. The pioneers then laid the foundations of networks that, in turn, facilitated the start-up of migration projects for others. As such, an accumulation phase began, where more and more migrants used and further developed these social networks.

Cingolani (2009) divided circular migration between Romania and Italy in four phases, in close relation to the historical events that Romania went through: the discovery - between 1990 and 1995 (right after the fall of the communist regime in December 1989), the consolidation - between 1996 and 2001 (when border crossings were still difficult, but high rates of unemployment and rampant inflation put pressure on the population), the circulation - between 2002 and 2007 (easier access to EU countries and the prospect of EU integration), and the opening of the borders - after 2007 (Romania becomes EU member state, meaning free circulation of labour and capital within the EU).

Adjacent to the impact of facilitating networks and institutions, six other elements arising from the societal effects of a country's first waves of migration would increase the incidence of migration. Cumulative causality, as Myrdal (1957, apud. Massey et al., 1993) called it, described how each act of migration changed the social context in which future migration decisions were made. Firstly, migration was perpetuated through a continuous reporting of relative deprivation among households. Another important aspect was the agrarian property. Some migrants invested in land acquisition for prestige and retirement security, but those purchases constrained the opportunities for the remaining farmers. Other migrants, who decided to invest in agricultural production, outperformed the local farmers due to their higher access to capital for mechanization (apud. Massey et al., 1987, in Massey et al., 1993). The contact with other modes of labour and higher consumption developed a culture of migration, which further predisposed individuals to emigrate. Skilled workers were followed by the unskilled as the sectors in host countries diversified and the home country stagnated due to the exodus. Educational investments in the home country increased the chances of accessing foreign markets. In host countries, the immigrants changed the social perception of work, creating a class of stigmatized jobs, rejected by natives, thus increasing the demand for immigrant labour (Massey et al., 1993: 453).

Institutional theory, another branch of process theory, addressed the economic institutional actors whose roles were to facilitate migration. Between the attempts of capital-rich states to limit immigration, and the high demand of labour migrants from poor countries to fill in job vacancies, a migration industry developed: international transport agents, intermediaries on the labour market, providers of accommodation, private insurance companies and so on (Massey et al, 1993; Benner, 2009; Castles, 2010; Lalani and Metcalf, 2012). These actors might be connected to social networks, but their activity was viewed through a different lens, rather organizational and through its ties to the grey market and crime, but also state institutions and transnational organizations.

In this paper, I was interested to find a theoretical framework that captures the dialectic between agency and structure, taking inspiration from Giddens's structuration theory. Giddens (1984) argued that social life is neither the product of social structures nor the result of individual action, given that the former limit and condition human perceptions and actions, and the latter have the potential to modify the structure.

Starting from a perspective that has agency in the limelight, labour migration became a means to an end. It was assumed that people plan their lives looking to achieve a series of needs and desires, and mobilize a series of resources (cognitive, effort or other) to meet them. Planning the type, amount and direction of these resources resides in their cognition, which researchers called the decision-making process (Willekens, 2021).

The attempts to approach the dialectic between actors and structure in the decision-making process are multiple, and so are the results, stating from two to five decisional phases (Janis and Mann, 1977; Kley, 2011; Klabunde et al., 2017, Willekens, 2021). Carling (2002) for example, suggested that people migrate based on the desire and the possibility to do so. As such, two stages occurred: the development of the idea that emigration is beneficial, making it an aspiration, and the ability to achieve the aspiration.

Both the aspiration and the ability were considered in close relationship with the macro-dimensions. While the aspiration arose from „a particular emigration environment, encompassing the social, economic and political context in which particular social constructions of migration exist” (Carling, 2017: 2), the ability to emigrate was conditioned by an immigration interface, namely a set of immigration regulations imposed by the host state. However, if the interface from the origin state would not permit emigration, then the ability would be negated. As such, I consider the migration interfaces of both the country of origin and the country of destination of utmost importance.

To summarize, researching labour migration is a delicate task, due to the multitude of elements that make it up. As such, anchoring in a narrow theoretical perspective is counterproductive and inappropriate to the actual empirical situation. This requires the researcher to make a multifaceted effort: to integrate arguments from multiple theoretical frameworks to the extent that it suits the phenomenon and to give way to the possibility of addressing the socio-historical process of Romanian migration, by taking into account the structure-agency dialectic.

