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The Importance of Skin Colour in Central Eastern Europe: A Comparative Analysis of Racist Attitudes in Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic

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The importance of skin colour is often neglected in empirical studies of negative attitudes towards minorities. In this study we use data from the 2014/2015 wave of the European Social Survey to analyse explicitly racist attitudes in Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. The data was collected before the refugee crisis of 2015–2016, which gives the study a unique opportunity to analyse these attitudes in three of the countries that were among the most hostile to migrants in the EU. The study demonstrates how theoretical perspectives commonly used in explorations of negative attitudes based on ethnicity may be effectively used to analyse racist attitudes. The results show high levels of racist attitudes in both Hungary and the Czech Republic, despite there being very few non-white immigrants in these countries, while, in Poland, the racist attitudes are less widespread. Realistic threats seem to be of little importance for understanding racist attitudes – in contrast, symbolic threats appear to be very important for understanding them. There is also the surprising result that voters for more moderate political parties are no less racist than voters for the more radical political parties in any of the three countries.

Keywords: racism, prejudice, Eastern Europe, attitudes, symbolic threat

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Introduction

Ethnicity and race can be viewed as two intertwined concepts, as they are both a form of social categorisation of human beings. They are socially constructed concepts which, at times, have been used interchangeably while, at other times, have been strongly differentiated (Spencer 2014). Max Weber (1978: 389) defined ethnic groups as '(…) those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or of both'. Contemporary definitions of ethnicity have changed somewhat from Weber's original definition, with ethnic groups now largely being seen as groups of individuals distinguished by a common culture, often including language, religion or other patterns of behaviour or belief (Cornell and Hartmann 2007).

In Europe, race has very much taken a back seat to ethnicity, as race – and consequently racism – is strongly linked to the atrocities of the Hitler regime and the Holocaust (Lentin 2008). Race is difficult to define briefly as there is an absence of commonly agreed conceptual tools or a common framework for understanding the parameters of race (Murji and Solomos 2015). For this study, however, we use Cornell and Hartmann's (2007) definition of race, understanding it as a group of human beings socially defined on the basis of their physical characteristics such as skin colour. We employ this definition as the core of our analysis is how majority populations perceive an outgroup based solely on skin colour.

It is important to note that race is far more complex than simply physical characteristics, as both cultural and religious aspects are important factors for the racialisation process of outgroups (see, for example, Garner and Selod 2015). There is a large number of quantitative studies exploring negative attitudes towards immigrants and minorities in Europe (Adnan 2020; Harris, Gawlewicz and Valentine 2019). However, there are surprisingly few quantitative empirical studies on explicitly racist attitudes in Europe.[1] Instead, empirical studies exploring racial prejudice or race in Europe tend to use a dependent variable that measures attitudes towards minorities of a different race *or* ethnicity (Creighton, Schmidt and Zavala-Rojas 2019; Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2015; Quillian 1995).

Another aspect relating to the issue of negative attitudes towards minorities in Europe is that studies tend to focus on the attitudes that can be found in Western European countries. This is not in itself surprising, seeing as the vast majority of immigrants live in Western European countries; it may therefore be of interest to focus on the dynamics between the majority population and the immigrant minority. However, although there are more immigrants in the Western half of Europe, higher levels of intolerance have been reported in the Eastern half (Bello 2017; Kunovich 2004, Strabac, Listhaug and Jakobsen 2012). There are different explanations for why this may be. Seeing that there are far fewer immigrants in Eastern Europe, one explanation may be that there is a lack of opportunity for contact with immigrants. In addition, these countries have had different historical experiences to Western Europe in regard to immigration and racism since the end of the Second World War (Humphreys 2000; Kunovich 2004; Law 2012).

We use the European Social Survey Round 7 (ESS7), collected in 2014–2015, to explore two major aims. The first is to explore whether the most common theoretical apparatus for studying prejudice based on ethnicity can advance explorations of racist attitudes based on an individual's skin colour. The second is to explore the differences and similarities regarding factors that affect racist attitudes between Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. All three countries are members of the group known as the 'Visegrad Four'[2] or 'V4', who united against the EU during the refugee crisis of 2015–2016, refusing to admit a certain number of refugees. During the refugee crisis, Islamophobic and anti-migrant rhetoric was widespread and the display of a common front against the EU was previously unseen in European politics (Kalmar 2018). Interestingly, Hutter and Kriesi (2022) show that the refugee crisis was the first time that immigration was widely politicised in both Hungary and Poland. This makes the three V4 countries very interesting cases, as our data was collected before

the crisis 'hit' Europe. It gives us a unique opportunity to explore the racist attitudes that we believe were already prevalent before the crisis and before the politicisation of immigration in the three countries.

Describing the contextual frames: The cases of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic

In order to understand the racist attitudes in Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic before the refugee crisis, it is relevant to explain the contextual situation of the three countries; we therefore outline the political developments and the politics of immigration there. Furthermore, it is pertinent to identify potential outgroups in the three countries. Since the fall of communism, *Hungary* can be said to have experienced two phases: from 1990 to 2010, it was considered a liberal democracy while, after the landslide electoral victory for Fidesz in 2010, where the party gained over a two-thirds majority, it became what Prime Minister Viktor Orbán described as an illiberal democracy, where political power was increasingly centralised and the freedom of the people was being eroded (Biro-Nagy 2017). Since taking power in 2010, the right-wing party Fidezs, with Viktor Orbán as its leader, have been adamant that they will not 'repeat the errors of the Western nations in setting their immigration policies' (Korkut 2014: 624). Hungary, therefore, had a strict immigration policy and their immigrant share of the population at the time was around 5 per cent.[3]

Although Hungary did not have a large immigrant population, it did and still does have one of the largest Roma communities in Europe. Estimates of the size of the Roma population vary as it is difficult to measure but they are estimated to number somewhere between 300,000 and 700,000 (Ram 2014). Previous research on social distance shows that the Roma have traditionally been the most stigmatised minority group in Eastern Europe (Strabac *et al.* 2012) The Roma have also been discriminated against for decades in Hungary, including the deportation and killing of massive numbers of the Roma minority during World War II and the ongoing failure to recognise the Hungarian government's involvement in this atrocity (Law 2012). Discrimination continued under communist rule, with the Roma being regarded as 'brown' Hungarians (Law and Zakharov 2019). The radical right party Jobbik were particularly harsh towards the Roma population (Kovács 2013).

In contemporary Hungary, racism and hate speech have also been incorporated into the discourse of the political elite. More recently, Muslims and refugees have been portrayed as the threatening 'Other' to Hungary's identity, very much resembling the anti-Roma rhetoric previously used (Hafez 2018). Differentiating between ethnic Hungarians and the different outgroups is central to Orbán and Fidesz' rhetoric, where the political messages which focus on the idea of an ethnically and culturally homogenic nation serve to unify the conservative support base of Fidesz (Bozóki and Simon 2019). While Fidesz took ownership of the migration issue during the refugee crisis, it was still considered a mainstream right-wing party at the time, while Jobbik was considered the more extreme and radical right-wing party (Bíró-Nagy 2022). This is an important distinction for the later discussion where we compare voters of the more radical right parties and the more moderate parties to see if there are any differences in racist attitudes between the voters of the radical parties and the voters of more mainstream political parties.

As with Hungary, *Poland* has also taken illiberal steps following the electoral victory of the right-wing populist Law and Justice Party (PiS). Both Fidesz and PiS use nationalist rhetoric and have been highly critical of EU integration, promising to defend their nation against the EU (Brusis 2016).

Before the refugee crisis, negative attitudes towards the different outgroups were prevalent in Poland (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2019). At the forefront were negative attitudes towards Muslims (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2019), despite the Muslim population in Poland making up less than 0.1 per cent in 2016 (Ipsos 2016). In fact, Poland was a highly ethnically homogenous society, with only 1.6 per cent of the population consisting of immigrants at the time. As with Hungary, these immigrants were also generally from neighbouring European countries. Scholars have asserted that Muslims began to be viewed as an external enemy soon

after the fall of communism and especially after the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 in New York in which several Poles lost their lives (Pędziwiatr 2018). In addition, Poland's participation in the war in Iraq and Afghanistan and the terrorist attacks in Madrid and London accelerated the anti-Muslim attitudes in Poland (Pędziwiatr 2018).

In the election year of 2013 in the *Czech Republic,* only 3 per cent of the population were satisfied with the political situation in the country and, as such, the centrist populist party ANO 2011 emerged (Havlik 2015).[4] ANO 2011 can be viewed as more of a centrist populist party, with anti-corruption and anti-establishment at the forefront of its discourse, with party leader Andrej Babis stating that he wished to run the country as a business (Hanley and Vachudova 2018). ANO 2011 entered into a coalition with the social democrats after the 2013 election and won in 2017, still relying heavily on anti-establishment discourse (Leff 2019). In Hungary and Poland, both Fidesz and PiS heavily emphasised their nationalist rhetoric and moved towards an illiberal direction. ANO 2011, on the other hand, cannot be compared to these two parties, as they did not resort to nationalist rhetoric and the Czech nation still appears to be a robust democracy in its formal institutions (Hanley and Vachuvada 2018). The party constructed refugees and Muslims as an external threat and had a clear anti-immigration stance but these views were considered to be relatively mainstream in Czech politics (Hanley and Vachuvada 2018).

Following the Second World War, much of the multicultural Czech Republic disappeared. Millions of Germans were forcibly moved back to Germany and communist rule led to severe restrictions regarding immigration. From 2001 to 2007, the Czech Republic saw a significant increase in immigration, mainly due to a growing labour demand and an improving economic situation (Drbohlav 2012). Before the crisis, the Czech Republic had a similar proportion of immigrants to Hungary, with around 4 per cent of their population having an immigrant background. Like Hungary, the Czech Republic also has a somewhat long history of Roma discrimination. After the Second World War, only around 5 per cent of the Roma population survived in the country and, during the communist regime, the Roma were mainly given low-paid jobs, their children were sent to 'special schools' and there was a sterilisation scheme to reduce the birth-rate of Roma children (Law 2012). The Roma are still very much viewed as an unfavourable ethnic group, with 79 per cent of Czechs not wanting to have a Roma family as neighbours (Law 2012).

Another important aspect to keep in mind is the geographic location of the three countries and the way in which this affected how they faced external migration. The Czech Republic borders only EU countries and its immigrant population was also largely made up of EU citizens from neighbouring countries. Poland's Eastern border is with Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, who also made up the biggest immigrant populations in the country (along with Germans). Furthermore, neither Poland nor the Czech Republic were on the main migration routes in 2015–2016. Hungary, however, was on the main migration route and was among the top receiving countries for asylum-seekers in 2015 (Valenta, Lønning, Jakobsen and Župarić-Iljić 2019; Valenta, Župarić-Iljić and Vidovic 2015).

The three countries all had a relatively low proportion of immigrants, especially those from outside Europe. However, intolerance towards the different ethnic outgroups were prevalent in all three countries, despite several of them being marginal in size (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2019). The exception would be the Roma population in Hungary and the Czech Republic. The two countries both have a long history of considering the Roma population as a 'brown' or 'dark' presence in need of being managed, regulated and controlled (Law and Zakharov 2019).

Another aspect is that all three countries have had populist parties win national elections. However, there is a difference between them. Whereas Hungary and Poland's populist parties relied heavily on nationalist discourse, the discourse of ANO 2011 in the Czech Republic was primarily anti-establishment and anti-corruption.

Theory and previous research

Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) contend that Western Europe has developed a norm against blatant prejudice[5] and that a more subtle prejudice has arisen. This is no different to what many scholars believe to be a shift to a new form of racism that centres on insurmountable cultural differences between groups – often known as cultural racism (Ramos, Pereira and Vala 2020). Cultural racism can be described as a more modern form of racism, where the focus is more on cultural differences between the majority and minority populations, rather than on biological differences (Balibar 1991). However, just because a 'new' form of expressing a racist attitude has emerged, this does not mean that the previous one has disappeared (Vala and Pereira 2018). Scholars such as Ramos *et al.* (2020) maintain that traditional forms of racism still persist in certain European countries; they further find that the more democracy is institutionalised, the more active are the different anti-racism norms. This finding has implications for our study. First, the social desirability bias[6] may not be as prevalent in regard to racist attitudes in the three countries as it is in other Western countries, as they are relatively newly established democracies. The second is that the democratic backsliding which has happened in both Hungary and Poland leads us to believe that racist attitudes will be more prevalent in these two countries than in the Czech Republic.

Based on this overview, we explore the differences and similarities in what affects racist attitudes between Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. We are primarily interested in analysing the more blatant forms of prejudice in this study. Therefore, for our purposes, a racist attitude is understood as a negative attitude towards a minority group defined solely by its physical appearance. To analyse racist attitudes in Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, we use two theoretical approaches: *intergroup threat theory* and *intergroup contact theory*. Intergroup threat theory explains the different threat perceptions that individuals or groups may have in relation to immigrants (Stephan, Ybarra and Rios 2016). An earlier version of this theory was named integrated threat theory and included four forms of threats (see Stephan and Stephan 2000).[7] In the more recent version of this theory, researchers distinguish between realistic threat[8] and symbolic threat (Stephan *et al*. 2016).

Concern over physical harm or the loss of material resources can be categorised as realistic threats. At a group level, realistic threats are related to the in-group's power, resources and general welfare while, at an individual level, the category of the realistic threat concerns material, economic, physical and security threats to an individual group member (Andersen and Mayerl 2018; Billiet, Meuleman and De Witte 2014; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Nunziata 2015).

Symbolic threat is, on the other hand, at a group level linked to perceived threats to the in-group's religion, belief system, values or ideologies while, at an individual level, the symbolic threat is often linked to an individual's self-identity or self-esteem. Symbolic threat can be exemplified by individuals' perceived threat to their country's cultural identity by immigrants. It is argued in some studies that these symbolic threats are often more important than realistic threats in predicting anti-immigrant attitudes (Lucassen and Lubbers 2012).

Previous studies have examined how different threats are linked to different minority groups. Ben-Nun Bloom, Arikan and Lahav (2015) found that, in Europe, symbolic threats are linked more to immigrants who are racially and ethnically different, while realistic threats are connected more with immigrants who are racially or ethnically similar. In the same vein, Gorodzeisky (2019) posits that Eastern Orthodox individuals in Russia tend to oppose the immigration of ethnically or racially different immigrants who are a threat to their cultural homogeneity and national identity. Furthermore, in their study of biological racism across Europe, Vala and Pereira (2018) highlight that new theoretical models which emphasise more symbolic and ideological dimensions, rather than socio-positional variables, should be used to understand the persistence of biological racism in Europe. We therefore expect the symbolic threat perceptions to be more important in understanding the racist attitudes in the three countries. However, as we explained in the contextualisation section, immigrants

who are ethnically and racially different were, at the time, almost non-existent in the three countries so it is somewhat unclear how the different threat perceptions may play a part in the racist attitudes.

A moderator of these negative attitudes can be intergroup contact, deriving from Gordon Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, which posits that if there is i) equal status within the contact situation, ii) cooperation between the groups, iii) common goals and iv) support from the government, contact will reduce prejudice towards out-groups. More recently, these four criteria have been found not to be essential, although they do contribute to the reduction of prejudice (Paluck, Green and Green 2019; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). However, it is maintained that negative contact and competition between groups may increase intergroup prejudice (Dovidio, Gaertner and Kawakami 2003; Paolini, Harwood and Rubin 2010). Intergroup contact can also moderate perceptions of threat as, when contact is established, increased empathy and knowledge and decreased anxiety towards the outgroup most likely influences the extent to which vulnerable individuals perceive outgroup members as threatening (Thomsen and Birkmose 2015). Intergroup contact can therefore reduce threat perceptions which, in turn, can reduce anti-immigrant attitudes (Schlueter and Wagner 2008).

An important aspect to consider in regards to intergroup contact in Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic is that they all have small immigrant populations and even smaller racially dissimilar immigrant populations. The opportunity for contact is therefore severely limited in these countries. What can further complicate intergroup contact in Hungary are the larger Roma populations who represent the Hungarian ethnic 'other' (Csepeli and Simon 2004; Koulish 2003; Vidra and Fox 2014). We highlight this possible factor as some studies have found that casual contact with Roma minorities tends to have a negative effect on attitudes in Eastern Europe (Kende, Hadarics and Lášticová 2017; Visintin, Green, Pereira and Miteva 2017). The effect of contact in Hungary may therefore be somewhat more complex than in the other two countries.

Despite the issues that we may face with intergroup contact theory, we still maintain that it is a valuable approach as we may gain insights into the effect of contact – or its absence – on racist attitudes in societies where the opportunity for intergroup contact is less likely. Nevertheless, contact with a minority is still expected to have an effect in all three countries, which actualises important differences in experiences – such as the difference between having *no* contact and having *some* contact. Based on the above-mentioned studies, we therefore explore the various dimensions of intergroup contact and perceived real and symbolic threats on racist attitudes in the three contexts.

Data and methods

This study uses data from the seventh wave of the European Social Survey (ESS) collected in 2014–2015. The dependent variable for this study is based on the following question from the survey: '*Please tell me how important you think each of these things should be in deciding whether someone born, brought up and living outside [country] should be able to come and live here. Please use this card. Firstly, how important should it be for them to be white?'* The respondents then ranked how important they believed it was that the immigrant should be white on a scale ranging from 0–10 where 0 represents extremely unimportant and 10 is extremely important. We believe this variable accurately measures overt racism as it explicitly asks the respondents how important skin colour is in accepting an immigrant to their country. To analyse the data, we used a linear regression model in the three selected countries. The sample size is a total of 4,122 respondents, of whom 1,255 are from Hungary, 1,230 from Poland and 1,637 from the Czech Republic. The estimates are weighted using post-stratification weights.

An interesting aspect regarding the data analysed is the period in which it was collected. The largest fraction of the data collection in Hungary took place in May 2015; in Poland it was in May and June 2015 and in the Czech Republic it was in December 2014 and January 2015.[9] The data was thus collected before the refugee

crisis of 2015 had escalated to its full scale between August and December 2015. This gives us a unique opportunity to analyse the already existing attitudes in the three countries before the height of the refugee crisis.

As this study aims to explore whether the theoretical framework usually applied in studies of ethnic prejudice can be effectively used in a racial framework, the independent variables chosen for this study all have a basis in previous research and theory exploring ethnic prejudice. Therefore, *gender* (female=1), *age* (measured in years), *education* (measured in years) and how *urban or rural* the respondents' lives were (on a scale of 1–5) have been included as they have all been found to be important for explaining ethnic prejudice (see Ceobanu and Escandell 2010 for review). Gender and education have also been found to be predictors of racist attitudes in Europe (Caller and Gorodzeisky 2021). For threat perceptions, we have chosen six individual-level characteristics which may serve as indicators of threat perceptions or increases in the level of perceived threat from non-white immigrants. *Unemployed* (1=employed), *income* (1–4) and *country economy* (0–10) are three variables that are chosen to represent economic aspects of the realistic threat category (Stephan *et al*. 2016). *Unemployed* individuals are expected to be more hostile to immigrants, as they may perceive the latter as competition for jobs. *Income* measures how satisfied the respondent is with his or her household's income. Individuals who are not satisfied with their income may perceive immigrants as a threat to them achieving a better income. *Country economy* measures how satisfied the respondents are with the present state of the economy in their country. We expect individuals who are less satisfied with their country's economy to be more racist, as immigrants of a different skin colour may be perceived as a threat to their country's economy which, in turn, could mean a reduction of benefits, higher taxes, etc. As for a security aspect in realistic threat, we use the variable *safety* (1–4), which measures the respondent's feeling of safety when walking alone after dark. In line with previous studies, we expect that individuals who feel less safe will feel more threatened by non-white immigrants, as they may perceive them as either stereotypically criminal or terrorists (see Andersen and Mayerl 2018; Billiet *et al*. 2014; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Nunziata 2015).

The symbolic threat of intergroup threat theory features two individual-level variables in this analysis: *customs* (1–5) and *religiosity* (0–10). *Customs* asks the respondents how much they agree with the following statement 'It is better for a country if almost everyone shares customs and traditions'. We expect individuals who believe it to be better for a country if almost everyone shares customs and traditions to be more racist, as the foreign culture of non-white immigrants may be perceived as a symbolic threat to local customs and traditions. We expect similar results for the variable that measures how religious the respondents view themselves. Individuals who regard themselves as very religious may view non-white immigrants as a symbolic threat to their Christian culture and heritage. As previous studies have shown, symbolic threats are very much linked to ethnically or racially different immigrants (Ben-Nun Bloom *et al*. 2015; Gorodzeisky 2019). Therefore, it will be interesting to see whether racist attitudes in the three countries are linked more to symbolic than to realistic threats.

As all three countries have seen a rise of right-wing populist parties, we have chosen to include three political variables which may be of interest; *Political trust*[10] (0–10), *EU too far* (0–10) and *Party last voted for*. In regards to *political trust,* we expect individuals who have lower levels of political trust to have a more racist attitude, as populist politicians often blame the establishment and immigrants for the problems in their respective countries (Bugaric and Kuhelj 2018). *EU too far* asks the respondents if EU integration has gone too far or if it should go further. We have added an EU variable because both Fidesz and PiS have been critical of EU integration. Respondents who distrust the EU may do so because they identify entirely with their nation state and the EU can be seen as a 'cause' of non-white immigration to their country (Brosius, Van Elsas and De Vreese 2019). As both Hungary and Poland have taken an illiberal turn in recent years, it would also be of

interest to identify differences between the voters in the three countries, which is why we have added a variable showing us which party our respondents voted for in the last election.

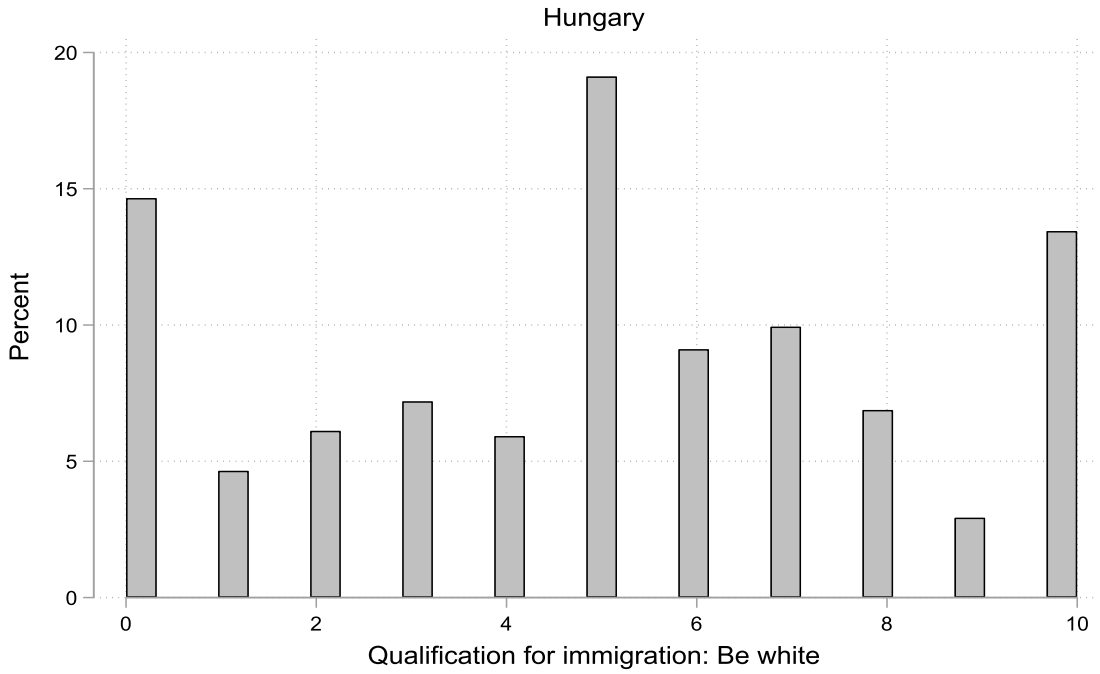
Finally, two contact variables have been added. *Contact* measures how much contact the respondents have with a person of a different race or ethnic group.[11] The original variable had seven categories; however, as previously mentioned, there are limited opportunities for contact with minorities in the three countries, which skews the distribution of the variable somewhat. We have therefore recoded the variable into three categories (1=Never, 2=Some 3=Often). We also have a variable measuring whether the respondent lives in an area with people of a different race or ethnicity (0=Almost nobody, 1=Some/many). As with the previous contact variable, this has also been recoded from three to two categories, as the variable is somewhat skewed, particularly in Poland.

Results

In Figures 1a, 1b and 1c, we show a simple distribution of the dependent variable so that we can analyse the differences concerning the levels of racist attitudes that can be found between the three countries.