Previous case studies on Romania

Most Romanian case studies analysed migration through the lenses of economic theories and confuse actors' decisions with migration drivers or with

migrants' profiles (Cristea, Dăncăică and Noja, 2021). However, these empirical studies set forth a series of arguments that might be taken into consideration. Ianos (2016) indicated a correlation that puts the imbalance of the internal labour market and the intensification of labour migration in an inverse relationship: the more the absorption capacity of the internal labour market decreased, the more migration intensified: predominantly internal, but the author indicates that the international migration is subjected to the same logic.

Along the same line, Simionescu (2016) indicated as push factors for migration between 1991 and 2014 poverty, high taxes, and slow increases in wage earnings. Noja and Moroc (2016) analysed wage differences between origin and destination countries, and saw them as main drivers for labour migration.

Regarding the pull factors towards a series of destination countries, Simionescu (2017) and later Davidescu, Ghinararu and Maicaneanu (2019) emphasize bigger GDP, lower unemployment rates and taxes, higher life expectancy (as a result of better social protection and living standards) and population density (which again might mean better living standards), but also the presence of social networks.

Others, such as Andrén and Roman's (2014), even though they did not aim to follow the structure-agent dialectic, asserted that migratory dynamics could have determinants in the political, economic and social historical contexts of the 2000s. The role of social networks on perpetuating migration was also recognized (Sandu, 2010), especially as a shared recipe for financial success.

Methodology

This paper contributes to the sociological understanding of the decision-making process of aspiring migrants by investigating the set of structural elements that trigger the decision-making process. These elements will be considered as belonging to the macro and meso levels, above the individual actor, along three main dimensions: the political-institutional, the economic, and the social dimension.

Compared to other theoretical approaches that considered either the impact of an event in the individual's life (Janis and Mann, 1977) or exposure (Willekens, 2021), contagion (Faist, 2009) or propagation of the option of working abroad (Sandu, 2010) as the start of the decision process, this paper follows all these elements encompassed in the economic and social dimensions. However, it is also necessary to take into account the political and institutional dimension. Through analysing the regulations regarding migration, I will determine the role of the migration interface (Carling, 2017) upon the individual's

attitude towards migration and their ability to migrate. I will also show that the influence of these structural dimensions is continuous and forms a dialectic with the actors that operate inside them.

Using an abductive reasoning, this paper represents a case study on Romania's female labour migration between 2002 and 2012. This historical period is important due to some major events for Romanian migration abroad: the legislative preparations regarding migration on the eve of EU accession (2007), the post-communist economic destructuring, and the 2008-2012 financial crisis.

To this end, I investigate the major legislative regulations regarding migration in the eve of joining the EU and the main disruptions on the economic markets. Then, I compare the results based on this analysis of the macro and meso level factors with the results of a qualitative research, through the thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), of 26 life stories of women who migrated between 2002-2012 in order to work in the Italian domestic sector.

Data collection was done between 2017 and 2024, based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews. All names represent pseudonyms. For this paper, the sections on which I concentrate on are the description of household and family life prior to considering labour migration, coming into contact with the idea of working across borders, the structural drivers for considering working abroad and the series of events that followed until the actual migration.

Individual agency and structural dimensions that shape the decision process over labour migration

The political -institutional dimension

Starting from 1990, Romania entered a process of reshaping its legislation in order to become a member of the European community (Diminescu, 2009). Even before the start of EU accession in 1997 and during the years of EU integration, Romanian legislators prepared bilateral labour agreements with several European countries (Diminescu, 2009; Şerban and Stoica. 2007), and issued a series of laws aimed at developing and modernizing border crossing points, creating an international niche for labour intermediation, and protecting workers in the European space, preventing cross-border crime and human trafficking.

Between 1990 and 2006, eleven labour agreements have been signed, with countries such as Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, France and Italy, with the aim of "recruiting labour by EU countries from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, for the jobs which required highly qualified labour or for those refused by the local population" (Constantin et. al.,

2004: 63). Romania's aspiration of that period was aligned with the world-system theory arguments and had strong ties with the dual labour market theory.

In addition to these efforts, for the countries with which agreements had been signed, or were to be signed, the Romanian state apparatus created its own institutions to ensure recruitment, information and monitoring of compliance with labour contracts across borders. The first of its kind was the National Office for the Recruitment and Placement of Labour Abroad (ONRPFMS). After a series of regulations, it became the Office for Labour Migration (OMFM) and was abolished in the summer of 2007. Its activities were taken over by the National Employment Agency (ANOFM). ANOFM became a member of the EURES (European Employment Services) network in 2007, through which it continued to mediate employment contracts abroad. One cannot therefore deny the fact that the Romanian state had fully assumed its role as an intermediary in the logic of globalized markets, laying the foundations of an institutional infrastructure that would ensure the perpetuation of work migration in the long term. Moreover, the Romanian legislators also opened the possibility of intermediation as a niche of economic activity in the private market, through the Law 156/2000, which offered the possibility to companies established under a certain activity code to mediate work abroad. Between 2005 and 2012, the intermediation niche for international labour registered an 80% increase, from 1008 to 1801 units registered in the records of the Labor Inspection Office².