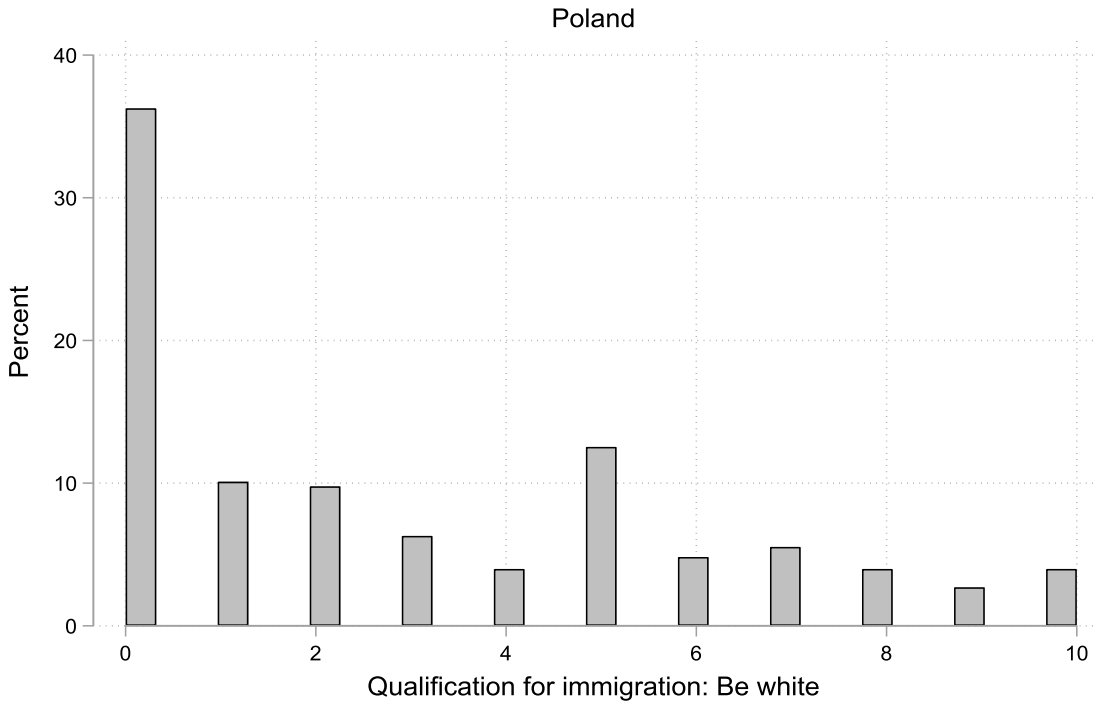
From the three figures, we can see that there are high levels of racist attitudes in Hungary, with almost as many respondents believing that it is *extremely* important that the immigrants be white as those who believe the opposite. Comparatively, the results in Poland are a great deal lower than in Hungary and the Czech Republic, as there are surprisingly high levels of racist attitudes in the Czech Republic, very comparable, in fact, to those that can be found in Hungary.[12]

Figure 1a. Distribution on the dependent variable in Hungary



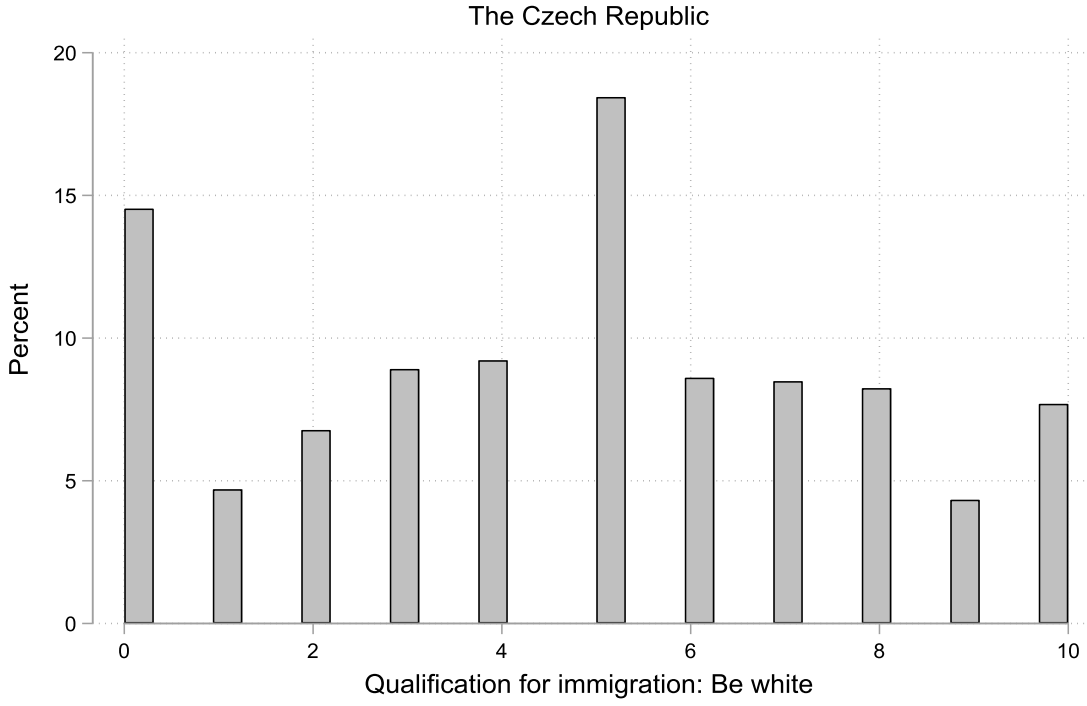
Source: Based on results from ESS Round 7 (2014).

Figure 1b. Distribution on the dependent variable in Poland



Source: Based on results from ESS Round 7 (2014).

Figure 1c. Distribution on the dependent variable in the Czech Republic



Source: Based on results from ESS Round 7 (2014).

An important aspect to comment on is the fact that there are high levels of racist attitudes towards immigrants of a different skin colour, despite there being very few immigrants in any of the three countries – the figures also show us that, even before the refugee crisis, there were extremely high levels.

We have explored the above-mentioned differences in more detail in Table 1, which includes two OLS models. We observed that previous relevant models that did not include symbolic variables had relatively low explanatory power (Vala and Pereira 2018). Therefore, we have chosen to exclude our symbolic variables from Model 1 and include them in Model 2 in order to see the differences in explanatory power of the models. When analysing the results, we mainly focus on Model 2, unless there are specific aspects regarding Model 1 that require commenting on.

We begin our analysis by commenting on the differences in R^2 between Models 1 and 2. In Model 1, Hungary and Poland have an R^2 of 0.134 and 0.110, whereas the Czech Republic has an R^2 of 0.058. When we introduce the two symbolic variables into Model 2, we see a considerable increase in all three countries, with an R^2 value of 0.185 and 0.197 in Hungary and Poland respectively and an R^2 value that is doubled in the Czech Republic to 0.117. This indicates that the symbolic variables are very important for understanding the racist attitudes we find in the three countries. *Customs* has a relatively strong effect in all three countries and shows us that individuals who believe that everyone should share the same customs in a country are more likely to have a racist attitude towards non-white immigrants. A greater discussion surrounding the effect of *customs* will take place later in the paper.

Religiosity has an effect in Poland, showing us that individuals who are more religious are more prejudiced towards non-white immigrants. In a European context, The Czech Republic can be characterised as highly secular, Hungary as somewhat religious and Poland as highly religious (Pew Research Center 2018). This may account for why *religiosity* has only a statistically significant effect in Poland since religion holds a strong position in Polish society. Some researchers explain the idea that the more religious Poles are, the stronger the racist attitudes they harbour will be, due to an ongoing trend of intensified sacralisation of the nation and an intertwining of Catholicism with Polish nationalism (Pędziwiatr 2018).

Following the effects of the symbolic variables, we start analysing the other variables from the top (see Table 1). The analysis shows that the *female* variable does not have any effect in any of the three countries. It is also evident that *age* has an effect in Hungary and Poland, showing that older individuals have more racist attitudes. However, *age* does not have an effect in the Czech Republic.

Furthermore, there is an interesting aspect regarding the estimates of *education*. Education cannot be said to have a statistically significant effect in Poland, which is surprising as education's role in defeating prejudice is one of the more robust findings across studies in the field (Ceobanu and Escandell 2010). *Urban* has an effect in both Hungary and the Czech Republic; however, there is a different direction in the effect between the two countries. Living in more urban areas is associated with less racist attitudes in the Czech Republic. In contrast, living in more urban environments is associated with higher levels of racist attitudes in Hungary. *Safety* cannot be said to have an effect in any of the three countries, showing us that non-white immigrants are not necessarily perceived as a security threat. The two contact variables show interesting effects in the three countries. *Contact* has a statistically significant effect in all three countries; however, it influences the racist attitudes differently in each of them. Having some or often having contact with an individual of a different race or ethnicity is found to have a decreased effect on racist attitudes in Poland. In the Czech Republic it is only for individuals who often have contact that the same effect can be found. Surprisingly, in Hungary contact has the opposite effect, as individuals having some or often having contact with a different race or ethnicity are associated with higher levels of racist attitude. This is explored further in the section discussing the findings. While often having contact with ethnic and racial outgroups decreases racist attitudes in the Czech Republic, living in areas with different ethnic and racial minorities increases racist attitudes there.

The three economic variables *unemployed*, *income* and *country economy* were expected to show signs of perceived realistic group threat. Several previous studies on the topic indicate that vulnerable groups, such as blue-collar workers or unemployed people, may view immigrants as a competitive threat to their jobs (Billiet *et al*. 2014; Hoxhaj and Zucotti 2021; Kunovich 2017). Other group-threat contributions show that immigrants are either perceived as a burden on a country's economy (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010) or indicate a perceived connection between immigrants and higher crime levels (Nunziata 2015). However, we cannot see in our models that being unemployed has an effect on the racist attitudes in any of the three countries. An individual's satisfaction with their income level has a negative effect in the Czech Republic, telling us that the more satisfied an individual is with his or her income, the less racist the attitude they hold. Yet, individuals in Poland who are satisfied with the economy in the country will hold a *more* racist attitude than individuals who are less satisfied with the economy. In light of realistic group threat studies in other countries, we expected the opposite effect, as a perception of a weak economy was expected to lead to a perception of non-white immigrants as a reason for it or that an increasing inflow of non-white immigrants could be perceived to lead to a reduction in benefits or an increase in taxes. This turned out to be an incorrect assumption, as it had no effect in Hungary or the Czech Republic and had the opposite effect in Poland.

Political trust has no effect on racist attitudes in any of the three countries, while *EU too far* has a positive effect in both Hungary and Poland, meaning that the more sceptical individuals are of the EU in Hungary and Poland, the more racist the attitude that they would have. In 2014, EU integration was an important issue in party competition in both Hungary and Poland, with the two largest populist parties, Fidesz and PiS, both being critical of EU integration (Brusis 2016). Fidesz and PiS have both promised to defend their nation against the EU while, in the Czech Republic, the biggest populist party, ANO 2011, has largely had a more technocratic populism, with corruption as the main 'enemy' rather than a nationalistic populism as in Hungary and Poland. ANO 2011 leader Andrej Babis was not a staunch Eurosceptic, as he favours the EU market structure (Hanley and Vachudova 2018).

There are surprising results when exploring the *party voted for* variable. The reference category for each country includes parties that are generally considered to be the 'most' populist and radical-wing political party.[13] There are two findings we wish to comment upon when analysing the *party voted for* variable. The first is the number of statistically significant categories. When compared to Jobbik, PiS and ANO 2011, there are a total of six out of 20 categories that have a statistically significant effect; four of these categories involve respondents who did not vote or refused to state which party they voted for. The remaining two categories are the centre-right and highly anti-immigrant party Fidesz and the social-democratic ČSSD, whose voters display lower levels of racist attitudes than the radical right-wing populist parties in their respective countries. It is remarkable that *none* of the voters for the centre-left or left-wing parties in either Hungary or Poland can be said to be statistically significantly less racist than the voters for Jobbik or PiS, even after controlling for several variables. It does, therefore, appear that these attitudes could be found across the political spectrum in the three countries.

Discussion

Our exploration of racist attitudes has resulted in several very interesting findings that may be roughly divided into two categories. In the first category are findings that confirm previous studies on racist attitudes, while the second includes more unexpected findings. The magnitude of the openly racist attitudes that can be found in Hungary and the Czech Republic and the difference between these two countries and Poland are what stand out.

An often-cited methodological problem in survey research is that of the social desirability bias (Krumpal 2013), as respondents have a tendency to under-report attitudes that conflict with the prevailing norms of society. It may appear that these norms are somewhat lacking in both Hungary and the Czech Republic and it is remarkable that so many of the respondents openly admit to having a racist attitude.

Previous studies have found that symbolic threats are more connected to immigrants of a different race or ethnicity, while realistic threats are more connected to immigrants of the same race or ethnicity (Ben-Nun Bloom *et al*. 2015; Gorodzeisky 2019). This study largely finds this to be the case with the explicitly racist attitudes shown here, where realistic threats seem to have little or no effect in the three countries. Even the more economic side of realistic threats has almost no effect in the three countries. None of the economic variables have any effect in Hungary, indicating that realistic threat perceptions are not a factor in explaining the racist attitudes there, while only one economic variable has an effect in the Czech Republic and Poland. It is, however, important to consider that the dependent variable used for this study does not measure anti-immigrant attitudes in general but the importance of immigrants being white. One can assume that all immigrants in general, regardless of their skin colour, will be perceived as economically threatening to economically vulnerable individuals. Therefore, these individuals will not necessarily have a preference for white immigrants.

Symbolic threat, on the other hand, can be viewed as a very important factor for the racist attitudes in the three countries. This follows Ben-Nun Bloom *et al*.'s (2015) finding that culturally threatened individuals prefer immigrants who are similar to themselves. The perception of not having shared customs and traditions has a strong effect in all three countries. It is also a very important variable for understanding the racist attitudes in all three countries, which is also indicated by the considerable rise of the explanatory power of the statistical models. It does, therefore, seem that, even though we are measuring negative attitudes towards a minority based solely on skin colour, a perceived cultural threat is very much connected to these negative attitudes. In other words, it seems that, when an individual who harbours a racist attitude views a person of a different colour, the racist individual will also perceive this person as culturally different.

Regarding intergroup contact, there is somewhat of a conundrum here as it has the expected effect in both Poland and the Czech Republic but it has an unexpected one in Hungary in that contact equals a more racist attitude. A possible explanation for this is that, as mentioned above, Hungary has one of the largest Roma-minority populations in Eastern Europe. We may therefore expect that much of the contact that is had with another race or ethnic group is with an individual of Roma origin. We highlight this fact, as some studies have shown that contact with the Roma tends to have a negative effect in Eastern Europe (Kende *et al*. 2017; Visintin *et al*. 2017).[14] We have previously described Hungary's and the Czech Republic's long history and continued discrimination against their Roma minorities. One may therefore speculate whether these sentiments towards their Roma populations simply found a new target in the face of the arrival of irregular migrants in 2015.

Last but not least, we have also explored the effects of political parties on people's attitudes. Previous studies indicate that voters for more right-wing political parties tend to be more sceptical towards immigrants (Callens and Meuleman 2017) and that populist politicians tend to blame immigrants for the problems which their country is facing (Bugaric and Kuhelj 2018). It was therefore our expectation that there would be a statistically significant difference between voters for the more radical populist parties and voters for mainstream political parties with regard to their attitudes towards minority populations. It was therefore unexpected that we found no statistical difference in the racist attitudes between voters for right-wing populist or extremist parties in the case of Jobbik and other parties, apart from Fidesz in Hungary and ČSSD in the Czech Republic.

Conclusion

To summarise, this study demonstrates that the theoretical approaches we chose to use can be applied effectively to studies of racist attitudes, showing that symbolic threats are very important for understanding these attitudes. People with a different skin colour are often automatically attributed a difference of culture. Realistic threats, on the other hand, seem to be of less importance, although we cannot say for certain that the same results would be produced in a country with a higher percentage of non-white immigrants. However, we also acknowledge that there are some mixed and counterintuitive results with regards to intergroup contact theory and the effects of the political parties.

One highly important finding is that these racist attitudes were prevalent *before* the refugee crisis in 2015–2016. This was particularly so in the Czech Republic and Hungary. It therefore seems that there was already a fertile background of racism – and not necessarily manipulation by populist politicians – that prepared the foundations of the political response to irregular migration. This is also clear when one considers that, generally, voters across the political spectrum in all three countries seem to harbour similar racist attitudes. The political parties also seem to have taken advantage of this, as several studies have highlighted how, across the ideological spectrum, they were all hostile to migrants across Central and Eastern Europe (Hanley and Vachuvada 2018; Korkut 2020).

Notes

[1] Notable exceptions include Vala and Pereira (2018), Ramos *et al*. (2020) and Caller and Gorodzeisky (2021).

[2] Slovakia is the fourth member of the Visegrad Four. Unfortunately, Slovakia was not included in the dataset that is used in this study.

[3] All numbers relating to immigrant size and make up are extracted from the UN international migrant stock and can be found at: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.asp (accessed 21 May 2022).

[4] Dawn of Direct Democracy (Dawn) was another populist party which emerged, gaining 6.9 per cent of the votes, although several MPs and the party leader, Tomio Okamura, split to form another right-wing populist party – Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD). Dawn was dissolved in 2018.

[5] They define blatant prejudice in its full form as a belief in the outgroup's genetic inferiority.

[6] The social desirability bias refers to making oneself look good in terms of prevailing cultural norms when answering specific survey questions (see Krumpal 2013 for a review).

[7] The four threats originally included were: realistic threat, symbolic threat, intergroup anxiety and negative stereotypes (see Stephan and Stephan 2000 for the original 'Integrated Threat Theory of Prejudice').

[8] Realistic threat does not necessarily have to be a 'real' threat, as intergroup threat theory is primarily concerned with the perceptions of threat, as perceived threats have real consequences, regardless of whether or not the perceived threat is actually real (Stephan *et al*. 2016: 258).

[9] The official data collection period in the three countries was from April to June in Hungary, November to February in the Czech Republic and April to September in Poland. The data collected in August and September in Poland only make up 1 per cent of the sample there and should not affect the overall data.

[10] Political trust was constructed using five variables: i) trust in country's parliament, ii) trust in the legal system, iii) trust in the police, iv) trust in politicians and v) trust in political parties. The constructed variable had a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.91 in Hungary, 0.86 in Poland and 0.91 in the Czech Republic.

[11] There are different measures for contact in the dataset; there is another variable measuring how good or bad the contact is between the respondent and people of a different race/ethnicity. The disadvantage with this variable is that there are very few immigrants in the three countries. As such, a large number of respondents (over 50 per cent in Poland) have never had contact with an individual of a different race/ethnicity and would therefore be excluded from the analysis. We have thus chosen to use the variable measuring the amount of contact with a minority as it is of interest to include the respondents who have never had contact with a minority.

[12] To contextualise the result, we have added the average racist attitudes across Europe in Appendix A1. It is clear that racist attitudes are considerably more pronounced in the three countries than in Western Europe. Estonia and Lithuania were the only two countries with a greater amount of racist attitudes, which indicates a considerable difference between the attitudes that can be found in Eastern European countries compared to Western Europe.

[13] The exception here would be in the Czech Republic, where ANO 2011 is the reference category. While ANO 2011 is certainly a populist party, the most right-wing populist party in the Czech dataset would be Dawn; however, as they only make up 1.65 per cent of the respondents, we have chosen ANO 2011, with 14.23 per cent of respondents, as the reference category.

[14] What complicates this explanation is that the Roma population in Hungary tends to live in more rural areas and the variable *urban* found that rural Hungarians actually have less racist attitudes than more urban counterparts. Future research should therefore focus more on the rural/urban situation.

Conflit of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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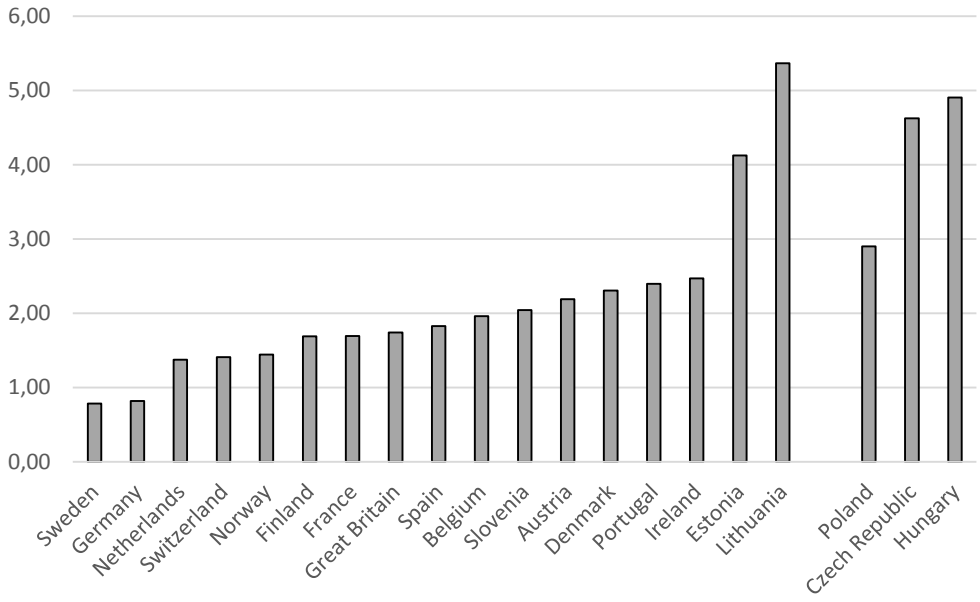
Appendix A1

Figure A1. Average racist attitudes in Europe (0/10)



Source: Based on results from ESS Round 7 (2014).

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The Impact of the First Covid-19 Wave on Migrant Workers: The Case of Romanians in Italy

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The Covid-19 pandemic is having an unprecedented impact on health systems, on many economic sectors and on the labour market. This critical situation is also accompanied by social destabilisation, which has exacerbated inequalities and severely affected the most disadvantaged population groups, such as migrant workers. This study provides insights into the consequences of the first wave and the lockdown period in Spring 2020 of the Covid-19 pandemic on Romanians living in Italy, using data collected by the International Association Italy-Romania 'Cuore Romeno', within a project financed by the Romanian Department for Diaspora and developed to support actions while strengthening the link with Romanian institutions during the pandemic. Findings show that, during the lockdown, two opposite situations occurred among Romanians. Workers in the 'key sector' become indispensable and experienced only small changes, while others lost their job or experienced a worsening of working conditions, with lower wages or an increase in working hours. Most workers chose to stay in Italy, relying on their savings or the support of the Italian government. Job losses, not having new employment, and having limited savings all influenced the decision of a smaller group to return to Romania. In conclusion, the analysis suggests that measures adopted should take into consideration that the Covid-19 pandemic might disproportionally hit population groups such as migrants, women, young people and temporary and unprotected workers, particularly those employed in trade, hospitality and agriculture.

Keywords: migrant workers, Covid-19 pandemic, labour market, Romania, Italy

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Introduction

In 2020, world citizens were faced with an unprecedented emergency due to the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The impact on health systems in Europe and the rest of the world has been – and continues to be – important but the consequences of this pandemic are not limited to the health dimension, as containment measures and the restriction of mobility have given rise to an economic and financial crisis, with a major negative impact on the economy and the labour market. Some sectors and, in general, industries that rely on social interactions or travel – like that of tourism (accommodation and catering facilities were the most affected) – but also transport, the cultural sector, recreation services and trade have recorded significant losses both in terms of turnover and employment due to the implemented restrictions and the inability of workers to work from home (Angeloni 2021; European Commission 2021; Filippucci, Bassetto and Cerrato 2021; IOM 2021; Statista 2021). This period of emergency has exacerbated inequalities and severely affected the most disadvantaged groups in society, such as migrants and the poorest social classes (Bajos, Jusot, Pailhé, Spire, Martin, Meyer, Lydié, Franck, Zina and Carrat 2021; Blundell, Costa Dias, Joyce and Xu 2020; Carta and De Philippis 2021; ILO 2020a; Papadimitriou and Blaskó 2020).

The objective of this contribution is to provide some insights into the consequences of labour-market outcomes in the earlier period of the pandemic on a selected group of EU migrant workers in Italy – that of Romanians, as their community represents the largest diaspora in the EU, with 3.5 million citizens living abroad, of which one third is resident in Italy (Eurostat 2020; OECD 2019). The focus is on the outcomes of labour-market dynamics, in a bid to answer to the following questions:

- What has been the consequences on Romanian workers' occupational status?
- Which factors have influenced the decision to return to Romania?
- Have their working and economic conditions worsened after first pandemic wave?

The data used in this work were derived from the online questionnaire of a survey conducted in the autumn of 2020 within the project 'Romanians in Italy. Structural Problems and Socio-Economic Dynamics after the Covid-19 Pandemic' carried out by the International Association Italy-Romania 'Cuore Romeno' and financed by the Romanian Department of Diaspora, who were seeking to acquire information about its citizens in order to plan possible actions to support and strengthen the relationship with Romanian institutions during the pandemic.