As part of the changes undertaken by Romania with the aim of becoming an EU member state, the development of a migration interface is also noteworthy. Two historical moments are of outmost importance here: the 1st of January 2002, and the 1st of January 2007. The first one marks the visa-free access for Romanian citizens in the Schengen area, for 90 days in a six-month period (Diminescu, 2009; Ciobanu and Elrick, 2009). However, they had to have a passport and meet several other criteria³, such as proving the Romanian border agent that they possessed a minimum amount of 500 euros, a medical insurance, and a return ticket or the green card for the car. The values of these amounts were briefly modified until the end of 2006, in an effort to limit the exit of certain population categories that, in the view of political elites, could have jeopardized the sensitive image of Romania in the European space (Șerban and Stoica, 2007).

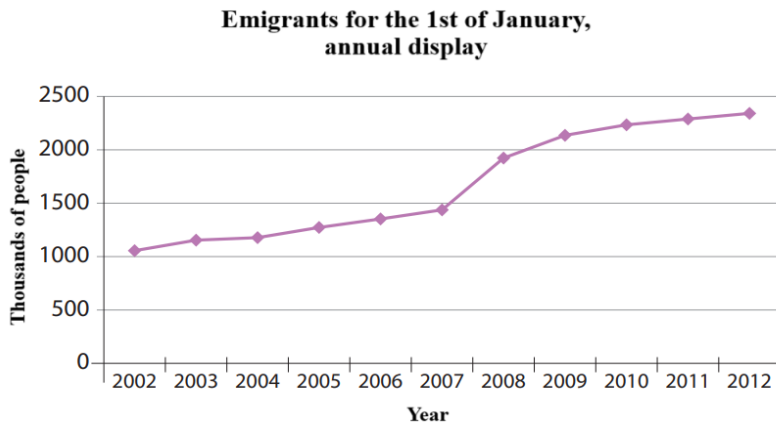
² From the data of the annual activity reports of the Labor Inspectorate, downloadable from the website: <https://www.inspectiamuncii.ro/raport-anual-al-activitatii-inspectiei-muncii>, accessed in September 2024)

³ By the Government's Emergency Ordinance no. 144/2001 and Order of the Ministry of Interior no. 177/2001

On January 1, 2007, Romania became a member state of the European Union, a fact that brought with it a huge elasticity of the migration process, as holding a national identity card entitled Romanians to travel throughout the EU (Cingolani, 2009).

Migration gained major momentum between 2002 and 2012, ranging from 1.000.000 to almost 2.500.000 (see Figure 1), many of whom migrated towards Spain and Italy (Sandu, 2010: 64).

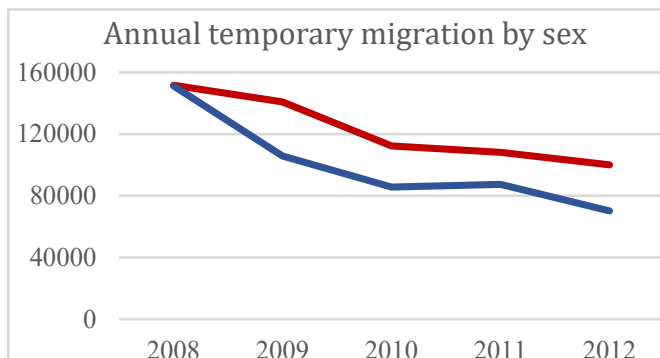
Figure 1. The number of Romanian migrants on January 1 of each year, period 2002-2012



Source: NIS/INS, Romanian International Migration, 2014.