In the first part, we describe the presence of the Romanian community in Italy before focusing on the impact of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, presenting the situation in Italy. Secondly, we explore early evidence of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on migrant workers in general. In the third part, more details on data and methods are provided and the results of the analysis of the information gathered from the questionnaire survey are presented. Finally, the discussion and conclusion highlights possible relevant insights that emerge from the analysis of the data and which could contribute to our understanding of the main changes observed in the labour dimension during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Romanians in Italy

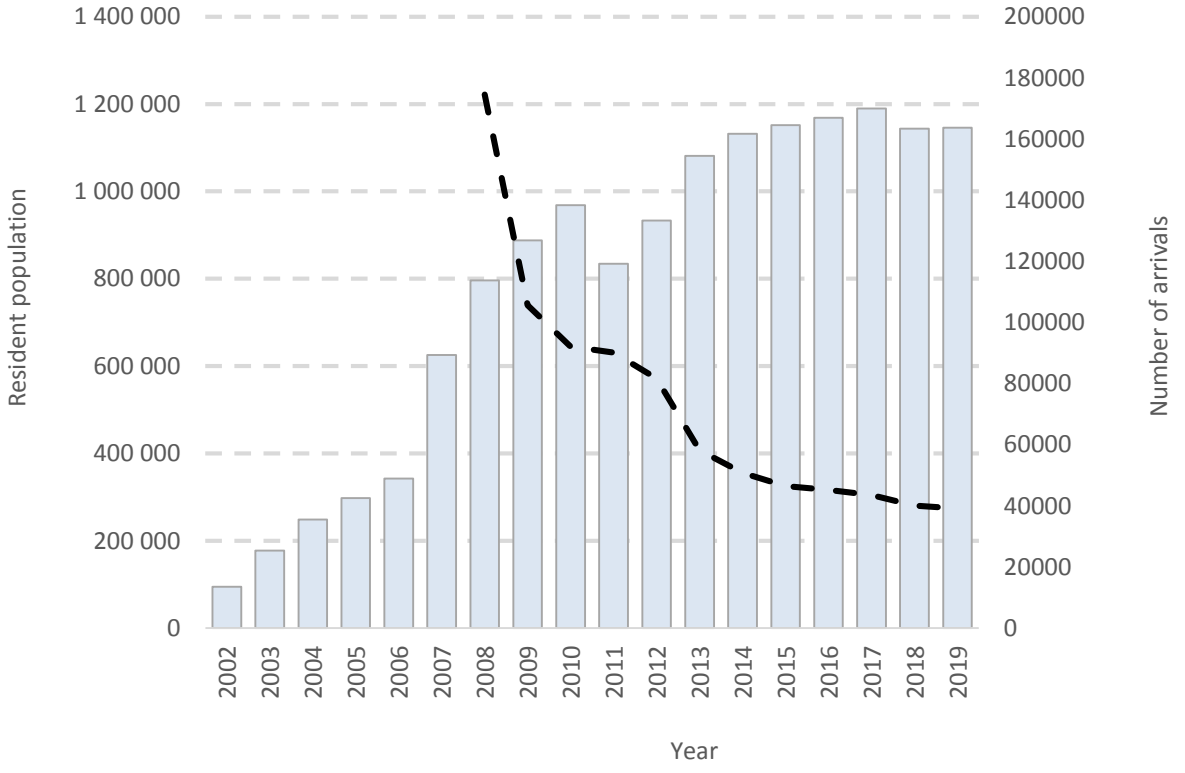
Since the abolition of controls in the Schengen area in 2002 and the subsequent accession of Romania to the European Union in 2007, the mobility of Romanian citizens has increased exponentially thanks to social links and networks, language skills and family reunification (Anghel 2008; Anghel, Botezat, Coşciug, Manafi and Roman 2016; Baldwin-Edwards 2007; Bleahu 2004; Sandu 2000, 2006, 2010). It is reported that, in Romania, at least one third of the country's population has been abroad for at least 6 months in the last 30 years (Anghel

et al. 2016). Data on temporary migration reveal that, in the period 2008–2018, 2,577,656 people have had a migratory experience abroad not exceeding 12 months (INS 2019).

According to Eurostat (2020) data, Romanian citizens of working age (20–64 years) living abroad in a European country counted for about a fifth (19.4 per cent) of the population of Romania. In 2019, Romanian citizens living in Europe (EU-28) totalled 3.5 million and there was a widespread presence in all European countries. However, some countries are privileged destinations for Romanian emigration – Italy (1.2 million residents), Spain (670,-000), Germany (660,-000) and the United Kingdom (422,000) – welcoming 85 per cent of Romanians living in Europe.

Italy is one of the top destinations for Romanian emigration due to the growing number of Italian investors in Romania, to the Catholic Church which supported the first flows (Anghel *et al*. 2016; Ban 2009; Cingolani and Piperno 2006; Jacob 2014) and to its informal economy because, especially in the early 2000s, it was possible to arrive in the country on a tourist visa and continue to work irregularly on the Italian labour market. During this phase, the migration was informal and highly circular (Ambrosini 2015; Fellini and Fullin 2018; Mara 2012; Reyneri and Fullin 2011).

Figure 1. Romanian residents in Italy (2002–2019) and yearly arrivals of Romanian citizens in Italy (2008–2019)



Data source: ISTAT (2020); Eurostat (2021).

From 2002 to 2006 (Figure 1) there was a significant increase in the number of Romanians resident in Italy. The official figures estimated that, in 2002, Romanians numbered just under 100 000 although, in the following years, their presence grew considerably thanks to a series of amnesties by the Italian government that allowed the emergence of a significant number of irregular workers. However, it was from 2007, with the accession of Romania to the EU, that an exponential growth began, which continued until 2010, when – for the first time

– the number of Romanian residents faced a phase of decline and subsequent moderate growth, reaching the threshold of 1 million in 2013. Eurostat data (2021) show how the number of arrivals has progressively decreased over time and stabilised in recent years at around 40,000 new residents per year. This has involved a slowdown in the total number but the Romanian presence in Italy continues to be significant (Figure 1). According to ISTAT (2020), more recent data show the number of Romanians regularly resident in Italy in 2019 at about 1.13 million, with a more marked female presence (57 per cent) compared to males.

According to data from the Labour Force Survey ISTAT (2019), Romanian citizens are actively involved in the Italian labour market, generally recording high levels of employment (respectively 75 per cent of males and 54.3 per cent of females are employed) which has allowed a flow of remittances to the motherland over time in support of families – for the purchase of food, the coverage of home-related expenditure, education and the provision of savings (Mehedintu, Soava and Sterpu 2020). Among women, however, there is a high inactivity rate (34 per cent) which might hide irregular work that escapes the LFS survey (AIIR-CR 2020).

The domestic, care and health sectors absorb more than half of Romanian female workers (59 per cent), while the remainder are occupied in the fields of hospitality, catering and industry. Men's participation in the labour market is more heterogeneous and they are predominantly employed in industry (30 per cent), construction (27 per cent), agriculture (12 per cent), and transport (11 per cent) (ISTAT 2019).

Italy in the first wave of the pandemic

Italy was hit the hardest by the pandemic in the earlier months of 2020. As a result, several measures were implemented to prevent infection. There was a general lockdown from March to May, starting with the closure of schools on 5 March, followed soon after by the cessation of most commercial activities, together with a ban on gatherings and the limitation of citizens' mobility. Within a few weeks, all non-essential activities were stopped. The government instated measures to support households and businesses in stages, first protecting workers and businesses and then – with the gradual recommencing of activities – allocating financial support for the purchase of goods in strategic sectors to revive spending (MEF 2021).

Closures and restrictions severely hit some activities, with heavy consequences for their workers. Many of them initially had their contracts suspended but the government banned the dismissal of employees in these activities and guaranteed the Redundancy Fund (*Cassa integrazione guadagni*, CIG), aimed at helping firms in financial difficulties, financing the costs of the unused workforce and supporting those workers who lost all or part of their income. It notably introduced a lump-sum bonus, of an average of about 600 euros per month, for almost all self-employed workers who were not protected by any social insurance programme prior to the emergency. These measures were accompanied by the promotion of remote working and support for the cost of child-care services (Carta and De Philippis 2021; MEF 2021).

During the first phases of the Covid-19 pandemic in Italy, families faced a period of high uncertainty, marked by a contraction in income and consumption during which they had to draw initially on their savings to be able to face everyday expenses – and especially those related to the mortgage of the house – while waiting for the implementation of support measures by the Italian government (Neri and Zanichelli 2020; Rondinelli and Zanichelli 2020).

For migrant workers living in Italy the first weeks of the pandemic were also a period of hardship and disorientation due to the initial lack of information about access for foreigners to the funds allocated by the Italian government to support workers and families – this even more so because, among the foreigners in Italy, there is a large proportion of irregular workers for whom access to welfare measures has proved to be more difficult during the pandemic (Caritas 2020).

Most Romanian workers remained in Italy, while a smaller group decided to go back to their home country during the spring closure period. The return to the home country of a large number of Romanians resident in Europe has not been well accepted by their fellow citizens in Romania and, during the first stage of the Covid-19 epidemic, the government adopted severe penalties for those return migrants declaring false statements about where they were arriving from and their health status (Romania Insider 2020). Public opinion, from the media and social networks, has often accused Romanian citizens returning from Europe to be the cause of the spread of the epidemic crisis created by Covid-19 in the country (Dascalu 2020). In this context, therefore, Romanian workers found themselves at a crossroads, having to decide whether to stay or to return home.

The impact of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic on migrant workers: early evidence

From the early stages of the pandemic, numerous international organisations and researchers have highlighted that the spread of the virus may disproportionally hit population groups such as immigrants and their children, unprotected workers, women and irregular migrants (Guadagno 2020; ILO 2020a, 2020b; IOM 2020; OECD 2020). Today, the number of studies that can evaluate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on society is progressively increasing. However, the occurrence of new pandemic waves makes estimation challenging, especially as the long-term effects remain unknown (see, *inter alia*, Foley and Piper 2020; Guadagno 2020; ILO 2020a, 2020b; OECD 2020).

As regards the labour market, the restrictions adopted and the closure of certain sectors of economic activity made it difficult, if not impossible, to find new employment. In many countries, this led to an increase in the unemployment level and to higher inactivity rates (Gelatt 2020; GLACOR 2020; OECD 2020). In destination countries, the increased pressure on the labour market – due to redundancies – exacerbated the adversity that public opinion has towards migrants who compete with natives on the labour market, effectively undermining the progress made in recent years in the integration process (OECD 2020). In the countries of origin, meanwhile, the local labour market had to cope with an increased demand for jobs by return migrants (Foley and Piper 2020).

In this emergency context, migrant workers prove to be generally disadvantaged, especially workers employed in the gig economy (with flexible, temporary or freelance jobs) and the informal economy, who have precarious and unprotected jobs, without health, insurance or wage protection (ILO 2020b). Often, migrant workers are engaged in close-contact professions – such as domestic workers or carers – or in tasks that cannot be remotely performed (Foley and Piper 2020; Guadagno 2020; OECD 2020), where the proportion of women is particularly high (ILO 2020a). The situation is also critical for seasonal and agricultural workers who have been severely affected by the pandemic (ILO 2020a; Palumbo and Corrado 2020; Tagliacozzo, Pisacane and Kilkey 2021) and among self-employed migrants, who usually have small activities and low capital stock (Caritas 2020; OECD 2020).

During the first pandemic wave, two major and opposing situations occurred. On the one hand, it was observed that many migrant workers lost their jobs and faced significant barriers to re-entering the workforce, finding themselves trapped and with limited networks to rely on (Foley and Piper 2020; Quinley 2020). Some of those who continued to work experienced wage cuts, the non-payment of wages and deteriorating working conditions (Fasani and Mazza 2020a; ILO 2020a).

On the other hand, there were groups of migrant workers who became indispensable within the labour market as they were the so-called ‘key workers’ who were employed in crucial tasks on the front line of the Covid-19 response (IOM 2020). In Europe, it was estimated that 13 per cent of key workers were migrants, who were over-represented among low-skilled workers – such as personal care-workers in the health service,

cleaners and helpers, drivers, transport and storage labourers and food-processing workers (Fasani and Mazza 2020b; ILO 2020a; OECD 2019), all in sectors that never stopped during the pandemic.

Generally, migrant workers had to deal with financial insecurity given the fact that they often had limited savings available to cope with hardship (Gavlak 2020; McCormack, Joudo Larsen and Husn 2015; Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2010). There was also a particularly negative impact on the families in origin countries due to the reduction in remittances (FAO 2020). The World Bank estimated that job losses would imply a reduction of 20 per cent in international remittances, about US$110 billion, with an impact on the well-being of families and communities who depend on these savings for their survival (Foley and Piper 2020; ILO 2020a; World Bank 2020).

Some migrants, due to school closures, were unable to continue working or look for a new job, as they had to cope with their family responsibilities. This also had relevant consequences for their children, who were at a disadvantage in the distance learning carried out during lockdown, as the native-born children of migrants were less likely to have access to a computer and an internet connection (OECD 2020).

The crisis experienced during the first wave of the pandemic also highlighted the limits and criticality of the care system in many European countries which increasingly depend on international workers, especially in countries where there are cash benefits, a culture of familism and a high percentage of care provided at home (Kuhlmann, Falkenbach, Klasa, Pavoline and Ungureanu 2020; OECD 2018). In recent decades, the continuous demand for workers in this sector has fuelled the flows of workers from Central and Eastern Europe in particular, which are the largest communities in this sector (Cangiano 2014; Eurostat 2011).

From the start of the pandemic, care and domestic workers have found themselves unprotected and exposed to greater risks, both to their health and to the economic impact. In Europe, among workers in long-term care (LTC), the proportion of migrants – with strong female participation – is particularly relevant as they are mostly employed in hospitals, households and residential homes where the latter – in some cases – became veritable pandemic hotspots, especially in the early stages of the pandemic (Kuhlmann *et al*. 2020). Instead, due to the native population's fear of contact with people coming from outside the family, many domestic workers were fired during the pandemic. For workers with a live-in contract, this implied the loss of their accommodation and, for non-EU workers, the loss of their work permit (Foley and Piper 2020). During lockdown, those who managed to keep their jobs in families with live-in accommodation had, in many cases, seen the suppression of days off and a continuous request for assistance from families (Guadagno 2020).

Data and methods

Data: the Romanian diaspora Covid-19 survey

As stated above, we used data from the survey of the institutional project 'Romanians in Italy. Structural Problems and Socio-Economic Dynamics after the Covid-19 Pandemic'. The project had two main objectives. The primary goal was to understand and assess the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic might have had on citizens residing in Italy in order to implement possible support action and initiatives that could help them to face emergencies. The second objective was to reinforce the presence and the connection of Romanian institutions with their citizens at a time of great uncertainty. The project was mainly addressed at Romanians living in Italy who actively continued to have links with their country of origin through participation in the activities of emigrant cultural associations, social groups and networks.

The study was developed through two approaches: a qualitative one with a series of in-depth interviews with key informers and a selected group of citizens, with the aim of investigating public opinion about the

pandemic; and a quantitative survey carried out through the administration of an online questionnaire (hereafter referred to as the Covid survey). In this work, data collected for the Covid survey were used, as the questionnaire focused on labour-market dynamics.

The administration followed a simple random sampling technique through the self-completion of a structured Covid-survey questionnaire, made available on the online platform *Survio* in the period from 9 October to 12 November 2020. To attain wide participation, the questionnaire was promoted and distributed twice a week on the project's Facebook page,[1] and on the Facebook pages of the Intercultural Association Italia-Romania 'Cuore Romeno', the project partners,[2] as well as on social networks and in several discussion groups of Romanian emigrants identified on Facebook (AIIR-CR 2020). The latter certainly represents a selected population but is in line with the focus of the Diaspora Department, which aimed to have feedback from citizens actively engaged and interested in the Romanian community. The questionnaire had an average compilation time of between 10 and 15 minutes in order to encourage wider participation and limit drop-out and non-completion rates (Corbetta, Gasperoni and Pisati 2001).

The multiple-choice questions focused on the demographic profile of respondents, their level of education and length of stay in Italy and considered the impact of the first wave of the pandemic and the Spring 2020 lockdown on employment, working opportunities, working conditions and the economic situation of respondents. This, despite the survey being conducted in October–November 2020, provides an *ex-post* evaluation of the pandemic period (Rondinelli and Zanichelli 2020).

Sample population

The questionnaire was started by 1 198 people, of whom only 44.4 per cent actually completed it. Despite the short amount of time required for completion, the response rate was affected by the presence, in the final part of the questionnaire, of a set of questions about the quality of relations and the level of trust that participants had with institutions such as migrant associations, relations with the consulate and the Romanian government. These questions turned out to be a sensitive topic and affected the respondents' decision not to complete the questionnaire, due to the general fear of being seen to publicly criticise institutions. To adjust for this behaviour, after the launch of the online questionnaire and the first uncompleted questionnaires, an *ad hoc* event was organised on Facebook to reiterate to the participants the anonymity of the survey.

Only completed questionnaires were considered for analysis (532 cases). Some 39 per cent of participants in the survey were men and the remaining proportion were women (61 per cent). Figures 2 and 3 show, respectively, the area of origin of the respondents and their province of residence in Italy. The most frequent areas of origin are the eastern provinces of Romania while, in Italy, their presence is quite heterogenous, with the greatest participation of workers resident in large urban centres and in Sardinia – the region of origin of the cultural association conducting the project.

Figure 2. Province of origin of Romanian Covid-survey participants

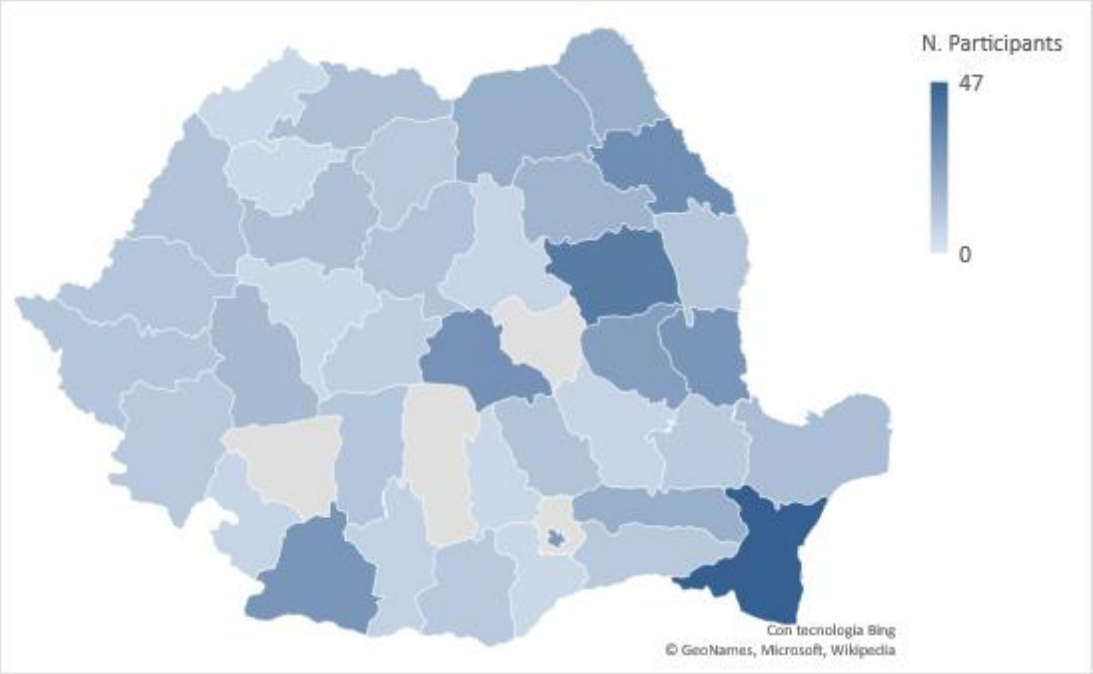
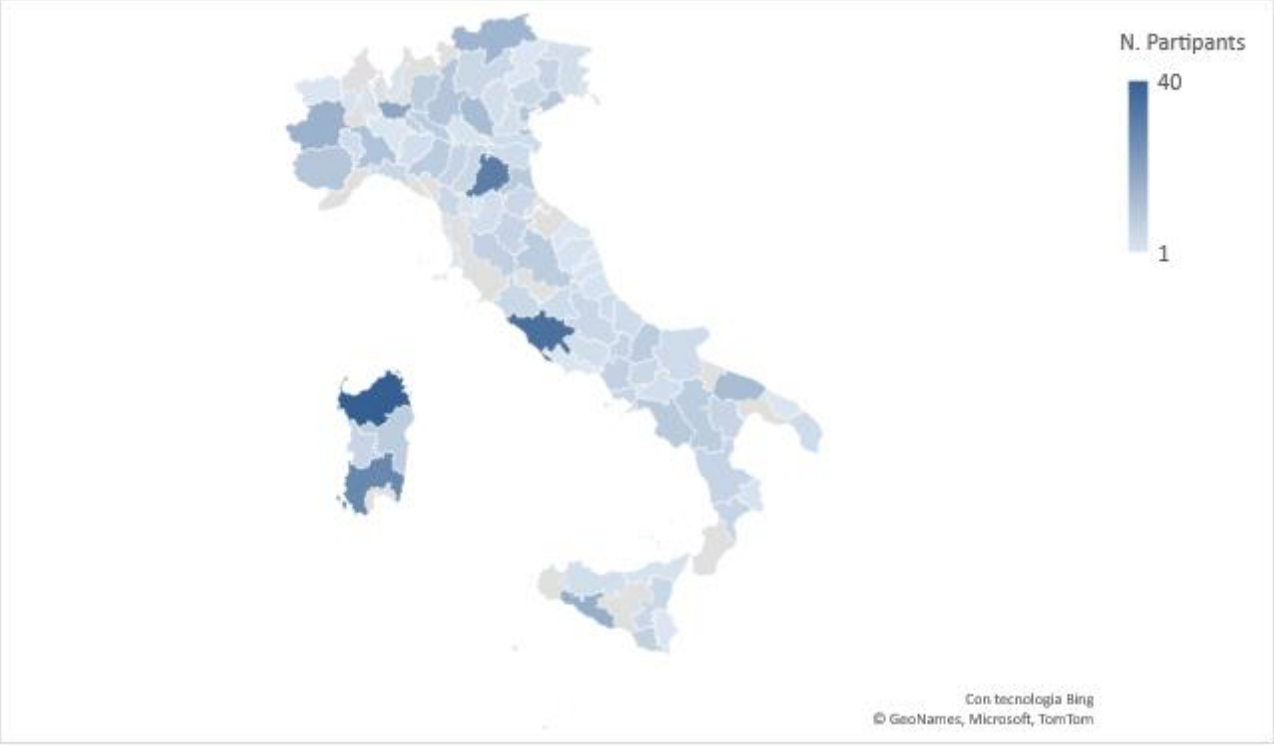


Figure 3. Province of residence in Italy of Covid-survey participants



Looking at the distribution by age and sex of our respondents, we observe a predominance of the population in the age groups 40–54 years, especially among women (Figure 4), reflecting to a great extent the age structure of Romanian residents in Italy (AIIR-CR 2020).

Figure 4. Distribution by age group (20–65+ years) and by sex of Romanians in Italy (LFS) and of Covid-survey participants

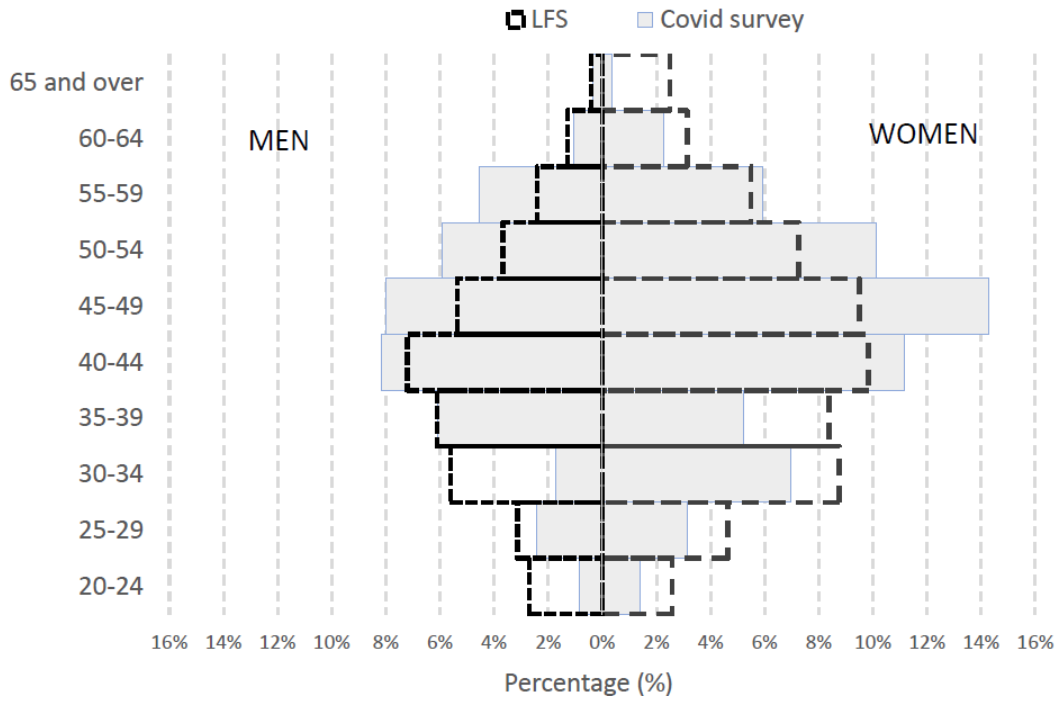


Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics of variables included in the MCA analysis and in the logistic model. We observe that the most frequently held qualification is upper-secondary education (67.5 per cent), followed by tertiary education – achieved by 1 Romanian in 5 (19 per cent). About two-thirds of respondents are long-term migrants which means that they have been in Italy for 10 years or more. Finally, as regards the working dimension, the distribution of respondents generally reflects that found by the LFS in 2019 (AIIR-CR 2020) for Romanian workers present in Italy. Accordingly, the high percentage of workers in health and care services can be attributed mainly to women while, for men, there is wider participation in all sectors of economic activity, even if agriculture, trade and industry confirm that they are the privileged sectors.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of Romanian participants in the Covid survey

VARIABLES	Number	Percentage (%)
SEX		
Male	213	40.0
Female	319	60.0
EDUCATION		
Lower-secondary or below	72	13.5
Upper-secondary	359	67.5
Tertiary	101	19.0
LENGHT OF STAY		
5 years and less	96	18.0
6–9 years	96	18.0
10 years and over	340	63.9
OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR		
Agriculture	35	6.6
Industry and construction	72	13.5
Commerce	46	8.6
Hotels and restaurants	37	7.0
Transport and communications Financial and business services	26	4.9
PA, education, health	140	26.3
Social care and personal services	176	33.1
RESIDENCE IN ITALY		
North-West	116	21.8
North-East	142	26.7
Centre	90	16.9
South	113	21.2
Islands	117	22.0
TOTAL	**532**	**100**

Method and data analysis

The data were first analysed using Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) which is an extension of Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Correspondence Analysis (CA) (Abdi and Valentin 2007; Groenen and Josse 2016) and which enables the exploring and visualising of the categorical data. The analysis was carried out using *R software* and the two packages 'FactoMineR' – for computing principal-component methods – and 'factoextra', for extracting, visualising and interpreting the results (Kassambara 2017). MCA was used to gain an initial evaluation of the possible impact of the first pandemic wave and lockdown on Romanian workers, identifying groups of individuals with a similar profile in their answers to the questions while investigating the possible associations between variable categories.

Secondly, a series of logistic models were applied to estimate the possible effect of the selected variables on the adopted strategy (stay in Italy or return to Romania) and on possible outcomes on the labour market. Therefore, Model 1 in Table 2 estimates the effect of selected and relevant variables on the probability of

adopting a return to Romania as a strategy to cope with the impact of the Covid-19 emergency, while subsequent models (2 to 5) consider a set of outcomes on labour-market dynamics – such as job loss and changes in occupational status – and on working and economic conditions. All models include sex, education, length of stay in Italy and the occupational sector as key characteristics. Model 1 also includes the possible effect of job loss or of having received a new job proposal (recruitment), having experienced a deterioration in economic status (economic changes) and having no savings to deal with the emergency period (savings). All dependent variables were coded as dichotomous. Bootstrap was used to estimate the confidence interval of the parameters to test models' stability and the resampling data (James, Witten, Hastie and Tibshirani 2021), the results of which are reported in Table 2 (B=1 000).

Findings

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Romanians in Italy

The exploratory analysis conducted through the MCA analysis of questionnaire responses provided by Romanians in Italy allows us to obtain our first insights into the experiences of this group of migrants during the first pandemic wave in Spring 2020. Figures 5 and 6 respectively show the distribution of respondents within each quadrant on the first two axes of MCA analysis (Figure 5) and the impact of the first Covid-19 wave and lockdown in Spring 2020 on Covid survey respondents, thanks to the association between the categorical variables included in the analysis (Figure 6). Based on the results of the analysis, it is possible to identify four groups of respondents with a similar profile, labelled as follows: the flexibles and the stables, the veterans and the recruits.

The flexibles

This is a group of respondents who have been in Italy for a period of between 6 and 9 years, time enough for them to be familiar with the dynamics and rules of the local labour market (Quadrant I); this is the largest group among those identified. Respondents who belong to this group responded to the Covid-19 pandemic with flexibility and managed to adapt to the required changes; during the lockdown phase, some of them even received new job proposals. They mainly live in the central area of Italy. However, these workers saw their economic and working conditions worsen during the first pandemic wave and the subsequent lockdown, as they were employed in economic sectors – such as trade and agriculture – which were highly subject to the restrictive measures taken. Despite the worsening of their economic conditions, they decided to remain in Italy.

The stables

Following the consolidated presence of Romanian workers on the Italian labour market, among our respondents, it is possible to identify a consistent group of workers whom we called 'stable' and who experienced limited changes during the pandemic (Quadrant II). These respondents were employed both before and after the pandemic and are so-called 'key workers'. They are mainly resident in the North-West (i.e. Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, Liguria) and in the North-East (Emilia Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Trentino, Veneto) of the country and work mainly in health, assistance and care services as well as in industry – where they are predominantly male. Despite the significant impact of the pandemic on the labour market and on the general economic situation, this category of workers has not seen their occupational condition change; in some cases, they even reported an improvement in their economic, working and contractual situation during the lockdown as the result of new contracts with higher rates of pay – more frequent among workers engaged in home care and employed in hospital services.

Table 2. Confidence interval (95%) estimated with Bootstrap (B=1000)

VARIABLES	MODEL 1			MODEL 2			MODEL 3			MODEL 4			MODEL 5		
	Estimate	95% C.I.		Estimate	95% C.I.		Estimate	95% C.I.		Estimate	95% C.I.		Estimate	95% C.I.	
		2.5%	97.5%		2.5%	97.5%		2.5%	97.5%		2.5%	97.5%		2.5%	97.5%
INTERCEPT	0.69059	-1.221	2.519	-1.110	-2.460	-0.051	-0.454	-3.659	1.108	-0.061	-3.945	-0.282	-0.881	-17.645	-0.516
SEX															
Male (ref.)															
Female	0.024	-0.552	0.673	0.389	-0.050	0.842	0.364	-0.305	1.255	0.218	-0.615	0.709	0.277	-0.673	0.681
EDUCATION															
Lower-secondary or below (ref.)															
Upper-secondary	0.133	-0.560	0.967	-0.275	-0.878	0.378	-0.500	-1.671	1.136	-0.700	-0.857	1.075	-0.260	-0.938	1.252
Tertiary	-0.583	-2.382	0.583	-0.665	-1.571	0.162	0.170	-1.101	1.840	-0.292	-1.196	1.385	0.879	-1.190	1.434
LENGHT OF STAY															
5 years and less (ref.)															
6–9 years	-0.511	-1.343	0.273	0.284	-0.369	0.980	0.234	-0.980	1.497	0.625	-1.084	1.029	0.384	-1.194	1.304
10 years and over	-1.389	-2.240	-0.674	-0.698	-1.331	-0.099	-0.420	-1.377	0.597	-0.640	-0.774	0.959	-0.453	-0.812	1.116
OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR															
Agriculture (ref.)															
Industry	-0.544	-1.899	0.876	0.133	-0.919	1.334	-1.701	-18.332	0.672	-1.509	-1.496	1.978	-2.023	-1.642	15.576
Commerce	-1.391	-4.145	0.314	0.179	-1.010	1.413	0.480	-1.226	2.632	-0.122	-1.981	1.999	0.196	-1.966	15.548
Hotels and restaurants	-0.732	-2.619	1.033	-0.024	-1.209	1.153	-0.448	-2.918	1.895	-0.366	-2.145	2.130	-0.584	-14.161	15.659
Transport, communications, financial and personal services	-0.893	-2.364	0.694	-0.315	-1.314	0.773	-0.729	-2.567	1.294	-1.004	-1.541	2.048	-1.563	-1.494	15.570
PA, education, health	-0.571	-2.509	1.324	-1.111	-2.720	0.098	-0.131	-1.634	1.884	-0.318	-1.642	2.050	-1.474	-1.511	15.679

Table 2. Confidence interval (95%) estimated with Bootstrap (B=1000) (cont.)

VARIABLES	MODEL 1			MODEL 2			MODEL 3			MODEL 4			MODEL 5		
	Estimate	95% C.I.		Estimate	95% C.I.		Estimate	95% C.I.		Estimate	95% C.I.		Estimate	95% C.I.	
		2.5%	97.5%		2.5%	97.5%		2.5%	97.5%		2.5%	97.5%		2.5%	97.5%
Social care and personal services	-0.019	-1.071	1.465	-0.023	-0.944	0.947	-1.016	-2.615	0.762	-0.548	-1.209	1.804	-1.027	-1.325	15.662
RESIDENCE IN ITALY															
North-West (ref.)															
North-East	0.214	-0.879	1.333	0.114	-0.657	0.939	-1.479	-2.784	-0.624	-0.536	-0.817	0.953	-0.011	-0.923	0.945
Centre	-0.073	-1.220	1.168	0.899	0.105	1.693	-0.453	-1.728	0.509	-0.313	-1.068	1.056	0.291	-1.083	1.127
South	0.724	-0.307	1.940	0.845	0.220	1.711	-1.558	-3.790	-0.384	-1.937	-1.031	1.036	-1.696	-1.040	1.086
Islands	-0.881	-2.152	0.298	1.291	0.630	2.256	0.131	-0.939	1.122	0.438	-1.092	1.051	0.795	-1.179	1.077
JOB LOSS	1.050	0.526	1.805												
RECRUITMENT	-1.812	-3.159	-0.819												
ECONOMIC CHANGES	-0.135	-1.330	1.081												
SAVINGS	0.252	-0.473	0.929												

The veterans

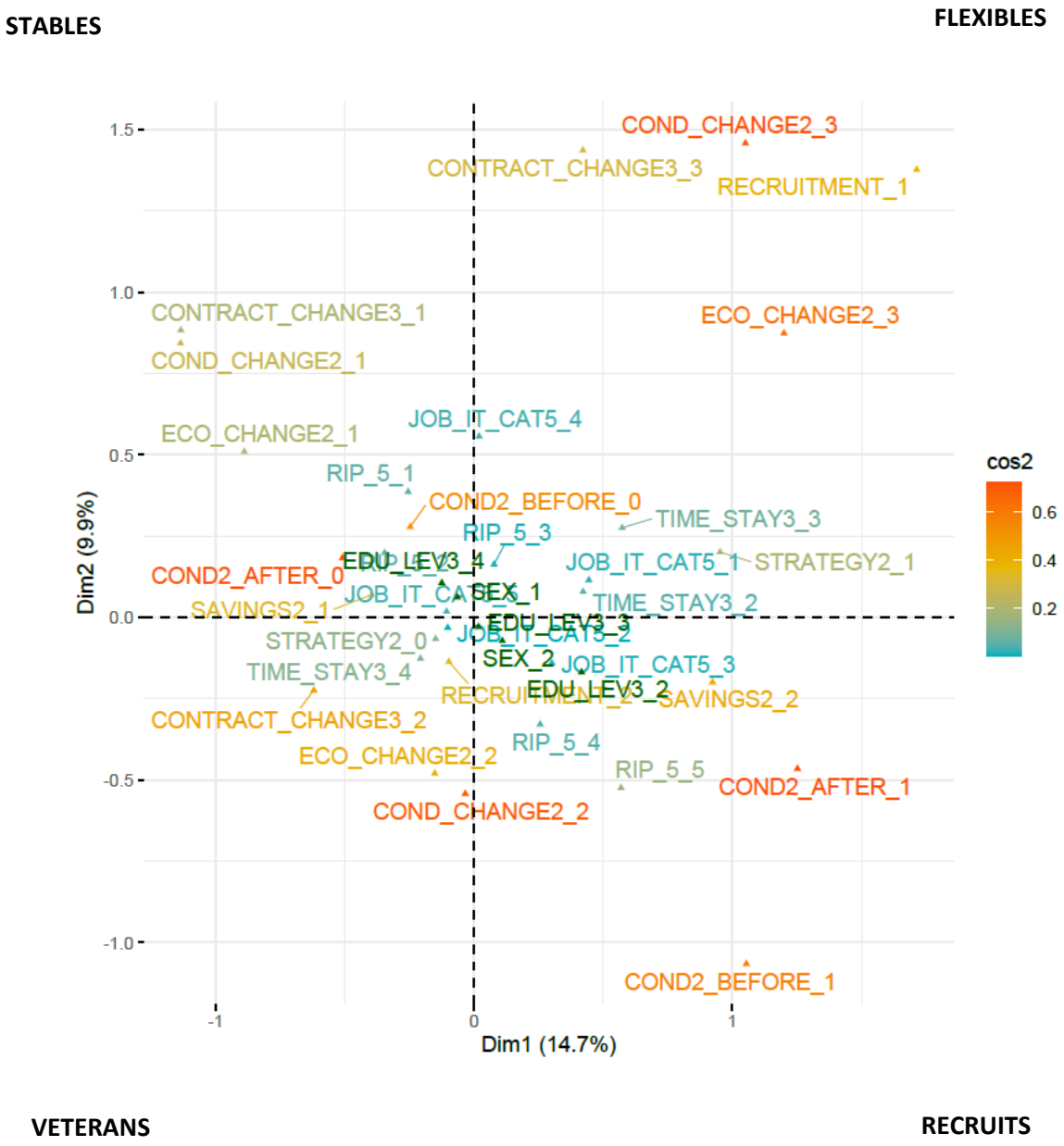
As was pointed out earlier, the presence of Romanian workers in Italy is the result of migratory flows that have a history going back at least 2 decades. We found traces of this link among our respondents, as there is a small group of long-term migrant workers who have been in Italy for 10 years or more. They are labelled here as 'veterans' (Quadrant III). For this group of Romanians, no relevant changes in their economic, working and contractual situation during the lockdown can be observed. Their presence is well established on the local labour market and they were less vulnerable than other workers with more-recent migration experience. However, within the group of veterans, we can also detect a sub-group of migrants who were unemployed or who lost their jobs during the first pandemic wave and received no job proposals. This implied that some of them decided to return to Romania as a pragmatic strategy when the pandemic started.

The recruits

Between the various groups that the MCA analysis has allowed us to identify, there is one group of modest size which we have named 'recruits' – the members ended up being penalised in terms of occupational outcomes (Quadrant IV). Recent migrants belonging to this group mostly live in the South (i.e. Campania, Calabria, Puglia, Basilicata, Abbruzzo, Molise) and the islands – i.e. Sardinia or Sicily. Consequently, due to the non-automatic transition from one job to another or possible difficulties in entering the Italian labour market, many of the members of this group were unemployed before the first wave of the pandemic and the lockdown and continued to be so after, due to the difficult access to the labour market as a result of limitations and restrictions in many sectors of the economy. This group mostly includes women and construction workers. They had little or no financial resources with which to confront the emergency, limited strategies to adopt and an inability to migrate away from Italy.

Figure 5. Distribution of Covid-survey participants within the first two axes of MCA analysis

Figure 6. Impact of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown in Spring 2020 on Covid-survey participants: association between categorical variables on the first two axes of the MCA analysis



Facing up to the Covid-19 pandemic: adopted strategies and impacts on occupational statuses and working conditions

The estimates of the logistic models reported in Table 3 show that controlling for the possible effect of individual variables on the decision to return to Romania – as a strategy to cope with the pandemic, a factor that has significantly influenced respondents' choice to leave Italy during lockdown – has revealed the loss of their job and not having received a new proposal as being decisive factors (Model 1). Moreover, the longer the length of stay in Italy, the fewer the respondents are who are likely to go back to Romania, regardless of the employment sector in which they are located, among which no statistically significant differences are observed, except for respondents employed in commerce. Moreover, it emerges that workers resident in the South of Italy record statistically significant lower probabilities of returning to their home country. A longer period of stay also corresponds to a lower associated risk of losing their jobs, which is statistically significantly low for long-time migrants and workers who arrived in Italy 10 or more years ago (Model 2). These estimates stress the importance of migrants' degree of knowledge of the mechanisms and rules of the local labour market when faced with the difficulties that arose during the first epidemic wave and lockdown. Respondents located in the central and southern regions of Italy or on the islands had a statistically significant lower risk of losing their job. Moreover, we observe that their level of education proves not to play a key role in the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, as none of the estimates are significant.

Women are statistically at a disadvantage in job losses compared to men (Model 2) but in an advantageous position in the health sector in which it can be assumed that they are protected by contractual safeguards and the increased use of open-ended contracts.

With regards to working outcomes (working, contractual and economic conditions), the respondents working in industry are the least vulnerable as they are protected by their contractual conditions (Models 3–5). There is no negative outcome for these workers, which proves that changes in their working conditions during the emergency period occurred under the conditions laid down in the contract; in the event of the suspension of work, the protections provided for by the redundancy fund automatically took over. Industrial workers in Models 3 to 5 recorded statistically significant lower odds than those in other sectors.

In an attempt to gain a general assessment from respondents about the changes in economic conditions, the dependent variable of Model 5 – 'worsening economic condition' – can be considered as one that synthesises the self-reported general welfare status of survey participants and their households. This confirms that workers in key sectors (i.e. industry, health and social care) and whose functioning during the lockdown of Spring 2020 tended not to have suffered interruptions or contractions, have a low risk of experiencing possible losses in their welfare.

Discussion and conclusion

The present study provides some insights into the possible impact that the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown of Spring 2020 had on Romanian workers in Italy, one of the largest communities of European foreigners present in the country, focusing on their response during the early stages of the pandemic and the outcomes on the labour market.

Our findings indicate that this crisis has affected Romanians living in Italy to varying degrees. The analysis shows that there is a geographical gradient in the effects of the first wave that reflects the structural differences of the Italian labour market already present before the pandemic. We can observe, in fact, that workers in Central and Southern Italy have been more affected and are at greater risk of losing their jobs; for Central Italy these data are also associated with a greater probability of returning to Romania. However, Central Italy (which includes the regions of Lazio, Le Marche, Tuscany and Umbria) also records a meaningfully contained impact regarding the worsening of working and contractual conditions, as well as of general economic conditions.

Table 3. Logistic regression models, odds ratio and significance

VARIABLES	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3	MODEL 4	MODEL 5
	Return to Romania	Job Loss	Worsening working condition	Worsening contractual condition	Worsening economic condition
SEX					
Male	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Female	1.025	1.476**	1.440	1.244	1.319
EDUCATION					
Lower-secondary and below	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Upper-secondary	1.142	0.760	0.606	0.497	0.771
Tertiary	0.558	0.515	1.185	0.747	2.407
LENGHT OF STAY					
5 years and less	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
6–9 years	0.600	1.329	1.263	1.868	1.468
10 years and over	0.249***	0.498***	0.657	0.527	0.636
OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR					
Agriculture	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Industry and Construction	0.581	1.142	0.183	0.221*	0.132**
Commerce	0.249*	1.196	1.615	0.886	1.216
Hotels and restaurants	0.481	0.976	0.639	0.694	0.558
Transport, communication, financial and business services	0.409	0.730	0.482	0.366	0.209**
PA, education, health	0.565	0.329*	0.878	0.728	0.229**
Social care and personal services	0.982	0.977	0.362	0.578	0.358*
RESIDENCE IN ITALY					
North-West	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
North-East	1.238	1.120	0.228***	0.585	0.989
Centre	0.930	2.458**	0.636	0.732	1.338
South	2.062*	2.327**	0.211***	0.144***	0.183**
Islands	0.415*	3.639***	1.140	1.549	2.214
JOB LOSS	2.857***				

Table 3. Logistic regression models, odds ratio and significance (cont.)

VARIABLES	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3	MODEL 4	MODEL 5
	Return to Romania	Job Loss	Worsening working condition	Worsening contractual condition	Worsening economic condition
RECRUITMENT	0.163***				
ECONOMIC CHANGES	0.874				
SAVINGS	1.287				
Constant	2.913	0.329**	1.469	6.181	
Observations	532	532	388	388	388
Log Likelihood	-195.122	-275.309	-133.171	-151.455	-133.681
Akaike Inf. Crit.	422.245	582.617	298.341	334.910	299.363

Legend: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

In general, there are two opposing situations which, as the analysis shows, are strongly influenced by the employment sector of workers, their type of contract and the system of associated safeguards. On the one hand, we have the so-called 'stable' workers and the 'veterans', who experience little or no change in their working lives and, on the other hand, the so-called 'flexible' workers and 'recruits', who are the most disadvantaged.

Among the latter group, the most penalised appears to be the 'flexible workers' – that is, those employed in trade, hospitality and agriculture, which were among the sectors the most affected by restrictive measures and which often offer seasonal, fixed-term contract or irregular positions. This confirms what is suggested by other studies conducted during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic (European Commission 2021; Filippucci *et al*. 2021; ILO 2020a; Palumbo and Corrado 2020; Tagliacozzo *et al*. 2021). Workers in these economic sectors often have no guarantees or safeguards in the event of the suspension or interruption of work – such as redundancy insurance or other social security benefits (ILO 2020b) – and might have greater difficulties entering the welfare system (Caritas 2020; Carta and De Philippis 2021). Moreover, due to the seasonality and temporary nature of their occupations, with movement restrictions during the pandemic lockdown and as they are generally highly mobile, they have found themselves unable to reach their places of work and forcedly excluded from the workforce.

Recent migrants, here called 'recruits' – as they had arrived in Italy just a very short time before and still had only a limited knowledge about the operating mechanisms and rules of the local labour market – have also been heavily penalised by the pandemic as they were proved to have limited resources with which to face up to the crisis and experience poor outcomes. Their employment position is often not yet consolidated or is sometimes irregular and this affects their economic stability and possibility to count on savings to cope with a decline in revenues.

The analysis presented here shows that the workers known to be 'stable' and 'veterans' instead experienced more-limited changes during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, a result which could mainly be interpreted through looking at the employment sector in which they worked. As is clear from the estimates of the logistics models, workers in industry and health experienced a low risk of losing their jobs and/or of seeing their economic situation deteriorate. These were sectors that continued their activities during the pandemic and in which most of the workers were covered by permanent employment contracts. These latter contracts during the pandemic, even in the event of closure or changes, were protected by the measures of the Italian government which had suspended any redundancies and guaranteed to cover the costs of any redundancies (Caritas 2020; Carta and De Philippis 2021; MEF 2021). What is observed for veterans also allows us to stress, in addition to their job position, that their level of integration into the labour market and their availability of savings are two factors that can strongly condition their capacity to cope with economic fluctuations and crises.

What we observe for Romanian migrants does not reflect the experiences of all migrant workers in general. It is worth noting that Romanian workers, as they are EU citizens, had the advantage of access to health care and of not facing problems with residence permits when losing their job. However, the latter event has more-relevant consequences for non-EU workers as it affects the validity of the legal title that allows them to stay and work in another country. This aspect stresses the weight of welfare regimes, legal frameworks and political settings on observable differences between groups of migrant workers (Finotelli and Ponzo 2018).

The Romanian community is also numerically important and this has allowed them to count – during the pandemic – on a support network of family members and friends who themselves live in Italy or on other members of this community, often organised in cultural associations or groups of co-nationals, whose presence becomes more relevant in times of hardship (AIIR-CR 2020; OECD 2020). However, it was also noted that, for some workers, the lack of relatives' ties and/or support networks, as well as the economic fragility due to income reductions and the lack of their own savings to cover the essential expenditure of households, made them decide to return to their home country. In the data analysed here, it emerges that this return strategy is

adopted in the case of the loss of employment and the impossibility of finding a new job, or of having to rely on public support measures for those who have no access to the protections provided for certain categories of workers and unemployed persons. This decision to return to the country of origin was therefore taken in order not to remain trapped in a state of deprivation and to avoid being unable to cover the family's essential expenditure in the absence of revenue.

One can assume that, even in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, the negative impact experienced by some groups of workers was also reflected in their penalisation before the pandemic crisis, as during the 2008 financial and economic crisis (Bonifazi and Marini 2014). This is particularly true for women, low-educated and low-skilled workers and young people, who have shown that they have been the most affected by the economic effects of the current crisis but who were already at a disadvantage on the labour market before the Covid-19 epidemic (Caritas 2020). This disadvantage not only concerns the Romanian migrant workers examined here but also all migrant workers, as well as by Italian nationals, as revealed in the increasingly numerous studies whose results head in the same direction.

Based on this early evidence, it seems necessary to point out that policy-makers today must take into account the different degrees of penalisation of population groups. More generally, the migrant groups who turn out to be the most penalised and most affected are women, temporary workers and workers in economic sectors that were the most affected by closure restrictions and economic fluctuations (Angeloni 2021; Caritas 2020; European Commission 2021; Filippucci *et al*. 2021; IOM 2021; Statista 2021). In many economic sectors such as hospitality, restaurants and catering, care services, cleaning services, transport and food processing – where migrants are certainly overrepresented – the presence of young people and women is also particularly significant; thus, we might expect that these groups have also been negatively affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The effects of other pandemic waves on these groups, who are already disadvantaged, can worsen and generate in the long run a more serious cumulative effect.

The measures taken by the Italian government to support the labour market – such as the freezing of redundancies, lay-offs or emergency income – have certainly mitigated the economic effects of the sudden and widespread interruption of economic activities but, at the same time, had some side effects. The data disseminated by the Italian Chamber of Commerce, for example, show that there has been a significant increase in the number of inactive people and some distortion in unemployment levels which would have been much higher in the absence of government measures (Viviano 2020). In some cases, delays in payments or restrictions on access to certain measures have created great inconvenience, generally favouring those already in the welfare system while penalising 'new' beneficiaries (Caritas 2020).

Future efforts will need to be directed towards the complete restoration of the pre-pandemic conditions of the labour market to enable those who have lost their job or are inactive to re-enter the workforce, promoting the growth of employment levels and, at the same time, reducing the pressure on the labour market where, in the presence of high levels of unemployment, the conflict between autochthonous and migrant workers might be exacerbated.

Finally, a gradual recovery of the economic system in the international context must involve the maintenance of a solidarity approach not only in health management and vaccination but also in the provision of international agreements for the controlled recovery of labour migration and seasonal workers' flows, with a view to a shared management of migration flows.

Notes

[1] https://www.Facebook.com/Probleme-structurale-și-dinamici-socioeconomice-după-pandemia-SARS-CoV-2-103209648223611.

[2] Project partners: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Romania), Cultural Association ORA (Turin, Italy), Association *'Diaspora Civica'* (Italy), Association '*Collage Migranti del Sulcis*' (Iglesias, Italy), TVRi International (Media Partner, Romania) and Mapamond News (Media partner, Romania).

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Brexit, a Hostile Environment, the EU Settlement Scheme and Rupture in the Migration Projects of Central and Eastern European Migrants in Northern Ireland

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This article examines the changing migration projects of Central and Eastern European migrants in Northern Ireland. It sets out the context for settlement scheme applications, linking it to broader hostile environment policies in the UK. It explores the dynamic nature of people's migration projects and how these have been challenged in the context of Brexit and the EU Settlement Scheme. The paper discusses the ruptures in migrants' narratives in relation to how they envision their future in Northern Ireland and their countries of origin, with some moving towards indeterminacy and some searching for fixity/stability in their migration projects. It examines how the Northern Irish context – and the question of the Irish border specifically – adds an additional layer of complexity to the migrants' shifting future imaginaries. The paper draws on my covert research and in-depth interviews with CEE migrants, where consent was given retrospectively. It discusses the role of the researcher in cutting the covert/overt continuum and ethical dilemmas in the field.

Keywords: hostile environment, migration strategies, Brexit, Northern Ireland

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Introduction

The aftermath of the Brexit vote left European migrants in the UK in an uncertain situation as to their futures in this country. Whereas, in the early stages, migration was a more fluid phenomenon, with its intentional unpredictability as the main determinant of people's migration trajectories (Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2007), after some time it has become a more fixed process, with people settling permanently and starting families in the UK. However, Brexit has posed new challenges to people's migration projects. Whereas before they could be free, floating between their country of origin and the UK, a new socio-political reality has re-configured the ways in which people imagine their future lives.