Moreover, starting from 2009, female temporary migration exceeded male migration for several years (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2. Annual temporary migration, between 2008 and 2012, displayed by sex



Source: Author's graph. Data retrieved from the INS-Tempo online dataset, accessed January 2023. Unit of measurement: number of people

Although there are no available national statistics on the purpose of leaving the country, taking into account legislative transformations, the economic situation of the country, and socio-demographic characteristics of migrants, one can reasonably assume that a large part of Romanian migration abroad represented migration for work. Both in the period before Romania's accession to the EU and after, the majority of migrants were part of the working age groups (18-64 years), accounting for over 80% of the total number of temporary migrants abroad (INS, 2014; INS Tempo On-line, 2024). The proportions of migrants with only primary education increased from 23% before the waiving of visa obligations in the Schengen Area in 2002 to 41% in 2011. In the same period, the share of those with a high school or professional education decreased: from 68% before 2002 to 38% in 2011 (Sandu, 2018: 269). Also, as I mentioned earlier, there is a substantial increase in the number of women involved in transnational migration, most of whom were married and had low educational level (Sandu, 2018). As we will see in the analysis of the second dimension, these categories of people are most likely victims of the labour market decline that occurred during the financial crisis of 2008-2012.

In this time span, Italy was an important player. The attractiveness of the Italian labour market is mirrored by the gradually increasing number of Romanian residents: from 61,000 in 2002 (Sandu, 2010: 85) to 933.000 in 2012 and 1.081.000 in 2013 (Sandu, 2018: 251) as a result of first or repeated migrations to Italy. Moreover, during the financial crisis, some Romanian workers abroad switched destinations, migrating temporarily to Italy at the expense of Spain, due to the relatively lower impact of the financial crisis in the former country and its stable demand for foreign labour (Sandu, 2018).

The high rates of Romanian labour migration should be analysed not only in relation with the cultural acceptance of working abroad as a legitimate strategy to improve living standards, but also having in view the institutional setup that facilitated migration, besides migrants' social networks: labour agreements within the EU, a labour intermediation apparatus, laws that permitted and regulated labour migration.

The migration interface had the capacity to condition (between 2002 and 2006) or disinhibit migration intentions (after 2007) but individual agency also shaped migration in specific ways.

Between 2002 and 2006 the phenomenon of "working tourists" crystallized (Ban, 2009): Romanians used the legal gateway that allowed them to enter other European countries as tourists in order to engage in (at the time) illegal labour abroad, at least for the duration of three months of visa-free residence permitted by the law.

It should be noted that not all aspiring migrants met the criteria imposed by the law to leave the country as tourists, as described in a previous

section of this paper. However, intermediary agencies took up the role to provide the necessary resources for labour migration disguised as “tourism” and allowed aspiring migrants to exploit the legal loopholes in exchange for paying for their “services”. It becomes obvious that a social connection between aspiring migrants and profit savvy actors was crucial in this phase of Romania labour migration abroad. The connections between different types of actors are comprised in a third, social dimension. Between 2002 and 2006, the actors with the most instrumental impact regarding exiting the Romanian border and circumventing the law were the international transporters. They exploited the legal loopholes through pretence loans, bribing border agents, etc.

Finally, Romania’s accession to the European Union in 2007 represented the strongest disinhibiting factor, due to the possibility of migration to European states based on national identity cards.

The economic dimension

Adjacent to the post-communist economic destructuring that Romania was going through (Anghel and Horvath, 2009), the global economic crisis hit as a “shock wave [that] highlighted the imbalances and vulnerability of the Romanian economy, characterized by poor economic management and a long list of unfinished reforms” (Stănculescu and Stoiciu, 2012: 26). Although the recession began to make its presence felt only in the third semester of 2008, the situation worsened rapidly in the following years, especially due to the “reduced capacity of the Romanian economy to create jobs and absorb the workforce available” (Anghel and Horvath, 2009: 395).

As such, the labour market situation worsened over time: the number of employees decreased drastically, and it did not return to the same values as in 2008. Moreover, the number of unemployed increased by more than 100,000 people, while job vacancies shrank to less than 25 thousand places (see Table 1).

Table 1. Number of employees, unemployed ILO and job vacancies between 2008 and 2012 in Romania

Indicators	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Employees	6,149,781	5,940,866	5,648,607	5,697,235	5,734,492
Unemployed	549,371	624,036	651,695	659,426	627,209
Job vacancies	92,222	38,625	24,239	26,057	24,825

Source: Author’s table based on the INS-Tempo online dataset (retrieved in August 2023).

Unit of measurement: number of people, number of vacant jobs. Annual figures for the period 2008-2012.