There is a burgeoning literature examining how Brexit has been an unsettling event which creates a lot of uncertainty and questions people's sense of belonging (Kilkey and Ryan 2021; Kilkey, Piekut and Ryan 2020; Miller 2019; Ranta and Nancheva 2019). This research expands on earlier discussions around the shift from intentional unpredictability to unintentional uncertainty in peoples' migration strategies (Kilkey 2017; McGhee *et al.* 2017; Miller 2019). Furthermore, scholars also examine the effects of Brexit on people's experiences of migration to the UK from a social welfare and public policy perspective (e.g. Currie 2016; Kilkey 2017; Sime, Kakela, Corson, Tyrell, McMellon and Moskal 2017). In this context, some authors focus on changing migration strategies and future plans (Lulle, Moroşanu and King 2017; McGhee *et al*. 2017; Trąbka and Pustułka 2020).

This paper draws on these debates and examines how migrant projects may change, focusing on a wider group of Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrants in Northern Ireland, as this region of the United Kingdom has been understudied. Northern Ireland as such presents a specific context due to its geo-political situation and physical proximity with the Republic of Ireland. I centre specifically on the EU Settlement Scheme, seen as a series of interlocking events (Kilkey and Ryan 2021), which, together with Brexit and the hostile environment policies introduced by Theresa May, put into question people's migration projects. I present the findings from a research project that I conducted at a migrant centre, supporting people with applications. In the first section I provide the context for migration to Northern Ireland and then draw on existing theoretical debates on people's migration projects and existing scholarship on impacts of Brexit on migrants in the UK. I then discuss my methodology and the ethical considerations inherent in conducting covert research, before analysing the ruptures in people's migration projects as a result of Brexit – and the introduction of the EU Settlement Scheme more specifically.[1]

The context for migration to Northern Ireland: social and political issues

Northern Ireland, due to its long history of sectarian divide and the Troubles, has been excluded from the influx of foreigners. However, since 2004, the situation has diametrically changed, with new communities making their home in this country. Up until 2004, the largest ethnic minority group were the Chinese who migrated to Northern Ireland in the 1960s. Other groups came from Commonwealth countries, particularly India and Pakistan. Moreover, there is a large Portuguese and East Timorese community in Northern Ireland, showing patterns of chain migration. These communities are located in the area of Dungannon and Portadown, with many individuals working at a local Moy Park factory. Since 2004, there has been a high influx of Eastern Europeans, who migrated mostly for economic reasons. The Polish are the largest group, with approximately 30,000 nationals in Northern Ireland. However, CEE migration to Northern Ireland has shown signs of decreasing following the Brexit vote in 2016, with some people going back to their home countries. Migrants in Northern Ireland often find themselves in deeply segregated locations, such as Belfast, Derry, Lurgan and Antrim. The places where they often choose to live are demarcated by symbolic boundary markers, such as

painted curbs, flags, etc. This may have a negative effect on their relations with the local communities as they may become the targets of hate crimes and racism. According to some commentators, racism is the new sectarianism and, in a culture where social divisions and hostilities are so deeply engrained in the everyday fabric of society, migrant lives may also be affected. Nevertheless, there are visible attempts to strengthen notions of multiculturalism in Northern Ireland and ethnic shops are readily observable in different locations across the country. This is particularly visible in Belfast – migrants and refugees tend to settle in South Belfast, with a high concentration of them around the Ormeau Rd area. Nevertheless, East Belfast has become largely populated by migrant communities due to its lower rent prices.

Furthermore, the question of an invisible Irish border is significant to the individual experiences of migration. The island of Ireland is split into two parts, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. These two parts are different jurisdictions and are distinct legally and administratively. However, when one travels from North to South, there is no physical border visible. Usually there are no passport controls, although there are some on cross-border buses, something which is often linked with the racial profiling of non-white, non-European passengers. However, for CEE migrants the border is generally invisible, which explains why many migrants consider the island as a single entity.

The context of a hostile environment

Whereas Northern Ireland physically shares the island with the Republic of Ireland, administratively it belongs to the UK. From this perspective, migrants in Northern Ireland have been affected by the hostile environment legacy of Theresa May who, as Home Secretary in 2012, introduced a new approach to immigration, with a set of administrative and legislative changes designed to make life difficult for people migrating illegally in the hope that they will 'self-remove'. May's aim was to 'create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration... What we don't want is a situation where people think that they can come here and overstay because they're able to access everything they need' (Travis 2013). This idea was extrapolated at the level of government policy through the Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016, resulting in a raft of measures preventing people from access to employment, healthcare, housing, education and other basic necessities. This led to the creation of a deeply unequal and rigidly divided society. The public and media discourses on migration to the UK have been hostile (Rzepnikowska 2019). CEE migrants have been represented as taking local jobs and stretching public services and welfare. This was exacerbated by the Brexit vote in 2016, following which there has been a spike in racist attacks against migrant communities in England. Even though the situation in Northern Ireland has been different, the awareness of discrimination and hate crime in England has affected people's sense of belonging in Northern Ireland.

In 2019, The Home Office launched the EU Settlement Scheme to enforce an obligation for EU citizens to apply for either pre-settled or settled status (https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families/what-settled-and-presettled-status-means). The deadline for applying was 30 June 2021. Those who did not apply for pre-settled or settled status have been subjected to a hostile environment. They lost the right to work and to have access to healthcare and benefits. The Home Office has provided support to EU nationals to make the scheme more accessible by contracting different community and voluntary sector organisations to help vulnerable clients with their application through the android system. However, according to some commentators, despite this, the scheme could trigger a new 'Windrush scandal'[2] if there are technical problems. The application process 'may lead to individuals being refused the Settled or Pre-settled Status, with potential consequences up to and including being forced into an undocumented status and facing potential for removal from

the UK' (Martynowicz and Radziwinowiczówna 2019). Furthermore, an obligatory criminal records check will make individuals more easily deportable.

In this context it is also worth noting that European migrant workers often engage in cross-border migration. Despite a history of conflict and underdevelopment, the Irish border region has been one of the world's most effectively integrated cross-border regions (Hayward 2020). Frontier workers may work in the Republic but live in Northern Ireland; inversely, they may live in the Republic of Ireland and work in Northern Ireland. Often referred to as cross-border workers or 'commuters', they have to return to their home country at least once a week in order to have the legal status of a frontier worker under EU law (Hunt 2019). Since 1 July 2021, a frontier worker requires a permit in order to enter the UK with a protected status. This permit allows them to access benefits and services in the UK (Home Office 2021). If successful, the applicant will receive a five-year permit. Frontier workers living in Northern Ireland and working in the Republic, on the other hand, may experience difficulties applying for settled status due to the number of absences from the UK. This may affect the migration projects of cross-border migrant workers, who had been allowed to move freely between the two jurisdictions and whose mobility has now been constrained.

Literature review

There is much existing literature on people's migration strategies and discussions of how Brexit has affected migratory patterns in the UK. McGhee *et al.* (2017) note that academic scholarship on migration strategies identifies two different trends – namely, transience and fluidity vs stability and settlement. Migrants' decisions as to whether to stay or leave the UK come about as a combination of individual and structural factors. Early research into the migration from Central and Eastern Europe to the UK highlighted the fluid, transient and contingent nature of this migration (Drinkwater, Eade and Garapich 2009). Engerbsen, in this context, refers to *liquid migration*, putting emphasis on the temporality of stays abroad (Engerbsen 2018; Engerbsen and Snel 2013). In relation to this there has been a considerable debate on migration strategies (Eade *et al*. 2007; Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2009; Piętka, Clark and Canton 2013; Trevena 2013).

Research by Eade *et al*. (2007) provides a useful typology of the migration strategies and different motivations behind people's moves to the UK. The authors single out the following migration strategies. 'Storks' are circular migrants, who are usually in low-paid jobs and alternate between their stay in the UK and their home country. 'Hamsters' are short-term migrants, who work in the UK but intend to earn as much money as possible and go back home. 'Stayers' are long-term migrants, who have the intention of remaining in the UK for a long period. 'Searchers', on the other hand, are seen as global nomads, who keep their options deliberately open (Eade *et al*. 2007). Research by Piętka-Nykaza and McGhee (2016) draws on this typology and expands it further, focusing on Polish migrants in Scotland. The authors single out settlers, over-stayers, circular and transnational migrants and economic migrants.

The main reasons for migration were push factors (the high unemployment rate in post-socialist-economy countries, combined with a difficult political situation and low living standards). Many authors have emphasised that the discourse of normalcy has played a crucial role in migrant narratives. For example, Galasińska and Kozłowska (2009), Rabikowska (2010) and McGhee, Heath and Trevena (2012) focused on migration as a way of attaining normalcy in people's lives. These authors situate Polish migration within a wider economic context in the home country, where high unemployment rates and the difficulties people experience in making ends meet led to a large exodus of Polish migrants to the UK. Seen from this angle, migration is a quest for a better living standard and a normalisation of people's livelihoods. Similarly, Piętka-Nykaza and McGhee note that over-stayers have 'developed the sense of leading a "normal life" that is related to economic stability and convenience of their life in Scotland' (2017: 1425).

Ryan, Sales, Tilki and Siara (2009), on the other hand, pointed to the fact that Polish migration strategies were linked to complex considerations of how to maintain a transnational family across borders. In the case of Poland, in the early years of migration, the movers were mostly young men who travelled back and forth between the UK and Poland, as a way of accumulating enough income to maintain their family members in Poland. As time went on, the families wanted to reconnect and this encouraged female migration across the borders (Ryan *et al*. 2009). These processes were also accompanied by chain migration; extended family members would often go to the UK and would obtain practical support from their relatives already living there. Migrants would maintain transnational connections with their relatives back home through mobile communication technologies and regular visits to Poland.

Drinkwater and Garapich note that there was a 'high level of return migration since many migrants moved on a circular, temporary or seasonal basis' (2013: 2). Pollard, Lattore and Sriskandarajah (2008) estimate that approximately half of all migrants from the new accession states either went back to their countries of origin or relocated to other EU countries between 2004 and 2007. At the same time, research focusing on family patterns across borders has highlighted the importance of families in decision-making processes on whether or not to stay and settle in the UK. This body of research suggests that Polish families who moved to the UK after 2004 are likely to settle there. In this vein, some scholars argue that families' extended stay in the UK is often related to complex considerations regarding their children's education (see McGhee *et al*. 2012; Piętka-Nykaza and McGhee 2017). Genova and Zontini (2020), in this respect, note that having children in school may have made it difficult for migrants to leave the UK after Brexit. Kempny (2017), focusing on the Polish community in Northern Ireland, found the same pattern.

There is also an emerging scholarship on how Brexit has affected the migration strategies of migrants in the UK. An early study, pre-Brexit, by McGhee *et al*. suggested that: 'the UK's departure from the EU and the change in the legal status of resident Polish nationals – whatever particular shape that will take – will unavoidably impact on the two contrasting trends of 'transience' and 'settlement' (2017: 2109). Their research predicted that migrants might be ready for 'civic integration', which might mean that they are considering settling down in the UK. A more recent article by Trąbka and Pustułka (2020) offers a more fluid theoretical framework through which migrants' strategies are captured in the context of Brexit. Their typology, including 'bees', 'bumblebees', 'cocoons' and 'butterflies', points to the complexity of people's migration strategies. Bees and bumblebees are 'well-anchored in the UK and, thus, they would not be willing to move' (Trąbka and Pustułka 2020, 2668). Cocooned individuals, on the other hand, question their future in the UK. They are in a between and betwixt position, although they have many anchors with their host country. Finally, butterflies, owing to their 'transnationally transferrable capital, cosmopolitan disposition and motility' (Trąbka and Pustułka 2020: 2677) do not seem to be intensely concerned about Brexit.

In a more recent contribution, Genova and Zontini (2020), drawing on theories of liminality, explore how people's lives have been affected by Brexit. They call attention to the in-betweenness of migrant worlds, which has been exacerbated in the context of Brexit, seen as an unsettling event. Migrants have to navigate 'the transition between the old certainty of freedom of movement and the potentially uncertain future associated with a restrictive post-Brexit migrant social status' (Kilkey, Piekut, Ryan 2020: 7). Liminality is characterised by a feeling of uncertainty and ambiguity but also offers the 'possibility for re-invention' (Genova and Zontini 2020: 52). Owen (2018) also notes that Brexit represents a potential rupture and possibility of new identities and transitions.

In other works, Brexit has been seen as an unsettling event (Kilkey and Ryan 2021; Ranta and Nancheva 2019) related to people's insecurities around socio-legal statuses and making them reconsider their migration plans. In a similar vein, Guma and Jones (2019) examine how Brexit can be seen as an ongoing process of

'othering', which might be very unsettling for migrants who had felt well embedded in the UK. Similarly, Barnard, Fraser Butlin and Costello (2022: 369) note that Brexit has made people 'feel like they were "becoming a migrant" in the UK'. Kilkey and Ryan (2021), adapting a lifecourse perspective in a bid to understand the impacts of Brexit on people's migration projects, note that Brexit should be considered as part of series of interlinked unsettling events. This is a useful idea, as the introduction of the EU Settlement Scheme could be seen as yet another unsettling event linked to Brexit.

My research will adopt terms of indeterminacy and stability in my conceptual framework. In the course of my research it emerged that, whereas stability prevailed before Brexit, *after* Brexit a sort of rupture in some people's narratives about their stay in Northern Ireland was evident. I consider indeterminacy and stability to be fluid options and that people's migration strategies change over time and their life course. In my opinion, for some individuals, the EU Settlement Scheme has caused a shift from stability to indeterminacy and, for some, the other way around – from unpredictability to stability. This is in line with Genova and Zontini's (2020) notion that the liminality that came with Brexit can be liberating for some individuals. In what follows, I discuss CEE migrant strategies in Northern Ireland and how the EU Settlement Scheme has affected them. The question of migration strategies has been further compounded by the recent Covid-19 crisis and the issue of the Irish border and the geographical situation of Northern Ireland adds an additional layer of complexity to the picture. I look at the changing dynamics of thinking about one's stay in Northern Ireland and reveal ruptures in people's narratives.

Methods

This paper is based on my covert research at a migrant centre and in-depth interviews with contacts that I had developed over the course of my research on the Polish migrant community (between June 2019 and March 2021). Conducting fieldwork was not my initial intention. I was just a support-provider at a local migrant centre in Northern Ireland. I was there to make my living providing help for people applying for European Settlement status. I joined the migrant centre in the summer, when my contractual agreement with a university came to an end; the main reason why I decided to join the migrant centre in 2019 was to secure my livelihood. However, as time went on, I realised that I could not just leave aside my anthropological curiosity and I started taking fieldnotes and writing a field diary. Overall, the workplace was very much in tune with my research interests. I had studied migration to Northern Ireland for a long time. Unwillingly, I plunged into covert research. For a long time, I was afraid to ask the migrant centre for consent to conduct research there. I was their employee and as such I was worried that they would think that I was spying on the clients, thus breaching my contract. Covert research on the whole has been deemed as ethically unsound and covered researchers were disparaged (see Bulmer 1982; Herrera 1999). On the other hand, advocates of this approach have emphasised that it allows researchers to gain insights into topics that would otherwise be difficult to access (Calvey 2000; Miller 2001).

Another reason why I continued conducting covert research was that I also felt that, working with vulnerable clients, for me to ask for their consent to my research at the time of our appointment would not be a viable option. They were coming to the centre to obtain practical support with securing their immigration status in the UK. The last thing they needed was to feel awkward and uneasy in the context of participant observation. I also did not think that interviewing them was an option, as that might also cause them a degree of anxiety. I realised, too, that they may feel obliged to participate in my research as, to them, I was in a position of power – I was the one who was helping them to secure their legal rights in the UK. Throughout my employment there I faced a gamut of ethical considerations as to whether or not to conduct covert research. However, in the end, I decided that this kind of research would allow for a greater understanding of the impact that the introduction

of the EU Settlement Scheme was having on migrant communities in Northern Ireland in the context of a hostile environment and the impact of Brexit, with the ultimate potential to inform policy-makers.

Inherently, fieldwork involves a continuum of concealment and disclosure (Herrera 1999: 331; Scheper-Hughes 2004) and I decided to cut this continuum by asking my management for retrospective consent. To my surprise, my manager gave me official consent and I shared the final draft of this article with the board of the migrant centre. Furthermore, I decided to follow the British Sociological Association's (2002) statement of ethics, which says that, where research consent was not obtained prior to the start of the study, it should be obtained post-hoc. As a result, apart from contacting the migrant centre, I also contacted some of my previous clients, asking whether I could include my observations in a research article. Their consent was obtained through a phone call. I either contacted people directly – asking for their consent in either Polish or English – or I asked my Romanian interpreter friend to ask Romanian-speakers for their consent to me describing certain situations and their ideas about the EU Settlement Scheme. The question remains as to what extent retrospective consent can be seen as informed consent. However, I also believe that conducting overt observation would cause reactivity problems and people might avoid disclosing certain information with me. When retrospective consent was not granted by those who did not wish to participate in the study, I have not included any field material relating to them in this paper. Furthermore, in order to protect people's anonymity, I have used pseudonyms.

When conducting covert research, it is necessary to balance ethical considerations towards informants with the importance of the research itself. I strongly believe that this research would not have been possible if I had tried to gain consent from the offset of the project and therefore retrospective consent is justified in this context. In addition, it is worth emphasising that I did not take notes on any specific situations but only on general trends among migrants, in order to ensure the anonymity of my informants. My clients came predominantly from working-class backgrounds and, on many occasions, they had limited knowledge of the English language. I focused on CEE migrants because I felt that they shared a similar background. They all came from post-communist countries with similar socio-economic and political histories. Their situations were also similar in that they were mostly economic migrants who came to Northern Ireland in order to undertake employment and improve their living standards. My participants came mostly from Poland, Romania and Hungary, although I also had several Slovakian and Lithuanian clients. In order to learn more about people's attitudes, I also conducted 10 in-depth interviews in Polish and English with people who had applied to the EU Settlement Scheme or were considering applying at the beginning of 2020. I spoke to Polish, Slovakian, Hungarian and Romanian nationals, who worked in a variety of sectors, including blue-collar workers and professionals. I re-interviewed five of them to find out whether their attitudes had changed since the initial interview.

I conducted a reflexive thematic analysis of my data (Braun and Clarke 2019) with the aim of gaining insight into people's experiences, views and perceptions regarding Brexit and the EU Settlement Scheme. I see my research as 'context-bound, positioned and situated' (Braun and Clarke 2019:591). From this point of view, 'qualitative data analysis is about telling "stories", about interpreting, and creating, not discovering and finding the "truth" that is either "out there" and findable from, or buried deep within, the data' (Braun and Clarke 2019:591). As such, I did not use a codebook or a coding frame but treated the process of analysis as something creative and fluid. I was writing up themes as they emerged from the data, using induction rather than deduction in my analysis. My coding approach was reflexive, seeking to obtain a more-nuanced understanding of people's changing migration strategies than a traditional deductive approach would allow.

From stability to indeterminacy

The EU Settlement Scheme has put into question some people's migration strategies. In their applications for settled status, many of my participants usually highlighted the fact that their choice to apply was strategic. The spike of racist incidents in the UK in the aftermath of Brexit (Rzepnikowska 2019) and the increasingly anti-immigrant discourses in the media and public debate have put people off from settling permanently in the UK. Furthermore, increasing fears about possible structural and economic problems following the Brexit vote have made migrants reconsider their migration strategies. In addition to this, the complex situation in Northern Ireland and people's fears about the situation post-Brexit (the issues of the Irish border, the possible unification of Ireland and social unrest in general) have forced them to think up alternative solutions in respect to their migratory pathways. As Rzepnikowska found, the wave of hostility post-Brexit 'revealed the extent of racism and xenophobia which affected not only Polish nationals but also other migrants and settled ethnic minorities, including British citizens' (2019: 61). She points out that racism has been institutionalised in the UK for a long time, even before the Brexit vote. It was expressed through the debates 'over immigrant numbers, media scares about scroungers, policies like Prevent which stigmatise whole communities' (Burnett 2017: 89). This links to the question of how safe and at ease some migrants may feel here.

There are certain parts of Northern Ireland where hate-crime rates remain high; this is particularly visible in working-class loyalist estates in localities such as Dungannon. It is common practice to write racist graffiti on people's houses ('No foreigners'), to leave dead rats on people's doorsteps and burn their cars, etc. Although, in Northern Ireland, the rate of hate crime against migrant communities post-Brexit did not increase, an awareness of these incidents in the UK made some migrants feel unwelcome. Marinela, a 23-year-old interpreter from Romania, said:

> *I was speaking to my friend from England and she told me that, on the day of Brexit, people were celebrating in the pubs and shouting racial slurs. It makes me feel uneasy when I think that Northern Ireland is part of the UK. The situation here is different but still I am not sure if I want to live in such a country. I've applied for settled status but I will wait and see.*

Marinela is well embedded in Northern Irish society; however, Brexit has made her question her intention to stay in the UK. This corresponds well with what Grzymała-Kazłowska refers to as the 'processual, uneven and relative character of "settlement", the flexibility of attachment and the reversibility of anchoring (i.e., a possibility of disconnecting from previous anchors' (2018: 253). Interestingly, Marinela *did* stay in Northern Ireland. When her father died in Romania in 2020, she decided that she had to support her mother financially and that going back to her country of origin was not a viable option. This supports Kilkey and Ryan's (2021) argument that a lifecourse perspective is indeed useful in understanding how migrants have been affected by unsettling events related to Brexit.

When I spoke to a 37-year-old Polish male, who has a wife and a child in Northern Ireland, he reflected on his EU Settlement Scheme application: 'Yes we did apply for the EU Settlement Scheme but in fact I have been discussing with my wife that we should think of some contingency plans. If the situation here gets worse, then it might be worth moving down South[3] or going back to Poland'.

Michał is well settled in Northern Ireland and has actually been studying for the citizenship test. He had obtained permanent residence and had the intention to naturalise as a British citizen. He then applied for the EU Settlement Scheme and put off his citizenship application for a later point in time. Both his son – aged 3 – and his wife have British citizenship. This links back to the issue of intentional unpredictability and keeping one's options open. He considered moving to the Republic of Ireland. When I asked Michał why he would do

that, he said, 'I don't know, I think that the attitudes towards foreigners are better. Although, if you think about it, the Republic of Ireland is backward, about 20 years behind the UK'. Furthermore, Michał mentioned that the Republic of Ireland is Catholic and the people have a Catholic mentality and are perhaps more welcoming towards Poles than the local Protestant communities. Even though he is not a strong believer himself, he did highlight the important role of religion in crafting out people's spaces of belonging and non-belonging. This example depicts the interviewee's ability to actively re-imagine his migration strategies in the context of interlinking unsettling events – namely Brexit and the introduction of the EU Settlement Scheme. In 2021, Michał was still not sure about his future plans nor had he yet applied for British citizenship. He told me that the situation was even more unpredictable because of Covid-19, with a major health crisis and an economic recession underway. He commented that crisis and contention around the Northern Irish protocol may awake old hostilities between the two dichotomous communities – Protestant and Catholic – causing social unrest.[4]

Furthermore, the question of the Irish border plays an important role in migrants' imaginings of the future and the projections of their migration plans. Andrzej, a self-employed handyman in his 40s who runs his own company, said that he has not yet applied for his settlement status. He told me that it was not an issue for him and that he could postpone his application; if he did not get settled status, he would register his company down South and possibly move there. Andrzej has had quite strong links with the Polish diaspora in NI; he was originally a teacher in Poland and also taught geography at a Polish Saturday School. He was quite well settled in Northern Ireland. However, with Brexit and a requirement to legalise his stay in Northern Ireland, he decided to wait and see what he should do. Another interviewee, Anniko, a Hungarian national aged 46 who is employed as a cleaner in Belfast, stated that her plan was to stay in Northern Ireland permanently, as her 20-year-old son and her partner were living and working there. However, she had not applied for settled status at the time that the interview was conducted. At the point when there were difficulties with passing the Brexit legislation, she expressed her hope that Brexit would not happen at all. She also said: 'Well, if Brexit does take place, then what's the difference, to go back to Orban's Hungary or stay in the post Brexit UK where people wanted to leave the EU and don't like migrants?' She held off applying for settled status and, provided that there is still plenty of time left to apply, said she might as well do it when she is ready. Her migration strategies also shifted from the need for stability to one of indeterminacy. Anniko was disappointed with the outcome of the referendum and was no longer sure if she wanted to stay in Northern Ireland.

Both Anniko and Andrzej finally applied for settled status. When I spoke to them in early 2021, they justified their decisions by pragmatic reasons. In Anniko's case, moving to Hungary would be difficult, as she would have a hard time finding employment. Andrzej's company, on the other hand, was growing and prospering; he already had a network of contacts around Northern Ireland and had build up his reputation there. This is in line with Kilkey and Ryan's (2021: 243) idea that 'professional attachments, developed over time in one place, could hinder return or migration elsewhere'.

Another point worth mentioning here is that a settled status allows migrants to leave the country for five years and not lose their rights, whereas a pre-settled status enables people to remain just two years outside the UK. This is an important change when compared with permanent residence, which allowed people leaving the country for up to two years. It may in itself affect people's migration strategies as now it allows for greater fluidity and mobility, given the five-year period. My friend, Joanna, a 37-year-old female from Slovakia, told me:

In fact, had I known that they would have changed the law I wouldn't have applied for British citizenship under the old rules. I wanted greater flexibility, you know, leave the country for three years without worrying about losing my rights. As a PhD graduate, I want to leave my options open and spend two years here, three years there, just to obtain the useful postdoc experience without losing my rights here.

In a similar way, when I was working at the migrant centre, I spoke to some Romanian people at a car wash. I told them about the new regulations, with the help of an interpreter. They had difficulty documenting their legal status in the UK, as they did not pay NI contributions and did not have bank accounts. However, applying for a pre-settled status did not require much proof back then. I encouraged them to apply. They reacted enthusiastically when I told them that they can leave the country for two years and not lose their status. In their case, they were commuting back and forth between the UK and Romania and their work was seasonal only. From this perspective, one can say that the new regulations in the first instance may actually encourage migrants to embrace fluid/malleable migration strategies. The problem with this is that, at some stage, they will have difficulties applying for a settled status, having left the country. They will not have enough evidence to document five years of continued stay. Nevertheless, many migrants do not think about their migration choices from a long-term perspective but are flexible and adjust to the demands of a given situation.

In search of stability

The previous section examined how people's strategies in terms of migration shifted from their settlement/sedentarism in the UK to fluidity/malleability in the context of hostile environment policies, Brexit and the EU Settlement Scheme. I agree with other authors such as Owen (2018) that the introduction of the EU Settlement Scheme has enabled migrants to re-imagine their sense of belonging and re-invent their future plans, while bringing in possibilities for new transitions. In what follows, I examine how people's strategies have shifted from the idea of lasting temporariness/indeterminacy to one of stability. I believe that, in this context, where Brexit 'entails a complex blend of uncertainty and ambiguity' (Kilkey, Piekut and Ryan 2020: 7) some people need to crystallise their plans to secure their future in the UK. This pushes them to develop specific settlement plans.

An example of this was Irena, who embodied the classical 'hamster' migrant type. She originally went to Northern Ireland in 2007 to earn enough money to get a house in Poland and return there. Irena was a psychiatric nurse in Poland and is working as a cleaner in Northern Ireland. During her stay there, she managed to save money and had her own house built but then decided to sell it. Instead, she invested in a flat for her daughter – who lives in Poland – and is herself now renting accommodation in Belfast. Both Irena and her husband applied for settled status. When I asked Irena more recently whether she had an idea of when she would go back to Poland, she told me that she definitely wanted to work in NI for the time being: 'I think that we will stay here until retirement. Now that we have secured our settled status, I feel secure here'. When I asked her why she is not going back to Poland, she said that it was unrealistic of her to expect to be able to re-integrate into the job market, which further reinforces a point that I made earlier about employment being a crucial factor in people's decisions on whether to stay or to leave. We spoke again in 2021, when she said that her son, in his late 20s, had applied for pre-settled status so that he could join her in Northern Ireland. He is a graduate of a university psychology department in Poland although he did not secure a job in his profession. He had been working in Northern Ireland previously but was moving back and forth between there and Poland. As Irena said, 'He could not be around for long anywhere'. Nevertheless, the introduction of the EU Settlement Scheme and strict immigration rules made her son re-think his situation and decide to stay in Northern Ireland.

This is just another example of when family considerations play an important role in people's decisions about whether or not they would like to stay long-term in Northern Ireland. Such was the case for Kristof, who was a cross-border worker living in Drogheda (in the Republic of Ireland, near the border) and working in Newry, Northern Ireland. He had originally worked in the Republic but then took up employment in Northern Ireland and took over his relatives through chain migration in 2015. They all settled in Newry. He told me that, initially, he was planning to apply for the frontier-worker permit, as he had already settled in well in Drogheda. He did not make any plans to move to Newry as he thought that it would be a better option to live in the Republic for time being rather than moving to Northern Ireland, which is administratively part of the UK, where people voted for Brexit. However, in 2020, he decided to move to Northern Ireland. He told me that he feared that, should he lose his employment in Newry, he would be at risk of losing his cross-border status and would be unable to settle in the UK with his family should he wish to do so in the future. He commented that the new points-based visa system to be introduced in January 2021 would make it difficult for people to migrate to the UK. These examples are in line with Kilkey *et al.*'s (2020: 9) argument that a 'mix of professional, family and emotional investment in the UK' was of crucial importance to people's decisions to stay in the UK.

However, a caveat is necessary here. While people may want to consolidate their stay in the UK through applying for settled status, this process, on the other hand, is bureaucratic and causes a lot of anxiety for people. This is particularly noticeable in the case of the homeless, of working mothers or of people on benefits who find it difficult to provide proof of their stay in the UK as they had not contributed to national insurance for some time. This raises further fears about family fragmentation as a result of new legal regulations. Often lengthy waiting times undermine migrant agency, leading to a kind of governmentality of 'stuckedness' (Hage 2009). From this perspective, waiting can be seen as a passive condition, making time feel 'numb, muted, dead' (Crapanzano 1985: 44). My research participants often expressed their vexation with the system and their fears in relation to the legality of their stay in NI in the future ('Is it going to be OK do you think? Will they not kick me out? Thank you so much, I was afraid that they would turn my application down').

People who are marginalised and do not have access to support systems in Northern Ireland will be negatively affected by such a wait. This is in lines with Jancewicz *et al.*'s (2020) argument that Brexit had a polarising effect on migrants in the UK, with some settling, while others found that Brexit added 'another layer of uncertainty' to their previously vulnerable situation. This has been visible in the case of several Romanian Roma male participants, who were circular migrants, moving back and forth between Northern Ireland and Romania. They were working at a local car wash, earning cash in hand. They were initially going to apply for pre-settled status. However, after their difficulty with presenting the relevant documents about their stay to the Home Office, they decided to go back home permanently. With a hostile environment, Brexit and introduction of the EU Settlement Scheme, there have been indeed visible patterns of return migration. In this case, there was a rupture between imagining one's future as fluid and contingent and thinking about stability, even if it effectively meant severing ties with Northern Ireland.

Conclusion

My research suggests that the series of interlocking events, including Brexit, the introduction of hostile environment policies and EU Settlement Scheme, have affected people's migration strategies in a myriad of ways. Whereas some of my findings seem to be in line with McGhee *et al's* (2012) argument about the shift from indeterminacy to stability in how migrants envision their futures in the UK, I argue that this situation has equally led to other scenario – whereby migrants who may have seemed well settled in the UK are actually rethinking their migration strategies. These examples yield interesting insights into 'how the Brexit process, and

its implications, can destabilise and unsettle individuals' sense of home and belonging' (Miller 2019: 8) and is in line with scholarship that sees Brexit as a liminal space, offering the possibility of liberation and re-invention.

My research has clearly shown that, on one hand, the introduction of the European Union Settlement Scheme questions people's taken-for-granted realities and may actually lead people to rethink their life projects. This was particularly visible in the cases of my participants, Andrzej, Anniko and Maciek. On the other hand, it may consolidate people's stay in Northern Ireland, as we have seen in the cases of Irena and Kristof. The EU Settlement Scheme, seen from this angle, invokes uncertainty and passivity although, on the other hand, it activates the individual imagination, allowing people to think creatively about their future lives in/outside Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, the EU Settlement Scheme itself causes a lot of anxiety and uncertainty, particularly for the most vulnerable sections of the community. This impacts on their sense of belonging in Northern Ireland and possible decisions regarding return migration.

The case of Northern Ireland and the invisible border adds an additional complexity to the picture. On the one hand, the Irish border allows people more flexibility in their migration plans as they can move South and find themselves under EU jurisdiction. It is worth highlighting here that such mobility does not necessarily mean a process of uprooting. Many of these migrants consider the island of Ireland as one region and feel connected to this particular island, rather than to the UK itself. On the other hand, cross-border workers who work in the North and live in the Republic may find themselves moving to Northern Ireland long-term. Regardless, people in this context are seen as active agents who navigate geopolitical spaces to adapt to the unsettling nature of Brexit and its implications.

Finally, due to time and space constraints, I have focused in this paper mostly on the migration projects of those who remain in Northern Ireland. I have merely signalled that the introduction of the EU Settlement Scheme could have a negative impact on vulnerable and marginalised individuals who find it difficult to document their stay in the UK and decide to return home. However, further research is needed to examine in depth the mechanisms that lead people to return to their home countries.

Notes

[1] I am using here term 'migration project' rather than 'strategies' to highlight the fluid nature of people's migratory pathways, which leaves scope for re-invention and improvisation.

[2] The 'Windrush' generation arrived in the UK from Caribbean countries between 1948 and 1973. The Windrush scandal 'began to surface in 2017 after it emerged that hundreds of Commonwealth citizens, many of whom were from the "Windrush" generation, had been wrongly detained, deported and denied legal rights' (Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, n.d.).

[3] People in Northern Ireland often refer to the Republic of Ireland as 'down South'.

[4] There were incidents of loyalist youth riots over the Irish Sea border in Northern Ireland in 2021, which included the use of iron bars, bricks, masonry and petrol bombs.

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Conflict of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Reflections on the Emigration Aspirations of Young, Educated People in Small Balkan Countries: A Qualitative Analysis of Reasons to Leave or Stay in North Macedonia

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For small, low-to-middle-income countries such as North Macedonia, the prospect of young, educated people leaving their place of residence (i.e. emigrating) can have significant negative societal-level effects. Understanding the complexity of the brain-drain phenomenon and its antecedents is critical to developing multi-level (i.e. global, societal and individual) strategic solutions. A qualitative analysis of several focus-group interviews was used to understand young, educated residents' reasons either for emigrating or for remaining in North Macedonia. Two overarching themes served to organise the participant-identified drivers for emigration and those opposed to it. Three sub-themes emerged describing the factors for emigration: 1) a lack of professional opportunities, 2) institutional systems, and 3) cultural tightness. Likewise, three sub-themes emerged describing the factors for staying: 1) community, 2) culture and 3) social responsibility. Insights serve to contextualise some of the experiences of young, educated people in small, low-to-middle-income, countries which impact on their emigration decisions.

Keywords: North Macedonia, Balkans, migration aspirations, emigration-decision conflict, brain drain

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Introduction

Mobility is an inherent characteristic of people; individuals often leave their homes in search of a better life, which can include better educational, professional and financial opportunities (IOM 2020). Indeed, Marsella and Ring (2003: 3) suggested that 'the impulse to migrate is an instinctual and inborn disposition and inclination to wonder and to wander in search of new opportunities and new horizons'. Such is the case when someone moves to a new location in the hope that better opportunities will elevate his or her social status (Rye 2019). At the societal level, such movement – or emigration – when occurring on a larger scale, is not without consequences for the sending countries. While these latter can be identified anywhere along the continuum of economic development, including economically developed countries such as Spain (Domínguez-Mujica, Díaz-Hernández and Parreño-Castellano 2016) or Italy (Dubucs, Pfirsch and Schmoll 2017), emigration can have especially significant consequences for sending countries identified as economically stagnant in their development. What is especially relevant is the emigration of young, skilled professionals (IOM 2020) – a phenomenon which scholars, at times, refer to as 'brain drain' (Adeyemi, Joel, Ebenezer and Attah 2018; Beine, Docquier and Rapoport 2008).

Such emigration can have positive global, societal and individual consequences. Docquier and Rapoport (2012) suggested that brain drain is a major aspect of globalisation, with Zhatkanbaeva *et al*. (2012) adding that the mobility of scientific minds is integral to the globalisation of science. At the societal level, such movement of young highly skilled migrants can also benefit both the receiving and the sending countries. Receiving countries benefit from the infusion of such talent to fill high-skilled labour needs (Miao 2021). Sending countries can also benefit from such movement. Adayemi *et al*. (2018) suggested that low- to middle-income countries cannot experience economic growth without the further development of professional, managerial, entrepreneurial and expertise skills, which can be acquired and/or refined in receiving countries. Subsequently, the emigration of educated individuals, according to Israel *et al*. (2019), can also lead to counter-migration or the return of capital. More specifically, brain drain can be further conceptualised as 'brain training' (Israel, Cohen and Czamanski 2019), which can have significant positive benefits for the sending country in situations of pronounced return migration. In addition, remittances sent by migrants can be used to boost the lifestyles of family members and can be invested in capital-accumulation projects that can benefit the sending countries (Adayemi *et al*. 2018). These benefits are not just financial and intellectual but can also include positive health outcomes for the returning individuals and their families (Petreski 2021). In general, social remittances in terms of ideas, skills, know-how and practices can benefit both receiving and sending countries (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010). Furthermore, Docquier and Rapoport (2012) suggest that emigration may contribute to the generation of positive external networks. Finally, benefits can also be experienced at the individual level. As Hendricks (2018) pointed out, worldwide, migrants evaluated their quality of life to be 9 per cent higher after moving abroad.

At the same time, significant drawbacks exist to sending countries with a significant output of young educated and highly skilled capital. Adayemi *et al*. (2018) pointed to the possibility of societal growth becoming stunted when devoid of such talent. Dodani and LaPorte (2005) highlighted the negative impact on the health systems in low-to middle-income countries when highly educated and skilled people emigrate to other countries in search of better economic and professional opportunities. In general, Docquier *et al*. (2007) suggested that brain drain is stronger in smaller countries, with Zhatkanbaeva *et al*. (2012) noting that such brain drain from low-to-middle-income countries is especially worrisome.

Therefore, at the societal level, small countries such as North Macedonia may be especially vulnerable to the negative consequences of such outflows of intellectual capital when emigration is not accompanied by a meaningful return migration (e.g., North Macedonia continues to exhibit a net loss of human capital – see

Janeska, Mojsovska and Lozanoska 2016) or an influx of financial capital (e.g., remittances or investments – Adayemi *et al.* 2018). In fact, the nation's president, Stevo Pendarovski, went as far as to suggest that, at the societal level, the 'emigration of young, skilled professionals [along with pollution] pose[s] the most serious threats North Macedonia faces' (Grant 2019: 1).

Indeed, a study conducted between 2015 and 2017 showed that 52 per cent of highly educated North Macedonian residents hoped to permanently leave the country (Gallup 2018). Similarly, approximately 80 per cent of students studying science, technology and engineering have reported seriously considering leaving the country to live abroad at the end of their studies (Ivanovska, Mojsovski and Kacarska 2019). As a result, the emigration of these youthful, future innovators has the potential to drive a considerable loss of creative capital (WFD 2019). According to the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's report, North Macedonia annually spends between €116 and €433 million on educating and training young individuals who then leave the country. In addition, the decrease in consumption alone from the loss of this human capital contributes to a sizable loss in potential gross domestic product (i.e. €15,850 per working-age emigrant – WFD 2019).

This issue, however, is not unique to North Macedonia. Other countries in the CEE region, both members – e.g. Romania and Bulgaria (Ionescu 2015) and non-members – e.g. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo (Eurostat 2020) and Kazakhstan (Zhatkanbaeva, Zhatkanbaeva and Zhatkanbaev 2012) of the European Union alike – have experienced similar emigration concerns. Due to its significance and complexity, it is unsurprising that the phenomenon has attracted the attention of scholars from various disciplines (Krieger 2004; Kvedaraite, Baksys, Repečkienė and Glinskienė 2015; Lee, Carling and Orrenius 2014). Yet, despite the widespread interest in the migration process, social scientists and policymakers alike have a limited understanding of the mechanisms responsible for generating and sustaining migration patterns (Carling and Collins 2018). The prevailing assumption in the existing migration literature is that young people gravitate towards higher-income countries in search of better economic and employment opportunities (e.g. Koleša 2019), as well as more advantageous political and socio-economic structures (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino and Taylor 1993). On the other hand, what may motivate these young people to stay in their countries of origin are the social bonds tying them to their local communities (Boswell 2002). Yet, the simple identification of the antecedents leading to, or preventing, emigration has been criticised for presenting the problem as a static process (Carling and Collins 2018; Van Hear, Bakewell and Long 2012), thus failing to account for changing motives (de Haas 2011) and largely ignoring the precise causal mechanisms (Hagen-Zanker 2015) leading to, or preventing, emigration. Instead, a more nuanced understanding of this process – contextualised through the expressed experiences of young people contemplating emigration – may allow for the better development of programmes, policies and strategies that target the antecedents to emigration and enable opportunities for young people to reach their full potential in their countries of origin, thereby slowing down or reversing the patterns of emigration for societies in which the negative consequences of emigration, at the societal level, outnumber the positive ones (Adayemi *et al*. 2018; Zhatkanbaeva *et al*. 2012).

Through a qualitative exploration of the experiences of young, highly educated North Macedonian residents, this study explores the presence of the above-listed factors which are suggested to influence emigration decisions and aspirations in addition to other potential factors that may impact on the emigration decision process. As King and Oruc (2019) have suggested, currently, there is an inadequate understanding of the complex attitudes and experiences of young people, such as young Macedonians, as they consider leaving their home country. This study was designed to contextualise some of these experiences for young, educated people residing in a small, low-to-middle-income countries such as North Macedonia and to further our understanding

of the antecedents influencing emigration decisions as a precursor to developing sensible and effective strategies, programmes and policy that may generate a meaningful positive impact on the patterns of emigration at both the individual and the societal levels.

The drivers *for* emigration

The extant literature points to numerous potential drivers of emigration experienced at the individual and/or societal levels (Boswell 2002) and covering a myriad of issues associated with the sending country, such as education (IOM 2020), economic instability, poverty or crime (Parkins 2010). For instance, some of the strongest drivers thought to impact on the decisions of young, highly educated people to emigrate include the sending country's lack of economic and employment opportunities (IOM 2020; Koleša 2019) and the political and socio-economic structures associated with these countries (Massey *et al.* 1993).

Although scholars are beginning to have a clearer picture of what generally contributes to emigration aspirations and intentions, the literature remains fragmented and largely assumes that motivations stem from economic reasoning (Williams, Jephcote, Janta and Li 2018). Indeed, stagnant employment opportunities and inadequate living standards in a person's home country have largely been regarded as important indicators of intentions to emigrate (Parkins 2010; Williams *et al.* 2018). Generally, it seems that the promise of better wages and improved employment conditions in receiving countries influences emigration aspirations (Aslany, Carling, Mjelva and Sommerfelt 2021) and decisions (Lowell 2009). Indeed, in a comprehensive systematic review of the determinants of migration aspirations, Aslany and her colleagues (2021) discovered that the aspiration to emigrate had a negative relationship with employment status, where a greater aspiration to emigrate was associated with a higher level of unemployment. Thus, when individuals' cost analyses suggest a positive differential income in favour of moving abroad, an important condition is met that elicits enduring migration patterns, persisting as long as wage and employment inequality persists (Hagen-Zanker 2015; Rakauskienė and Ranceva 2014). As Kvedaraite and her colleagues (2015: 197) surmised, a 'willingness to have an economic freedom' and a 'rise on a career ladder' are important determinants of emigration. As such, we advance our first research question:

RQ1: *Do young educated North Macedonian residents consider the current economic and employment opportunities as potential drivers for emigration?*

The political (Ambroso 2006; Efendic 2016; Rakauskienė and Ranceva 2014) and socio-economic structures also influence emigration decisions (Massey *et al.* 1993). Structural factors, such as poverty, economic development, changing demographic trends (EU Science Hub 2018) or policy (Ambroso 2006; Efendic 2016) present some of the more common drivers of emigration. Yet, structural problems are not limited to matters of policy and economics. Other structural issues perceived as deficient in societies, such as security, human rights, environmental degeneration, climate change, infrastructure, transportation quality, communications and information can also drive people away from their countries of origin (Van Hear *et al.* 2012). Indeed, Aslany *et al.*'s aforementioned systematic review of the literature found convincing evidence that increased perceptions of corruption and the low quality of a country's security, public services, healthcare, public institutions and education all increase aspirations for individuals to emigrate from their current country.

Through the shared experiences of young, educated residents of North Macedonia, this investigation also explored what structural issues, if any, increase aspirations or considerations for emigration from a small, low-to-middle-income country such as North Macedonia. As such, we advance our second research question:

RQ2: *Do young educated North Macedonian residents consider the current country of origin's structural inefficiencies as potential drivers for emigration?*

As suggested in this review, while economic issues and structural inefficiencies may be important drivers of the decision to emigrate, other factors may also play an important role. What role, if any, would these additional factors play with young, educated professionals residing in a low-to-middle-income country such as North Macedonia in cultivating their aspiration to emigrate? To pursue these inquiries, we propose our third research question:

RQ3: *What additional drivers for emigration – aside from economic and structural ones – do young educated North Macedonian residents consider?*

The drivers *against* emigration

While a number of drivers may elicit considerations for young, educated professionals to emigrate abroad, some factors have the opposite effect as they contribute to immobility (Schewel 2020) and a desire to remain. In fact, strong social bonds, close familial relationships or significant community involvement offer strong reasons to stay and forego emigration (Boswell 2002). Indeed, a strong satisfaction with community relationships has been associated with diminishing effects on aspirations (Aslany *et al*. 2021) and intentions to emigrate (Williams *et al.* 2018). Similarly, strong family attachments or the importance of family, has also been connected with lower intentions to migrate (Van Mol 2016). Discussing the reasons for the reverse-emigration of Polish women, Duda-Mikulin (2018) also noted the need to take care of elderly parents as an important concern impacting on emigration decisions. Thus, the strength of familial relationships, connections and community engagement may counteract the desire to emigrate. As such, this investigation explores the impact of social bonds on the decisions to emigrate, as captured through the experiences of young, educated professionals residing in a low-to-middle-income country such as North Macedonia and prompts our fourth research question:

RQ4: *Do young, educated North Macedonian residents consider social bonds to present a potential deterrent to emigration?*

The social bonds that tie individuals to their country of origin through close familial relationships and community engagement may only provide a limited insight into the primary reasons which young, educated professionals in countries such as North Macedonia use to convince themselves to forego emigration. What other drivers against emigration, if any, would these residents cite as factors motivating them to remain in their place of residence? To explore these issues, we advance the final question of this investigation:

RQ5: *What additional drivers against emigration – aside from social bonds – do young, educated North Macedonian residents consider?*

Against the backdrop of exploring questions targeting the different potential drivers both for and against emigration, it is worth noting that scholars investigating the patterns of migration largely discourage theoretical exclusivity; instead, most acknowledge that 'causal processes relevant to international migration might operate on multiple levels simultaneously' (Massey *et al.* 1993: 455). Thus, even though we highlight each of the

drivers introduced in this investigation separately so that we can study them in greater detail, the drivers of migration often overlap and occur in mutually influencing patterns (Carling and Collins 2018).

Method

This study is the first in North Macedonia to simultaneously analyse reasons for both leaving and for remaining in the country; additionally, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to explore the factors impacting on emigration in North Macedonia from a qualitative perspective, as all of the previous studies relied on historical data or quantitative measures. As such, focus groups were used to understand young residents' motivations to emigrate or to remain in North Macedonia. While they may lack the significant depth afforded by in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions provide a distinct advantage over in-depth interviews and traditional self-report methods as they reveal intrapersonal insights from dynamic group interactions (Morgan 2019).

Four focus groups (*N=4*) included a convenience sample of undergraduate students (*N*=26) recruited from a business course at a large public university in North Macedonia. In order to facilitate conversations, heterogeneous groups were divided based on their responses to a filter survey, in which they indicated whether they planned to remain or to leave North Macedonia during the next year (*N=13 intend to stay; N=13 intend to leave*). Recruitment continued on a rolling basis until we reached a point of saturation with the data (Morgan 2019). The focus groups lasted between 38 and 82 minutes (*M=54 minutes*) and the participants ranged in age from 21 to 26 (*M =23.47*). All the participants identified as Caucasian.

The focus groups followed a semi-structured interview protocol, which was developed based on previous literature (Morgan 1997). The questions focused on the participants' plans after graduation and for the future. We also asked about what or who influenced their decisions regarding their future plans. In addition we asked, when they pictured their future, if they saw themselves in North Macedonia. Lastly, we asked them to describe the reasons why they did or did not picture themselves in North Macedonia. There was little debate in the focus groups about whether they would remain in or leave North Macedonia; stated differently, there were two groups clearly represented. As such, much of the conversation centred around the reasons why they wanted to leave or remain in the country.

University IRB approval was received prior to the commencement of the project and written informed consent was obtained from all participants. The first author, a trained interviewer, conducted the focus groups via Zoom. The moderator was not the students' instructor and, as such, the students did not receive class credit for their participation. The focus groups were video-recorded with participant permission and transcribed verbatim. A codebook was developed inductively from the data by the research team. Two graduate assistants coded the one transcript together, achieving a 98 per cent average inter-rater agreement. The rest of the transcripts were coded separately.

For this project, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process for thematic analysis was applied, which includes familiarity with the data, the generating of initial codes, the searching for themes, the reviewing of themes, the defining and naming of themes and the producion of the report. This is an inductive thematic analysis and patterns were sought related to the research questions posed in the literature review. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and gaining consensus by the team.

Findings

During the focus groups, we talked to young people about the reasons why they considered remaining in or leaving their birthplace of North Macedonia. Two overarching themes emerged, which address the consideration factors for emigrating and for remaining. From the overarching theme related to the drivers *for* emigration,

three sub-themes emerged which describe the reasons why people considered emigrating. The following themes were identified as factors which participants examined as part of their consideration to leave North Macedonia: a lack of professional opportunities, institutional systems and cultural tightness. From the overarching theme related to the drivers *against* emigration, three sub-themes also emerged, characterising the consideration factors for remaining in North Macedonia. The following themes were identified as factors examined by participants as part of their decision to stay in their home country: community, culture and social responsibility. First, we discuss the factors which young people consider when deciding to emigrate.

Consideration factors for emigrating: pushing away from frustrations

As previously mentioned, three themes – a lack of professional opportunities, institutional systems and cultural tightness – emerged as significant factors examined by young, educated residents of North Macedonia when considering emigration. Throughout the focus groups the young people discussed their satisfaction with particular locations they had visited in the past and their desire and aspirations for educational opportunities; hence, it is worth noting that, while discussions of particular locations did not emerge as themes, they are often incorporated into the narratives of the participants.

A lack of professional opportunities

The focus-group participants indicated that they consider leaving North Macedonia because of the perceived limited economic opportunities for financial security or professional growth. As this young student stated,

> *I'm about to graduate in a few months. And I feel like I have no options. For example, if you took the job industry, let's say I'm feeling like I have 10 companies, maybe 20 companies that I'm about to choose from, or maybe… like I have no goal for me to work here. As simple as that.*

The young people generally believed that there are more opportunities abroad for employment, volunteering and economic advancement. Participants often shared their opinion that they felt the gains would be greater for the same input if they went abroad – '... it plays a big part, and finances are a big thing that maybe if we go abroad then, like, for the same hours of working, we could get a better salary'. Another participant added: 'I think one of the biggest reasons why people want to move elsewhere is really about money, because, if you can earn more, you will probably have a better quality of life'. In sum, participants described life abroad as offering opportunities that they believed would be constrained by remaining in the home country.