In addition, the average monthly expenses declared by households were just below the average household incomes (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparative display of monthly average incomes per household and monthly average expenses per household, the value of the minimum wage salary and the value of the unemployment allowance, expressed in euro, between 2008 and 2012 in Romania

Monthly average (euro)	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Incomes	199.8	189	188.4	197	193
Expenses	179.5	167	168.7	178	175
Minimum wage salary (before taxes)	136.6-147.5	142.2	158.7	164.3	168.1
Unemployment allowance value	109	110	112	124	94.60

Source: Author's table based on the INS Tempo Online dataset for total incomes, expenses, and unemployment allowance (data retrieved in August 2023). The data are expressed in total per household member. The figures differ depending on the number and type of members in the household, such as dependent children.

Minimum gross wage before taxes according to the National Agency for Fiscal Administration and the National Institute of Statistics. All the values displayed were converted from Romanian lei (Ron) to Euro, according to the exchange rate of the Romanian National Bank (BNR) for each year.

The proportion of the salary in the household total income amounts more than 60%, the rest being supplemented from other sources, such as social benefits⁴ (such as family allowances, disability benefits, social assistance benefits etc.). A decrease in wage income would therefore drastically impact household living standards.

The fact that making ends meet was difficult is shown in the results of a survey conducted by NIS annually⁵, where most of the respondents stated that they found various degrees of difficulty in paying their expenses (see Table 3).

⁴ The exact mean for the social benefits' percentage is 23,7%, derived from a 5 year mean calculus, based on NIS Tempo On-line data, accessed August 2023.

⁵ More information about the survey here:

<http://80.96.186.4:81/metadata/viewStatisticalResearch.htm?locale=ro&researchId=5458>

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Table 3. Self-reported difficulty to pay the bills between 2008 and 2012 in Romania

% Capacity to pay the bills	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Great difficulty	19%	19.3%	21%	20.8%	21.6%
Difficulty	29.3%	28.7%	27.8%	27.9%	28.2%
Some difficulty	36.5%	37.5%	39.3%	39.1%	37.9%
Pretty easy	11%	10.2%	8%	8.4%	8.6%
Easy	3.7%	3.9%	3.3%	3.5%	3.4%
Very easy	0.5%	0.4%	0.6%	0.3%	0.3%

Source: Author's table based on the INS Tempo-Online dataset (retrieved in July 2024). Data provided by the annual household budget survey on a sample of cca. 9,000 households. The section in question seeks self-reporting on a Likert scale consisting of 6 dimensions: 1- With great difficulty, 2- With difficulty, 3- With some difficulty, 4- Fairly easy, 5- Easy, 6- Very easy.

The biggest payment delays (see Table 4) were registered for electricity bills, followed by house maintenance bills, such as water, gas or heating. Delays in paying telephone subscriptions or bank instalments also increased during the financial crisis. The only element with a reduced percentage is the rent, but this is most likely due to the increased proportion of homeowners among Romanians.

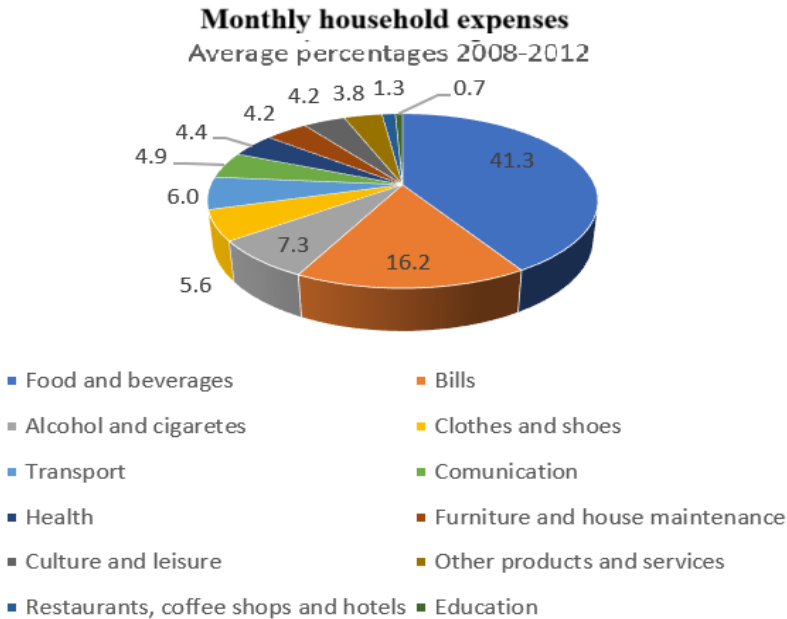
Table 4. Bill payment delays, expressed in percentages, between 2008 and 2012 in Romania

Type of delayed bill	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Rent	1.5%	2%	1.4%	1.5%	1.3%
House maintenance	49.4%	50.9%	48.6%	51.7%	51.9%
Electricity and radio subscription	51.8%	54.2%	51.6%	54.6%	53.7%
Telephone subscription	15.6%	27.4%	27.8%	28.5%	30.7%
Instalments on consumer loans	7.2%	9.6%	12.6%	14.3%	11.7%

Source: Author's table based on the INS Tempo-Online dataset (retrieved in July 2024). Data provided by the annual household budget survey on a sample of cc. 9,000 households.