The above are just a few of many similar exemplars provided by the participants and suggesting that the perceived lack of professional opportunities – independent of perceived societal structural issues – kindles these young, educated people's aspirations to emigrate. Indeed, the perception of the lack of professional (i.e. economic and employment) opportunities was continuously mentioned as an indisputable driver inciting young, educated North Macedonian residents to consider emigrating from their country of birth. As such, these findings are consistent with the current literature, which suggests that individuals with limited employment and advancement opportunities show greater aspirations to emigrate to places that offer greater opportunities (Aslany *et al.* 2021). In addition, the current findings also provide further evidence of the complexity of linearly correlating the impact of income on the aspiration to emigrate, as low-income earners may not represent the predominant drivers of income-based migration (Aslany *et al.* 2021). Instead, the aspiration to emigrate – which can drive mobility – may be based on the opportunity for a person to improve his or her earnings by

relocating to areas with higher pay for comparable services (Aslany *et al.* 2021; Hagen-Zanker 2015; Rakauskienė and Ranceva 2014). As such, the perceived benefit of emigration at the individual level – in this case professional development and financial gain – is clearly visible through the participants' responses, thus reiterating the complex relationship and balance between individual and societal consequences of emigration.

The institutional system

Participants reported considering leaving the country because they are frustrated with society and various institutions in North Macedonia, including politics, healthcare, education and pollution. Participants suggested that life in North Macedonia is difficult, as even simple things are challenging to accomplish, thus constraining their agency to achieve their desired tasks. As one participant suggested:

> *...I wouldn't want my kid to be born here or kids and have a Macedonian passport. I had the opportunity to go to South Korea for an exchange programme and I couldn't go because my passport was Macedonian. So, I had to get a Bulgarian passport which I do not want to do. This is still my country.*

In these words, there are traces of an emotional struggle where the young person found that it was necessary to attain another country's citizenship just to be able to freely travel in pursuit of opportunities and happiness.

Some of the participants squarely placed the blame on the government, infrastructure and system in place:

> *...the systemic corruption, cultural deficiency and, let's say, business innovation stagnation (...) because if you have an innovative idea, it's pretty tough to execute it from here because getting funding and everything else (...) it's definitely limited.*

Alas, while all of the students were close to completing their college degrees, not all felt that they were in a system that would allow for innovation and opportunity. Furthermore, they repeatedly referenced the perceived corruption in the country and the supposed inability of the system to repair itself. As one young person reiterated:

> *...the corruption, low level of education, the bad health system, the bad (...) all the bad influences, actually, inside the society and inside the country. That makes the system, like the whole system, like, broken.*

The perceived lack of innovation and corruption left them frustrated and feeling that there were more opportunities for them in other places, as it was not just the economic barriers that kept them from envisioning a future for themselves in North Macedonia but also the perceived systemic issues that made life challenging. They also discussed their impression of what they considered to be the country's issue with pollution, as one participant suggested: 'The problem is actual and it's here'. Participants also shared their sentiments regarding how pollution would impact on them and their future families throughout their lives, as another participant surmised: 'I would definitely like for my children to not go through their developing years with heavy air pollution'. North Macedonia is one of the most polluted countries in Europe (IQAir 2019) and this was frequently cited as a reason to consider leaving the country.

In addition, there was general dissatisfaction with the health care and medical coverage provided in North Macedonia, as summarised by this participant:

> *Let's say, if you work hard, you become a high class. You still, if you want to, for example, get your medical needs satisfied, on a more higher standard, this is not possible in Macedonia, because you have a few sectors which are privatised, then definitely up to par with most developed countries' medical sectors. But, for example, I know that the infection sector that treats viruses and such (...) there's no privatised sector for this. This is only statewide. So, even if you're willing to pay a lot of money to get better treatment, you're not able to.*

Thus, as illustrated in this quote, even for individuals who are not economically disadvantaged, life in North Macedonia may be less satisfying due to the perceived lack of quality healthcare, which provides young, educated residents with a reason to consider emigrating.

Overall, there was a sense that the dissatisfaction with public institutions was a key factor in their decision-making. One participant articulated his concerns about the various institutions and how they are perceived to interfere with residents' growth and upward mobility:

> *So, basically, it's not just about education. It's also about the healthcare. It's also about the political structure. It's like, if you don't want to be in a political party, you're not going to get a job. And if you don't do this, you're not going to get also a job. And so the political reason is mostly the reason why people like me and my colleagues over here are trying to leave this country.*

A poignant statement by a young woman reiterates this point clearly: 'Politics corrupt every aspect of our life'. Hence, the supposed institutional instability in the country, along with the impression of lack of opportunities for professional development tied to perceived corruption and other structural barriers, provided a significant motivation for moving away from North Macedonia.

The frustration with these issues was evident from the focus groups as the participants oscillated between being displeased with the factors perceived to provide them with what they saw to be legitimate reasons to leave their country and lamenting the perceived lack of opportunities that would allow them to stay home: 'I just hope I can give my kids more opportunities than I had'.

Overall, this theme provided an answer to the second research question by clearly indicating that people's impressions of North Macedonia's structural inefficiencies are a strong contributing factor in the aspiration and desire of young, educated residents to emigrate. The decision to leave their place of residence was not easy, as it represented a conscious struggle (e.g. '…this is my country...') as these young people were not thinking only of their own futures but also of those of their future families (e.g. 'We cannot have children or give them everything they want'). These findings closely align with the extant literature that shows a positive relationship between the perceived corruption and dissatisfaction with public services (e.g., healthcare, public institutions and education) on the one hand and the aspiration to emigrate on the other (Aslany *et al.* 2021). At the same time, the participant responses highlight the complexity of emigration decisions where the potential conflict of benefits vs costs is not limited to a debate between societal-level loss (e.g., the loss of human capital) and individual-level gain (e.g., greater opportunities abroad), a frequent focal point of brain-drain discussions (e.g., Zhatkanbaeva *et al*. 2012). Conflict is also experienced at the individual level, where individual benefits (e.g., greater opportunities abroad) are offset by individual costs (e.g. not wanting to leave their home country and extended family behind).

Cultural tightness

The focus-group participants indicated that they felt frustrated with the perceived closemindedness of North Macedonian society. They suggested that the rigid cultural norms, as they perceived them, provide clearly established behavioural expectations. Violating such traditions, according to our participants, is not tolerated and is regarded as socially deviant behaviour. The concept of cultural tightness perhaps best describes this experience. Cultural tightness is defined as 'the strength of social norms and degree of sanctioning within society' (Gelfand, Nishii and Raver 2006: 1226). Dunaetz (2019) defines tight cultures as 'cultures having strong expectations concerning adherence to social norms and little tolerance for deviance from them' (p. 410). Consistent with this description, one participant suggested, 'So basically, if we're still in the phase where, if someone gets a tattoo, it means that they're a drug addict or something like that. So, basically, our society is not open-minded. It's just a straight path and they don't look left or right'. Essentially, participants showed their frustration with the status quo, as one participant shared this sentiment: '...if you do something off the beaten track, you're just like an outsider'. Another participant added: 'I'm feeling very limited here. Like, I have no options'.

Frequently, participants suggested that it is the combination of what they saw to be perceived intolerance and the culturally normalised practice of figurative suffocation that is so hard to bear. Thus, they expressed a longing for a different lifestyle, which they perceived could take place beyond the country's borders. As one participant said:

> *I appreciate more the way that, for example, in Germany, how people are not concerned about you and about what you do. They are not so, like, curious about your life and everything. You can just be whoever you are and here it's not like that.*

Thus, participants felt suffocated by the supposed rigid rules and the roles which they were expected to neatly occupy. They felt that it was hard to function under the apparent constant scrutiny of their actions, which did not adhere to perceived culturally accepted norms. They described this suffocation as a situation whereby their fellow North Macedonian residents were seemingly always getting involved in other people's business, as this participant illustrated: 'I don't like that people are interested in your life more than you, and everyone is looking at what you're doing, but they don't look after themselves'. As the young people suggested, this cultural tightness left them feeling isolated and hopeless: 'So many toxic things that you have to undergo that eventually you get really tired of it'. Another participant added: 'It's not that we cannot have kids or give them everything they want… we just don't want them to grow up in this kind of closed-minded society'. Indeed, the young people felt as if they could not be themselves. As one participant surmised: 'Why fight if eventually no-one is going to listen to your voice, even if it's the right thing'.

The third research question asked whether reasons other than economic (professional) and structural would emerge as drivers for emigration by young, educated residents. The current theme shows that the perceived cultural tightness is frustrating for these young people and is seemingly providing a good reason for them to consider leaving their place of residence. The perceived intolerance of any deviation from rigid cultural norms, coupled with what was perceived to be consistent close behavioural scrutiny has seemingly created a suffocating desire for young, educated residents of North Macedonian to seek freedom from judgment and close behavioural monitoring elsewhere. The findings from this theme align with multiple areas of the current literature (e.g., Aslany *et al.* 2021; Pettit and Ruijtenberg 2019). As demonstrated in one of the above quotes, clear admiration was shown for a possible emigration destination (i.e. Germany). Aslany and her colleagues' (2021)

findings suggest that positive perceptions about a target destination directly correlate with aspirations to emigrate, thus the participant's desire to relocate as a solution to current concerns is in line with the extant literature. In addition, culturally established norms and values have shown a propensity to influence peoples' desire to move. Individuals who are more pessimistic about the future and the possibility of timely cultural change are also more likely to show a desire to seek better opportunities abroad (Pettit and Ruijtenberg 2019), as did the participants quoted here.

The above themes present three clear drivers that would appear to impact on young people considering emigration. Participants who considered remaining in the home country identified multiple factors that can impact on immobility decisions. The next section focuses on these factors as exemplified in the emergent themes.

Consideration factors for staying: the draw of social connections and opportunities

Our young, educated North Macedonian participants highlighted a number of potential factors that may impact on their decision to remain in their place of residence. These immobility factors included community, culture and social responsibility. We now examine each factor in turn.

Community

Family members, friends and romantic partners – among others who would continue to live in their home country – were a major inspiration for deciding to forego emigration. As this young resident told us: '…the great network of people I have made over all these years of high school and college (…) if you leave the country, you can lose this'. Frequently, these young, educated participants echoed concerns about the loneliness and isolation they might feel when living away from those they love, should they decide to emigrate: 'The thought of being far away would bring me a lot more worries and, yes, the digital age would give me the opportunity to communicate, but having the people you love out of reach would make me, I think, feel more lonely'.

The young residents also conveyed to us that they would prefer to stay in North Macedonia because they have established certain professional relationships with businesses, through internships or working with others. As this young man asserted, young people's relationships were tied to North Macedonia and they did not want to have to rebuild those social connections:

> *I think that this is the reason I want to stay here because, with my friends or someone I know, I can trust them. I've been with them here and I know their parents, their friends, etc. And I think that if I move away from my country, I would need a lot more time to trust them and to work with somebody.*

They had developed contacts over time and often mentioned the word 'trust' when describing those relationships: 'I personally think that, for every job, you need the right people whom you can trust and, me personally, I need a long amount of time to be with someone and trust them fully'.

It is important to note that these young people were not concerned about making friends in new places. They often told the focus group that they knew people in other places or knew there were large populations of individuals with shared cultures (i.e. from the Balkan peninsula) around the world. However, they believed that the bonds and status they had attained at home could not be replicated:

> *Wherever you go, there are Balkan communities that you can adapt in. So, let's say in Chicago, there are 2 million Balkan people, so yes, you can find friends with your culture over there, but it's not always what drives people forward… to leave or not to leave. It's not always culture… maybe the social status that they'll have to build again and stuff like that.*

Thus, what mattered to them was being in the same location with the people they care about, as this young woman articulated: 'The feeling that you belong somewhere because everybody you love is there'.

Thus, the perceived sense of community (i.e. the established social bonds) provided an important consideration when thinking of remaining in North Macedonia. As such, this theme closely mapped onto the fourth research questionm which inquired whether social bonds present a relevant consideration for young, educated North Macedonian residents when deciding whether or not to emigrate. The experiences of these young people, as here exemplified, demonstrate that their connection with the community – their social bonds – was a clear factor to be considered for remaining in their current place of residence. This finding is consistent with the extant literature, which shows social attachments to have a negative correlation with individuals' aspirations to emigrate (Aslany *et al.* 2021). Past findings also show that the presence of strong migration networks or extensive and well-established diasporas (Van Hear 1998), can have a positive correlation with people's aspiration to migrate (Aslany *et al.* 2021). However, our study also shows that a strong sense of community in the sending country may be able to negate the emigration pull of well-established migration networks in the target country.

The perceived community, however, was not the only reason influencing young people to remain in North Macedonia. The perceived close identification with the culture also provided a strong social connection and a potential reason to remain at home, as the next theme suggests.

Culture

Participants communicated their sense of comfort in the culture and day-to-day life to which they are accustomed in North Macedonia. 'I feel good here with my life. If I leave, I don't think I'll manage'. This comfort could include food, culture or any of the privileges that come from being part of the native population in one's birthplace. The young people described their satisfaction with their home country and their pride in their place of birth: 'I really think that I am, I mean, I really like my culture where… I really like to stay where I was born'. Evident from the quotes was the strong cultural identity displayed by the participants, as evidenced by this young man's words:

> *One of my colleagues and friends left the country and, before he left, it was for work. He also lived in European country, and he wanted to disappear from here and everything in between. But when he went there, he realized that his daily life is not the same as here… He feels like a robot. He told me that. And after maybe a year or something like that, he changed his mind. So, I think that most of the young people don't get that.*

Hence, they frequently articulated that they wanted to stay where they were comfortable and could enjoy life. Moreover, they felt that making a life in a new place would mean starting over and would take time.

> *[S]taying in the country… it is a good opportunity for the rest of us because if you can find a way to earn enough money here, you have probably a better lifestyle than you would have in the States… because you're a foreigner in the country and have to adapt to the value of the country.*

As such, they did not see a strong reason to move away and make this transition. Along these lines, they said that they were not interested in adapting to another culture or becoming someone new, as exemplified here:

> *I would like to also mention the culture shock. I don't think it has to do with leaving your comfort zone, but the thought that I should shake my cultural values and adjust in another… in something different, in a different culture, it's not how I see myself, for example in 10 years. And it's not how I see my kids living, because we are, as my colleagues already said… it is the trust and it's not all about the comfort zone. It's about the thing that I would have to… shape myself into something different, where I don't feel like I belong.*

In sum, at least part of their perceived identity seemed to be tied to their host culture and living as an emigrant was not desirable; they did not see the benefits to be outweighing the costs. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that subjective well-being, or a high satisfaction and happiness with one's current life, is negatively associated with emigration aspirations (Aslany *et al.* 2021), thus contributing to the immobility of current residents in North Macedonia.

This theme closely mapped on to the fifth research question, which asked whether there were additional salient drivers – aside from the perceived importance of social bonds – considered by young, educated people from North Macedonia encouraging them to remain in their country of residence. Yet, it is important to note that there was a close connection between the last two themes, culture and community, as the close social bonds and ties to community appear rooted in the cultural norms which place emphasis on relationships. In addition to these two themes, young, educated North Macedonian residents also stated that they felt a personal obligation to help propel the country in a more positive direction. Thus, our next theme relates to the young residents' perceived sense of social responsibility.

Social responsibility

Individuals in our focus groups reported that their desire to remain is tied to their perceived obligation and duty to improve North Macedonia, as this young person indicated: 'I see my country on the wrong path. I want to participate and make it right'. Young, educated residents believed in their ability to change the direction in which the country was headed and saw it as their responsibility to do so:

> *Because many, many more people are living in despair or disappointed with the place they are in, and I see that like, a main, main problem for leaving our country. I can speak about myself. I see myself here in Macedonia and I don't want to leave… permanently leave my country, because I see that, with young people like us, we can change the environment, we can change the country.*

The goal of making a difference and creating a good life in North Macedonia for themselves and others was articulated throughout the focus groups. Those who wished to remain in the country believed in their ability to both drive and facilitate change, as this young man described it:

> *I want to stay in North Macedonia, and I think that we, the youth, are an important group of people who can make changes in the future and make North Macedonia great again. Somehow, because I think that we don't have a lot of opportunities and, when we finish our studies, we're not equal, so, we should somehow change this, and maybe more of the students will decide to stay here and to be part of this country… and contribute to North Macedonia.*

The possibility of change over time with regard to community and societal conditions generally has shown a negative association with aspirations to emigrate (Aslany *et al.* 2021). Thus, a lack of desire to emigrate on the part of local residents should suggest a more optimistic view of North Macedonia's future. Yet, our study participants did not express such optimism in things changing for the better on their own, unless they themselves engaged as active participants in the process. These young people hoped to build a better future for their country by being a part of the solution. As such, perceived social responsibility emerged as an additional theme delivering an answer to the final research question in this investigation. Thus, community, culture and social responsibility provided three salient themes contributing to young, educated North Macedonian residents' decisions to remain in their home country.

Discussion

The emigration of educated young people can have significant global, societal and individual effects. At the societal level, it impacts on both the sending and the receiving countries, producing both positive (e.g., remittances, financial investments, brain training, network building, etc. – Adayemi *et al*. 2018) and negative (e.g., loss of intellectual capital – Adayemi *et al*. 2018; Zhatkanbaeva *et al*. 2012) outcomes, thus highlighting the fact that this phenomenon is neither exclusively positive nor exclusively negative. However, the negative consequences of emigration, at the societal level have the potential to significantly impact on small, low-to-middle-income countries (Adayemi *et al*. 2018; Zhatkanbaeva *et al*. 2012) when unaccompanied by a meaningful counter-migration. Indeed, to the extent that it propels a nation's president to declare the issue as one of the two most significant challenges facing the nation – as in the case of North Macedonia (Grant 2019) – the emigration of young people can present a significant societal challenge that may inspire the development of and investment in programmes, strategies and policies aimed at slowing down or reversing the emigration trend (Zhatkanbaeva *et al*. 2012).

Yet, the societal outcomes of emigration do not always match its impact at the individual level. For example, while the departure of young, educated talent may have a negative impact on critical institutions in the sending country (e.g. Dodani and LaPorte 2005), the impact at the individual level may be quite positive, if filled with greater professional and financial opportunities for the departing individuals. Furthermore, family or community members may also benefit from the remittances sent back by the emigrating individuals. Therefore policies, strategies and programmes that ignore the complexity of the issue run the risk of overlooking the individual-level antecedents leading to emigration and, as such, jeopardise the opportunity to produce real solutions with a multi-level (e.g., societal and individual), rather than just societal-level, impact. Without addressing the individual concerns that impact on emigration decisions, a positive solution to emigration may be elusive. As such, the efficacy of the above-mentioned approaches rests on a proficient understanding of the considerations that influence young, educated residents' decisions to move away from or to remain in their home country. Yet, as King and Oruc (2019) argued, there is a lack of clear understanding of the complexity driving young people's attitudes and shaping their experiences as they contend with the decision of whether or not to leave their home country. This is not to suggest that such drivers influencing people to move towards, for example, professional opportunities (Koleša 2019) and socio-economic structures (Massey *et al.* 1993) or away from, for example, social bonds (Boswell 2002) have not been identified in the literature. Rather, it indicates a need for a more thorough exploration into the contextualised experiences of young, educated people residing in low-to-middle-income countries, such as North Macedonia, in order to better understand the precise drivers of emigration patterns.

This study has provided a qualitative exploration, through thematic analysis, of the specific emigration drivers identified by young, educated residents of North Macedonia. Altogether, two overarching themes

emerged from the study, one dealing with the reasons which young, educated residents gave for considering leaving the country and the other covering the reasons given for remaining at home. Each of these overarching themes was supported by three specific drivers. The three salient reasons which the young people gave for considering emigration were the perceived lack of professional opportunities in the home country, the insufficiency of the current institutional systems and the cultural tightness of the people in North Macedonia. What the young people frequently spoke of was their frustration with the seemingly limited economic and employment opportunities in the country, which did not necessarily match their training and skills and did not, ostensibly, provide great prospects for professional growth and advancement. The participants also discussed in great depth what they perceived to be the inefficiency of the home country's current institutional systems, spanning educational deficiencies, political corruption, rampant pollution and inadequate healthcare. While these drivers have been identified in the literature as some of the primary drivers for emigration in general (Koleša 2019; Massey *et al.* 1993), through the shared experiences of young, educated North Macedonian residents, this study has shown just how strongly these factors are experienced and the passion which they can generate when people are considering the potential to emigrate. The third emergent theme – which we named cultural tightness – evidenced a clear discontent with what was perceived as rigid cultural norms and behavioural expectations that are presumably rooted in the culture of the homeland. According to those participants intent on leaving the country, should a person stray away from the perceived rigid cultural norms, being labelled as 'deviant' was interpreted as a sign of intolerance in a culturally overbearing and suffocating society. As a result, young, educated people were in search of what they felt was a cultural refuge and the opportunity for individual expression free from judgment. Thus, the perceived lack of professional opportunities, inefficient institutional systems and cultural tightness of its residents seem to be three strong motivations influencing the decisions of young, educated residents of North Macedonia on whether or not to emigrate.

The sense of community, on the other hand, presented an important pull factor convincing young, educated people to remain in their place of residence. Identified as such in previous research (Boswell 2002) and emerging as a clear theme in this exploration, the social bonds, prestige and status formed in the community were clear drivers against emigration as expressed by the young residents – sacrificing and leaving behind these social bonds was not an option for many of them. As Mata-Codesal (2015) noted, some individuals feel the pull to remain in the home country to be a conscious decision, either because they have a stable income and can qualify for visas or simply because they do not see their situation as a burden. The sense of community was intertwined with the second emergent theme against emigration – the home country's culture. In general, young people had strong reservations when it came to leaving their culture and communities behind. Many participants felt that it was too much of a sacrifice to leave behind their friends, families, established roles and connections and way of life. Several scholars have noted that social structures are highly valued and cannot be underestimated in migration decisions (see Schewel 2020). The price of starting anew was just not one they were willing to pay in relocating abroad. The final emergent theme provided a glimpse of hope for the country and its future as the young people cited their societal responsibility as a major reason for remaining at home and facing the country's challenges. Our young, educated participants suggested that they are aware of the perceived problems facing the nation and they want to be a part of the solution. They indicated their willingness to help to resolve the challenges that act as important push factors prompting young, educated people to move away from the country.

Overall, this exploratory investigation has provided a solid insight into the reasons voiced by young, educated North Macedonian residents for wanting to (a) move away from or (b) remain at home in, the republic. Some of these drivers were identified in earlier literature and closely mapped onto the findings of this study. Even so, it is important to remember that decisions to emigrate are complex and may not necessarily rest on

a single factor. Instead, it is probable that they 'operate on multiple levels simultaneously' (Massey *et al.* 1993: 455) as they frequently overlay and transpire in reciprocally influencing patterns (Carling and Collins 2018). Frustration with the perceived lack of employment opportunities in the sending country, for example, may be met with an equally strong perception of such opportunities existing in the receiving country, enthusiastically shared by emigrants settled in the origin country. Thus, the push (i.e. lack of employment opportunities) factor in the home country is simultaneously reinforced by a pull factor from the receiving country (i.e. emigrants sharing stories of employment opportunities). In this case one factor reinforced the other. In other situations, the two factors may be in opposition to one another. For example, the perceived social and cultural pull of the home country, which encourages young people to remain home, may be offset by an equal or even stronger pull coming from the close bonds and cultural unity expressed by migrants from the same culture who have previously settled in the host country.

Altogether, the study highlights the internal strife which young people face when making such complex and life-changing decisions. While the homogeneous composition of the two types of focus group led to discussions that were primarily focused either on reasons for and the possibility of leaving or staying in the home country, the themes uncovered in this study point to a potential internal conflict that young people experience when making such complex decisions. This renders the phenomenon of emigration and, consequently, of brain drain akin to a wicked problem – a constellation of deeply entangled social issues or crises that may be difficult or impossible to isolate, define or solve due to, at times, their conflicting nature (Rittel and Weber 1973). For example, an intellectual-capital void created in the sending country may fill such a void experienced in the receiving country. Therefore, ostensibly 'solving' the problem in the sending country by retaining the intellectual capital at home leads to a new problem for the receiving country. This is one aspect in which the wicked emigration issue can be conceptualised, analysed and considered at both societal and global levels.

Another important aspect is tied to the individual level. For example, in the current study, an internal battle seems to ensue for young, educated residents of North Macedonia, a battle in which they want to leave the country in an attempt to escape the perceived rigid behavioural expectations stemming from the cultural tightness permeating the societal culture but, at the same time, also want to remain home and influence cultural change. They want to emigrate to provide better financial and intellectual opportunities for themselves and their future children while equally wanting to remain home where they and their future children would experience the benefits of close familial and societal bonds. Finally, the young people want to escape the inefficiencies and corruption of the institutional systems but, at the same time, feel a social responsibility to remain home and correct these inefficiencies and root out corruption.

While the exact drivers that impact on emigration decisions may differ from one society to the next, the internal battles faced are not unique to North Macedonian residents. As such, they underscore the importance of policymakers, strategists and programme-planners familiarising themselves with the pressing issues facing young people at the individual level, so that proposed societal-level solutions are consistent with the promotion of individual-level goals and objectives if they are to yield long-term success.