Moreover, canvassing the monthly household expenses, one might find that more than 50% of the budget was usually spent on food and bills, leaving the rest of the needs to be scarcely addressed (see Figure 3), or as we’ve seen before, delayed.

Figure 3. Visual display of monthly household expenses



(Source: Author’s table based on the INS Tempo-Online dataset (retrieved in July 2024). This is part of a survey on family budgets⁶, carried out by questionnaire, with a quarterly and annual frequency, which includes a total of 38.016 households. The displayed percentages represent average values for the five years analysed, for each category.

Poverty rates, measured against a relative income threshold based on the Eurostat methodology, disproportionately affect families with three or more children, and also single- parent families (see Table 5).

⁶ More information about the methodology of the survey here:
<http://80.96.186.4:81/metadata/viewStatisticalResearch.htm?locale=ro&researchId=5457>

Table 5. Relative poverty rates by type of household between 2008 and 2012 in Romania

Relative poverty rates by type of household	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Household with dependent children	26.5%	25.7%	26.2%	27.8%	29%
Single parent with at least one dependent child	41.3%	33.1%	32.6%	38.9%	33.4%
Two adults with one child	13.8%	15.3%	16%	18.2%	17.6%
Two adults with two children	24%	24.1%	26.4%	26.6%	26.1%
Two adults with three or more children	57.3%	55.7%	62%	52.4%	57.5%
Three or more adults with children	25.6%	23.9%	23.8%	28.2%	30%

Source: Author's table based on INS Tempo-Online dataset (retrieved in November 2023).

The family situations of my respondents fit into this logic. Most of them reported losing their jobs and facing the need to be the breadwinner of the family. The women often reported dysfunctional family situations, in which their life partners did not actively participate in the economic support of the household or were no longer part of the family nucleus at all.

Overall, I could identify in my respondents' cases similar factors leading to taking into consideration migration as those reported by other scholars, and these are based on economic reasoning (Anghel and Horvath, 2009; Fedyuk, 2016).

Between 2002 and 2006, all my respondents migrated for work as locum tenens for experienced migrants who had indeterminate contracts. As such, the labour campaigns had the rationale of a financial supplement, cumulated with already existing incomes, and carried out in periods of annual leave or periods of inactivity in the employing organizations.

Between 2008 and 2012, however, the factors that contributed to taking into consideration migrant labour as a long-term enterprise were cemented: the precarious situation of the labour market, the disappointment regarding the occupational prospects for women over 40 years old, reduced access to social protection measures or finding out that these social benefits were much below family needs.

From the perspective of neoclassical economic theory, these structural elements represent push factors, while the higher wages available in the Italian domestic work sector can be seen as pull factor. Although, as we saw before, even if only one person in the family becomes the victim in the destructuring of the labour market, the effect is felt by the entire household. This observation

therefore takes us into the territory of the theory of the new economics of migration, which does not repel the push and pull factors. However, these structural elements do not automatically lead to migration. Followed by a culminating event, they create difficult living circumstances that put individuals in a state of being open to other solutions for ensuring a livelihood. Migrating for labour in the Italian domestic sector becomes that solution only after taking into account the social dimension. Although it exerts most of its influence throughout the second stage of the decision-making process, the individual faces with the alternative of working in the Italian domestic sector within the social dimension.

The social dimension

One must take a small step back and consider the fact that migration would not have appeared as an option for earning a living if there had not been a social precedent and a social contagion (Faist, 2009).

Although the number of women who migrated before Romania's accession to the EU is small in my sample, none of the people interviewed emigrated without being exposed in one way or another to the idea of working abroad. In the period before Romania's accession to the EU, the contagion (Faist, 2009) or propagation (Sandu, 2010) was limited to the network of personal relationships. The possibility of working across borders was embodied either by the existence of migrants in the extended family or in the circles of friends, or by distant stories about third parties who migrated for work and succeeded (a "friend of a friend" type).

After Romania's accession to the EU, however, the contagion of the idea of working across borders was more extensive, no longer limited to friends or relatives. Phrases such as "I had heard", "it was known" found in several of my interviews indicate that the option of working abroad had become part of the common sense.

Although the pioneers (Faist, 2009) or innovators (Moretto and Vergalli, 2008) were the first to migrate and became the living examples, imitators (Moretto and Vergalli, 2008) could start their migration projects only after the idea of working abroad became viable for them. In order for that to happen, each aspiring migrant has to go through a decision-making process.

The next four stages of the individuals' decision-making process are addressed in forthcoming papers (Harabagiu, forthcoming). However, I must stress here that before aspiring migrants could implement the decision to migrate, they must solve three practical dilemmas: transportation, accommodation, and identifying a job. Their outcome represents costs and risks in reaching the desired goal of making a living from working abroad. Here lies the importance

of the ties between the aspiring migrant and the various social actors in the migration industry: the power of the migration industry to solve these dilemmas and minimise costs and risks.

All migration projects of my respondents were achieved through pre-arranged forms of migration (Anghel and Horvath, 2009). Between 2002 and 2006, acquaintances and relatives who had migration experience represented the main facilitators. A great aid was of course represented by the international transporters' legal loophole exploitation capacity. After 2007, however, aspiring migrants could also have greater chances of contacting international labour market intermediaries, on which we will focus later.

The experienced migrants act both as mentors and facilitators, by providing a series of services related to migrant labour niche. Let's take the case of one of my interviewees, Daniela (not her real name). She was helped by her friend with a loan for the cash amount needed to start the project, with accommodation and finally free mediation for a job. This type of direct facilitation disinhibits the aspiring migrant because the cost of migration does not have to be covered in advance and can be delayed when the first financial gain occurs (the first payment for her services). The same goes for the accommodation costs, which could be covered by the experienced migrant. Finally, finding a job with the help of an experienced migrant gives the novice migrant confidence regarding the potential success of the migrant labour campaign, through the culturally imbedded relational expectations. Most of the time, in mediation situations involving the network of relatives, friends and acquaintances, the aspect of risk of failure is considered minimal.

In the absence of close social network facilitators, migrants may also rely on third parties such as recruiters, transporters, housing brokers, whose market roles facilitate migration and form a "migration industry" (Castles, 2010).

Although most of these social actors operate in the private sector, the Romanian state had its own mediation agency, whose role was to mediate contracts between Romanian citizens and foreign employers. However, none of my respondents emigrated using the services of the National Agency for Employment (ANOFM) through the EURES network. Instead, they used intermediary services in the private sector and/or in the grey economy.

International labour market intermediaries were usually connected to various collaborators with instrumental roles for transforming labour migration in a for-profit endeavour. Most of the Romanian intermediaries operated through a double terminal, with one intermediary agent in Italy, or with a more complex network, consisted of a transport agent and an accommodation agent (which could be the same as the Italian intermediary).

Most of my respondents stated that they found the intermediaries' contact details through advertisements in the print media or on the Internet, then phoned them and either arranged a meeting with them or received the contact details of other transnational collaborators.

For a fee, most of the Romanian intermediaries took upon themselves all the stages necessary for migration: the transport to Italy, accommodation, mediation and transport to the new workplace, three job offers, job counselling, employment contracts with benefits and social security measures. As the costs and risks seemed dealt with in advance, the start of migration projects with intermediaries' aid appeared as very beneficial to the aspiring migrant, despite of the fee. However, the promises rarely materialized, instead creating intense coercive context for novice migrants:

The bosses (the Italian intermediaries) were very direct and told us that if in a few days at most we will not speak Italian, and uh, we don't fit their norms, they will send us back to Romania. After paying 200 euro as a fee in Romania, plus a 130 Euro fee at the agency, plus the bus money, plus food... Because we were 33 people (at the accommodation site), and they fed us a pot of 15 liters of water and 3-4 bags of spaghetti, with a faint sugo a day (red pasta sauce). As such, we bought more food ourselves... They (the Italian intermediaries) used to enter the agency's saloon, they would turn on the TV and start shouting "imparati parole" (learn words) (...) I want to tell you that I spent 10 days in the agency... It was an ordeal for me that time. I was so gutted and disappointed... and scared, because every day women came back (from the job offer tests) in bad shapes and for good reasons. One, for example, was beaten up, bruised on her right hand, because she had taken care of an old man with senile dementia, and when he got angry, he would beat her with his cane...

(Mrs. Florica, migrated for the first time in 2010, at the age of 49)

The third category of actors with a huge contribution to external migration is represented by the international transporters. Thus, although GEO no. 144/2001 and Order of the Ministry of Interior no. 177/2001 specified that Romanian citizens had to prove to the border agent that they possess at least 500 euros, we learn from Mrs. Maria (not her real name) a method of circumvention facilitated by international carriers: the pretence loan.

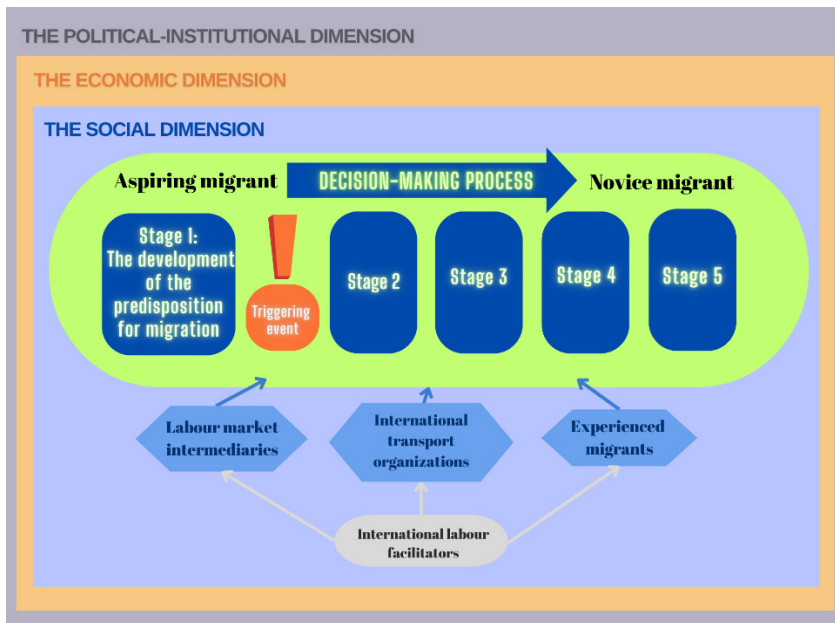
I went with a company, they made (sold) me a ticket, and the money that... it was like as I was going on a trip for....3 days? 5 days, I don't know exactly, (let's say) a week. One had to have the spending money. Well, the driver gave us the spending money...those money that we had to show at customs, because we faked that we were tourists. (...) After the customs agent left, we gave the money back to the driver. (Mrs. Maria, emigrated for the first time in 2005, at the age of 42).

Another strategy was bribing border officers, to overlook that the passengers did not meet the criteria. Bribery was usually organized through a joint collection of money from bus passengers. Moreover, if there were migrants who exceeded the three months migration period allowed, the same bribery scheme was applied, but this practice was ensured only by carriers experienced in these activities and with previously formed border connections.

Conclusions and discussion. Proposal of a decision-making process diagram for labour migration

As systems theory proposes, one must consider individuals as gradually included in various systems, with various functions in their lives. If the primordial one is the family, the more the individual creates and uses ties with other actors and structures, the more they will have an inverse impact on the individual's life. It is therefore a dialectic between structural dimensions and individuals (see Figure 4) which have a crucial role in shaping labour migration. These dimensions are the political-institutional, economic, and social dimensions.

Figure 4. Diagram with the structural dimensions and actors that influence individual's decision-making process concerning labour migration



Source: Author's graph.

The influences of the three dimensions upon the individual one are not necessarily temporally disparate, although I arranged them separately for a more complete comprehension of the phenomenon.

The highest dimension which the individual is connected to is the political-institutional one. The gradual building of a culture of labour migration and of a migration interface created a positive change in actors' attitudes towards labour migration. Regulations that condition or disinhibit migration also shaped the actors' ability to migrate.

The median dimension is the economic one. In Romania, the destructuring of the labour market, poverty, and the inadequacy of social protection measures represent the elements that brought individuals in a need for another solution to ensure their livelihood and that of their family.

The option of labour migration as a livelihood solution was insinuated to individuals inside the social dimension. This dimension is closest to individuals, because it is being composed of all individuals' social ties with relatives, friends and acquaintances, but also with other actors with important roles in facilitating migration. These actors influence the aspiring migrant to become a labour migrant by assuming the roles of mentors and direct migration facilitators.

The contagion of the migrant labour option (from within the social dimension), together with the necessity for a livelihood option (from within the economic dimension) and the possibility of pursuing the option (from within the political-institutional dimension) transforms the individual into an aspiring migrant. This represents the first stage in a five-stage decision-making process. At the end of the stages, the individual becomes a novice labour migrant.

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