Conclusion and strategic considerations

As this investigation has asserted, emigration – and consequently brain drain – is an inherently complex phenomenon that is neither positive nor negative as it can be both simultaneously, no matter whether the consideration is taken at the global, the societal or the individual level. In some circumstances – especially with small, low-to-middle-income countries where the phenomenon features a significant exit of young educated talent – the perceived negative societal-level outcomes can lead a country to attempt to remedy what it considers to be a significant issue by devising strategies, structuring programmes and proposing policy that may slow down

or reverse the emigration trend (Zhatkanbaeva *et al*. 2012). As the current study has suggested, such an approach should take into consideration the individual-level drivers and the subsequent internal conflicts experienced in relation to the individual-, familial-, community- and societal-level goals that impact on emigration decisions. While the decision processes and the presence of internal conflicts experienced by those considering emigration may be more universal, the specific drivers or reasons to stay or go may be more unique to individual societies. Thus, it is important to identify the specific individual drivers influencing such decisions, if the amelioration approaches undertaken at the societal level are to yield positive results at the individual level as well.

This study has focused on uncovering the main drivers considered by young, educated residents of North Macedonia that impact on their decision to remain in (i.e., community, culture and social responsibility) or move away from (the lack of professional opportunities, the institutional systems and cultural tightness) their homes. As such, this investigation has provided a deeper view into the complexity of some of the more prevalent challenges identified by young people in North Macedonia, as well as the opportunities available in the host country, when addressing the threat of the 'emigration of young, skilled professionals' (Grant 2019: 1). The findings of this investigation should be relevant to other small countries nested in the Balkan peninsula, Eastern and Central Europe and beyond, as the decision-making processes of young educated emigrants may follow similar patterns in other societies too.

As a final note, it is important to keep in mind that the patterns of migration are quite complex and that, while the participants in this study did not focus on the social networks in the receiving countries providing a potential pull away from their home country beyond what was presented in the above findings, a continued study of the transnational space in which decisions are being made on whether to leave or stay should inspire additional studies in North Macedonia and other countries in order to enrich our understanding of this phenomenon.

Conflict of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported by the autrhors.

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Social Media and the Online Political Engagement of Immigrants: The Case of the Vietnamese Diaspora in Poland

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This study investigates the political engagement of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland on social media. It employs the typology of online political participation as a theoretical framework to determine the pattern of online involvement in the political sphere staged by the migrant group. Through analysing materials relating to political discussions created daily on an online community of the Polish Vietnamese, collected by doing netnography, this study shows that the political activism on social media of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland exists and varies. Vietnamese-migrant users discuss homeland politics and express views about political issues in the host country as well as other countries by creating non-mobilising posts (Information and Diffusion), while being inclined to produce posts with calls for action (Instruction and Promotion) to criticise social injustice and mobilise equality. This study also found a growing critical attitude towards homeland politics among Vietnamese-origin individuals in the country. The findings have practical implications for associations and state actors in both the host and home countries to account for the evolvement of the migrant community.

Keywords: Vietnamese immigrants, Vietnamese diaspora, Poland, online political participation, diaspora politics, social media and migration

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Introduction

The involvement of immigrants in political affairs is by no means a new phenomenon. However, online political participation, as developed by Segesten and Bossetta (2017), is considered as an emerging form of immigrant political practice. It is attributed to the recent considerable growth and development of the Internet and other communication technologies, especially the emergence of new social media. Previous studies show that online public spheres on social media lower costs and foster immigrants' engagement in politics by facilitating accessibility, enhancing efficacy by its interactivity, enabling quick and effective reactions towards important political events, furthering the transmission of political messages to the recipients and stimulating political mobilisation (Chadwick 2006; Earl and Kimport 2011; Tang and Lee 2013). Social media facilitate immigrants' political expression (Bernal 2010; Brinkerhoff 2009), inciting them to discuss political issues, helping to put pressure on political leaders and calling for social justice and equality in their country of origin (Trandafoiu 2013). Additionally, social media provide the potential for immigrants' transnational political practices through informing political developments in both original as well as receiving countries and other areas, helping immigrants to encounter ideas and narratives that allow them to understand the political process in greater depth, enabling immigrants to form new online centres and supporting them in establishing new political alliances and solidarities (Siapera and Veikou 2013).

Recent studies also point out that immigrants' political participation on social media contributes to the formation of digital diasporas, wherein there exists a tendency towards negotiation to reconstruct ethnic and political identities (Al-Rawi 2019). The Uyghur, for example, endeavour to reformulate Uyghur diasporic identity through daily posts expressing their identities on Facebook sites (NurMuhammad, Horst, Papoutsaki and Dodson 2016). Immigrants disagree with each other over the imagination of homeland, national and transnational political ideologies in online communities to recreate political identities (Georgiou and Silverstone 2007). Online communication also is used as a means by which immigrants express their political dissidence against homeland regimes (Bernal 2006; Mandaville 2001) while, at the same time, dissidents abroad attempt to create connections with regime opponents at home in order to 'coordinate resistance, publicize atrocities, and counter-propaganda and censorship' (Moss 2018: 276).

The Vietnamese diaspora in Poland is the biggest community originating from Asia, with a population estimated at around 25,000–30,000, with both regular and irregular status (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2016). This migrant community first marked its presence in Poland in the 1950s as a result of the 'socialist fraternity' project of which the aim was that the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites would assist their 'younger brothers' during the Cold War era (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019: 21). After the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989, inflows of Vietnamese migrants have continued to arrive in Poland, constituting a crowded and diverse community. As a mirror of their homeland, discussing politics is also regarded as a 'sensitive issue' by most Polish-Vietnamese people (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2017, 2019). Therefore, it is understandable that most studies by Polish scholars look at the social, cultural and economic aspects of the Vietnamese community in Poland (see Głowacka-Grajper 2006; Grabowska and Szymanska-Matusiewicz 2022; Grzymała-Kazłowska 2015; Huu 2021; Klorek and Szulecka 2013; Nowicka 2014, 2015; Pokojska 2017; Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2015, 2016), while the political life of this migrant group has been rarely addressed in previous analyses. That is not to say that the political practice of Vietnamese-origin immigrants in Poland does not exist. Far from it, there has been growing visibility of political activities within the framework of a democratic system staged by the Vietnamese in the country (see Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2017, 2019, 2021). Social media have played a crucial role in mobilising and facilitating the political participation of this migrant group (see Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019). I therefore argue that the Vietnamese diaspora in Poland provides an interesting example when investigating migrant online political engagement. While politics is

regarded as a 'taboo subject' among the majority of Polish Vietnamese, social media offer favourable settings for the political re-socialisation of this migrant group.

In this study, I research the online political engagement of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland by investigating the pattern of their political participation on social media. I further seek to explore and interpret those political issues that Vietnamese immigrants are concerned about in their online engagement. Theoretically, I employ the typology of political participation online proposed by Segesten and Bossetta (2017) as a theoretical framework to identify forms of online political engagement staged by the Vietnamese. Furthermore, I apply content analysis to examine the political interest underlying the discussion of politics through political messages online circulated by Vietnamese immigrants. Materials for this study are individual posts that I collected through netnography on an online forum of the Vietnamese community purposively selected for this research. As a domain of ethnographic studies, performing netnography should meet the standard of ethics in this qualitative study. The issue which I found the most challenging was the provision of confidentiality for the online community being researched. It should be acknowledged that the political issue which is the focus of this study is widely regarded as a 'sensitive' topic by the Vietnamese (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019). Thus, exposing the type of social media and the name of the online community targeted in this research might potentially cause harm to the community and its members. Consequently, I decided to anonymise any information serving to identify the online group. This study thus aims to shed light on the political activism of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland, making a significant contribution to the literature on Vietnamese diaspora politics.

This paper is organised as follows. On the basis of past studies, the next section, by systematically reviewing the evolution of the concept of political participation, develops a theoretical framework that clarifies political participation and the typology of online political engagement with reference to the work of Segesten and Bossetta (2017). It then moves on to a short discussion about the Vietnamese diaspora as a case study for this research. A justification of the data and methodology used appears in the fourth section. The fifth section presents the results of this study, after which the paper is closed with the discussion and conclusion.

The concept of political participation and forms of political participation online: A theoretical framework

The concept of political participation has extensively evolved since its introduction to political sciences. A classic definition was proposed by Verba and Nie (1972: 2), who regarded political participation as 'those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take'. This definition has been the subject of controversial debates and is considered too narrow because the 'political outcomes' assumed in the definition are decided by 'governmental personnel' (Teorell, Torcal and Montero 2007: 335). Verba and his colleagues (1978: 47) also admitted that not only political elites but also private and civil-society actors could determine the authoritative allocation of values for society. More recently, Brady (1999: 737) offered a wider view of political participation by referring to 'an action by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes'. This conceptualisation was adopted and developed further by Teorell and his colleagues (2007), whose definition of the term is seen as the most comprehensive to date, viewing political participation as actions by ordinary citizens who more or less intend to influence political outcomes in society (Ekman and Amnå 2012: 287; Teorell *et al*. 2007: 336).

In their classic study, Verba and Nie (1972) identify four dimensions of the typology of political participation: voting, campaign activity, contacting public officials and cooperative or communal activities (forms of engagement that focus on issues in the local community). A more extensive typology of political participation suggested by Teorell and his colleagues (2007) entails five components: electoral participation, consumer participation, party activity, protest activity and contacting organisations, politicians or civil servants. Ekman and

Amnå (2012) argue that forms of political participation, as developed in Verba and Nie's (1972) study or in a recent suggestion by Teorell *et al*. (2007) are not optimal. Those established typologies mainly focus on concrete political actions but ignore latent forms which are regarded as 'pre-political' or on 'stand-by' (Ekman and Amnå 2012: 287). These authors point out that latent forms are acts by citizens that may not be directly observed as concrete activities and that this type of engagement could be significant for future political activities of a more conventional type. Ekman and Amnå (2012) clarify two forms of political participation in which individuals can be involved. The first is *civic participation* (latent political participation) which encompasses involvement (a personal interest in politics and societal issues and attentiveness to political issues) and *civic engagement* (activities based on a personal interest in and attention to politics and societal issues such as discussing politics and following political news). The second form is labelled as manifest political participation – which comprises formal political participation and activism (extra-parliamentary participation). Formal political participation includes electoral participation and contact activities, while activism is determined in terms of legality. Legal activism refers to extra-parliamentary forms of participation – to make one's voice heard or to make a difference by individual means (e.g. signing petitions, political consumption) – and illegal activism is related to politically motivated unlawful acts on an individual basis.

The notion of a latent part of political participation developed by Ekman and Amnå (2012) is of great significance for understanding political activities online because it taps into the way of information-seeking and communication relating to politics in social media which, in turn, can affect political outcomes (Segesten and Bossetta 2017). Drawing on the typology proposed by Ekman and Amnå (2012), Segesten and Bossetta (2017: 1627) argue that political participation should be in the form of continuity from latent to manifest participation, as 'a process whereby citizens' latent activities become manifest, concrete political actions aimed at influencing political outcomes'. According to the authors, the process involves three phases, comprising latent and manifest parts and a transition stage connecting the two parts, termed as 'mobilisation'. Mobilisation refers to attempts made by individuals to incite political action and is operationalised as political calls for action – which are instructions to 'do something' expressed linguistically as an imperative verb.

In this study, I adopt the definition developed by Segesten and Bossetta (2017), viewing political participation as a process experiencing latent to manifest forms through the mobilisation phase. This way of conceptualising political participation is particularly relevant to this research because it allows the way in which individuals engage in politics on social networking sites to be taken into account, especially the online social-media platform on which this study focuses. More specifically, it adequately accounts for the practice whereby individuals (users) can only engage in latent activities or execute mobilisation since the researched platform does not support manifest participation essentially. In this regard, Verba and Nie's classical views and Brady's recent perspective on political participation fail to capture the way that individuals become involved in the political sphere on social media because they focus exclusively on concrete actions when defining political participation. In addition, it is acknowledged that Ekman and Amnå (2012) have made a significant contribution to the field by distinguishing between latent and manifest political activities, opening up for consideration unobserved activities which can potentially impact on political outcomes. However, they make no attempt to pave the way for observing the possibilities provided by social media with respect to individuals' political participation. As a result, the significance of latent political participation on social media, which causes concrete forms of engagement in politics and leads to political outcomes, is overlooked. In this sense, constructing the mobilisation phase in conceptualising political participation as a process is crucial. Not only does it help to account meaningfully for the continuity between the latent and the manifest parts but it also makes it possible to capture the important influence of online political participation on political outcomes.

Despite viewing political participation as a continuous process connecting latent and manifest phases through the mobilisation stage, this study refrains from approaching the process as linear. Segesten and Bossetta (2017) acknowledged that a mobilising call could be incited during manifest political actions such as protests which, in turn, can be transformed into latent participation. Moreover, excepting the manifest phase, which exclusively takes place offline, the latent activities and mobilising calls can be enacted both online and off. For example, individuals can read political news in print newspapers or on social media and make mobilising calls on online forums or by canvassing other people.

In their study of the typology of political participation on Twitter and by focusing on latent participation and mobilisation, Segesten and Bossetta (2017) propose a typology of citizens' political participation online based on the notion of citizen-driven mobilisation through social media. The typology comprises four dimensions: Information, Diffusion, Promotion and Instruction. On the one hand, Information is similar to Instruction because both denote the creation of original new content. In this regard, these two forms are different from Diffusion and Promotion, in which new content is not user-generated but shared. On the other hand, while Information implies content without a call for action – which is analogous to Promotion – Diffusion and Instruction are made with a mobilising call. The construction of the typology is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Typology of political participation online proposed by Segesten and Bossetta (2017)

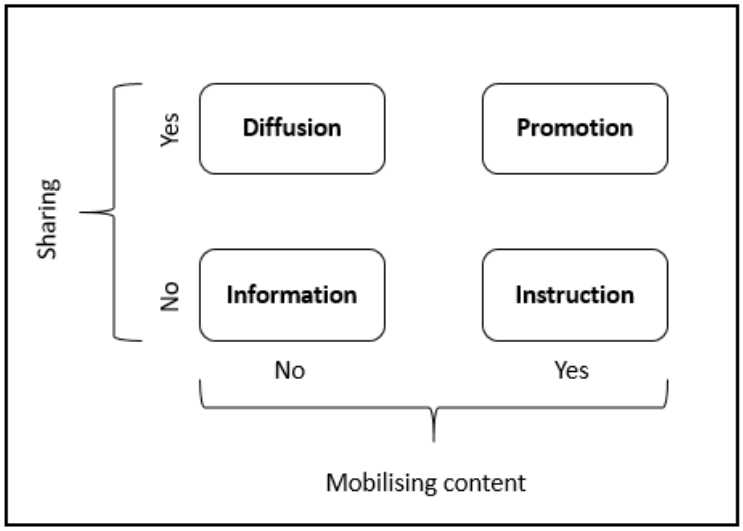


Figure 1 shows a matrix of the relationship between four distinct but related dimensions that constitute a typology of political participation online. The matrix is drawn on horizontal and vertical distinctions. The horizontal distinction is between latent participation – which is the creation and circulation of information about politics without mobilisation (left side) – and mobilisation, which is also the generating and spreading of information about politics with a call for action (right side). In turn, the vertical distinction is between the new creation of content (lower half) and a share of pre-existing content (upper half). According to Segesten and Bossetta (2017), creating and sharing calls for action are two distinct but interlinked activities. While the creation of a call for action is seen as a fundamental condition for manifest political actions, sharing can maximise the possibility of the emergence of manifest political actions originating from the creation of mobilisation.

In this study, I employ the typology developed by Segesten and Bossetta (2017) to investigate the pattern of online political participation of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland. The reason for applying the model is

justified as follows. First, despite being initially developed for exploring online political participation on Twitter, this typology can be applied to several social media platforms, including the one that this study targeted, owing to the focus on sharing. On this platform, a user can participate by making a new post with political content, be it either originally creating a post or sharing the post of the others. Second, as pointed out by Segesten and Bosetta, previously proposed typologies only focus on a single category of social actors (Golbeck, Grimes and Rogers 2010; Jackson and Lilleker 2011; Saxton, Niyirora, Guo and Waters 2015), only take into account one dimension of political participation or fail to identify whether the content is user-generated or shared. This typology is advanced when accounting for the patterns of individuals' political behaviour on social media because it is suitable for a wide range of categories of social actors and can capture different forms of political participation owing to its multidimensional construction.

Recently, Bossetta and his colleagues (2017) also developed a typology of online involvement in politics with four degrees of engagement, including *making* (the act of creating new political content), *commenting* (the act of responding directly to pre-existing content), *diffusing* (the act of liking or sharing content) and *listening* (the act of reading or watching political content without leaving any visible traces on social media). On the one hand, this typology seems to be more sophisticated than the four-dimensional one developed by Segesten and Bossetta (2017) in the sense that it allows for the observation of activities enacted by lower-level users by developing the form of *commenting* and considering the passive form by formulating *listening*, while the latter does not. On the other hand, Bossetta *et al*.'s (2017) typology fails to account for the connection between online political participation as the latent phase to the manifest stage due to ignoring developing online forms that capture mobilising calls. As I wdiscuss in the methods section, due to the unique feature of the data of this study, which are merely individual posts generated by first-level users, the dataset is not composed of comments left by lower-level users. Therefore, Segesten's and Bossetta's (2017) typology of online political participation is more appropriate to this study than that developed by Bossetta and his colleagues (2017) not only in terms of harmonising the way that political participation is conceptualised but also fittingly accommodating our empirical data.

The Vietnamese diaspora in Poland: a case study of immigrants' online political engagement

As members of the Vietnamese diaspora globally, the Vietnamese have a long history of living in Poland, with the first presence in the country dating back to the 1950s. The Vietnamese migrant flows have continued to take place since then and have experienced four phases in which their migrant orientation has gradually changed to an economic one (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2016). They now form the third-largest legal migrant group in Poland, with more than 12,000 people holding valid documents (Central Statistical Office 2020). It is also the most crowded community originating from Asia, with a population estimated at around 25,000–30,000, with both regular and irregular status (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2016). After nearly seven decades of presence in Poland, the Vietnamese community has turned into a permanent settlement and changed itself to adapt to Polish society.

Unlike its counterpart in the United States, the origin of which can be traced back to flows of communist refugees after the fall of Saigon in Vietnam in 1975 and after which it constituted a stateless community in the country, the Vietnamese community in Poland – documented as a state-linked diaspora (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2016, 2017) – originated from the 'socialist fraternity' project. The aim was for the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites to assist their 'younger brothers' during the Cold War era (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019). The nature of the state-linked community of the Vietnamese diaspora in Poland is illustrated by strategies and efforts implemented by the Vietnamese socialist state to control the community through various activities organised by 'official' Vietnamese associations in the country, leading to the interweaving of social

and cultural activities of the Vietnamese in Poland with politics (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019). A striking characteristic in the political life of the community is that Vietnamese immigrants in Poland are more likely to avoid directly discussing politics because they find the issue very sensitive to debate (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2017, 2019) – a phenomenon is allegedly attributed to the experience of totalitarianism under the communist era in the country of origin.

Nevertheless, it is argued that the term 'state-linked diaspora' is not entirely adequate to describe the Vietnamese diaspora in Poland. Vietnamese-origin individuals or groups have engaged in existing forms of political participation in the framework of a democratic system, such as mobilising democracy or protesting, which are different from traditional forms taking place within official Vietnamese associations closely aligned with the Vietnamese state (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019). Social media have been found to play a crucial role in mobilising and facilitating political participation. This was strikingly demonstrated, for example, in two anti-China demonstrations which took place in June 2014 and July 2015 to oppose China's policy concerning sovereignty over archipelagos on the South China Sea. The plans and organisating of the protests had been intensively discussed on forums on social media created by Vietnamese users (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019). Information concerning the time, the place and the way to organise the protests were widely and quickly diffused by community representatives through such online groups and who also made great efforts to incite the practical engagement of Vietnamese people in these political events. Of the two protests, the first, held in June 2014 in front of the Chinese embassy in Warsaw, surprised the public and social media in Poland because it attracted the participation of around 3,000–4,000 people (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019). Recently, a similar event occurred in an online group where a small number of Vietnamese people called on all Vietnamese immigrants in Poland to engage in protests against the Chinese-communist government and to support the Hong Kong freedom and democracy movement in Warsaw in 2019.

Online spaces on social media are of great significance for Vietnamese immigrants who have long been mired in the politics of totalitarianism, greatly helping to facilitate their political participation. Social media allows them more space to seek and circulate political information, enabling them to freely formulate and share political views and engage in transnationally political issues, thanks to the nature of transgression of the spatial constraints of virtual spaces. The Vietnamese diaspora in Poland is thus deemed suitable for the study of migrants' online political participation.

Data and Methods

This study is a part of the project 'Political Engagement of Diaspora in the Era of Global Interconnectedness. The Vietnamese Migrant Community in Poland and its Transnational Political Connections'.[1] It employs the netnography-based approach (Kozinets 2019), using data collected in an online forum (community) created by the Vietnamese in Poland. The selection of the online forum as a research site for this study is based on the theoretical and practical guidance of the purposive sampling method. The online group appears to be one of the largest communities online created to connect Vietnamese migrants in Poland, where their political engagement is particularly visible. This online community meets the conditions of a single object of study in terms of both its uniqueness and its similarity to other online forums of the Vietnamese in Poland, hence its selection as a case study (Stake 1995). On the one hand, it is unique compared to the other groups in that, as shown in its goals, it is intentionally created to help Vietnamese immigrants to broaden their knowledge, to understand as well as exercise their human rights and also to encourage the diaspora to actively engage in social and political affairs. On the other hand, regarding commonality, it is similar to other online communities which were set up to bring together Vietnamese people in the country. Furthermore, selecting the online forum

also satisfies other criteria of purposive sampling. Practically, this online community is visible for everyone to access (accessibility), gets daily postings by members (frequency of updates) and has become well-known by Vietnamese immigrants in Poland (popularity) (NurMuhammad *et al*. 2016).

Performing netnography is connected with two fundamental ethical challenges, which Kozinets (2002) addressed: the privacy of the online site (private or public) and the acquisition of informed consent. While the publicity of the privacy of the online forum makes the free access and data collection on the forum justifiable (Kozinets 2019), this study faces another ethical issue regarding the guarantee of confidentiality to the research group. This ethical challenge results from a notable characteristic of the Vietnamese, whereby politics is viewed as a 'taboo subject'. As documented in the literature, a majority of Vietnamese are reluctant to engage in politics because they regard political participation as risky (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2021). Taking this issue into consideration, I contend that exposing the type of social media and the name of the online forum targeted in this research might potentially cause harm to the community and its members. Consequently, I decided to anonymise any information serving to identify them.

The dataset of this study was created through a collection of post materials, conducted from early November 2018 to April 2019. These are posts related to political topics such as dissident activism, general issues connected with political systems, discussions about democracy, authoritarianism, communism and diasporic political activism. Because the research project of which the data employed in this study collected individual posts generated only by first-level users, comments left by lower-level users were not gathered. While I acknowledge that this fact could contribute to the overlooking of mobilising calls by such lower-level users, which could further spur the formation of concrete political participation as an indirect result of posts created with calls for action, this unique feature of our empirical data fits nicely into the typology of online political participation employed as the theoretical framework here. As discussed in the previous section, the typology is primarily formulated to accommodate content generated by first-level users rather than lower-level ones. The data were then organised and sorted by date of collection. To each post was added information about the user's name, the origin of the post (original or shared) and the post's content. However, I cannot add details about the participants whose posts I quote later in this paper for privacy and ethical reasons.

In this study, the unit of analysis is individual posts, which were examined by applying the content analysis method. As shown in Table 1, the qualitative content analysis was carried out via two tasks. The first aimed to classify the typology of online political engagement based on the four dimensions proposed by Segesten and Bossetta (2017) – Information, Diffusion, Promotion and Instruction. As discussed by the authors, both Information and Diffusion are recognised as creating posts with content concerning political issues without a call for action. Information is the creation of posts consisting of original texts made by users or introducing content from another source (for example, quotes or links from external sites), whereas Diffusion is the sharing of original posts without a call for action. The other dimensions – Instruction and Promotion – are the creation of posts with a call for action. While Instruction is originally created by users, Promotion is generated by shares. Drawing on this theoretical implication, the content analysis identifying the typology of political participation online was conducted as follows. Original content is coded as Instruction if the post carries a call for action, which is exposed through using imperative verbs such as 'sign this petition' or 'share this information'. If an original post is created without a call for action, be it an original text made by a user or an introduction to content from another source (for example, quotes or links from external sites), it is labelled as Information. A post is coded as Diffusion if it shares an original post without a mobilising call. Finally, if a post is created by sharing an original post with a call for action, it is coded as Promotion.

The second task is to identify emergent themes conveyed in political discussions by the users in the online community. For this task, I applied inductive content analysis to abstract the political issues conveyed through political posts, which are inherently unstructured qualitative data created by the group members. As guided by

Thomas (2006), I condensed extensive and varied raw text into a summary format, connecting the research objective of examining the discussed political issues to findings from the raw data and then framing the political topics evident in the raw data. By employing this approach, I was initially familiar with and coded the raw data from the collection of posts related to political topics, as mentioned earlier. I then created categories by overlapping the codes. I then proceeded to reduce the overlap and redundancy categories to create emergent themes. By referring to previous studies investigating political topics or messages delivered online by immigrants (Bernal 2006, 2010; Georgiou and Silverstone 2007; Mandaville 2001; Trandafoiu 2013), political themes which interested the Vietnamese online community were identified as those involving discussions on homeland politics, mobilisation for social justice and equality and debates on international politics. All quotes that illustrate these themes in the next section have been translated into English by the author.

Table 1. Coding scheme

Task 1 – Classifying the typology of online political engagement			
Content	**Examples**	**Original content**	**Shared content**
Without calls for action		Information	Diffusion
With calls for action	Sign this petition	Instruction	Promotion
Task 2 – Identifying emergent themes			
Specific categories		**Emergent themes**	
Criticism of the homeland political system Pressures on political elites in the homeland Criticism of the degradation in Vietnamese society		Discussion on homeland politics	
Criticism of illegal acts by the Vietnamese Encouraging the Vietnamese in respect for the law Encouraging the Vietnamese in civic engagement		Discussion and mobilisation for social justice and equality	
Discussing politics outside the homeland		Discussion on international politics	

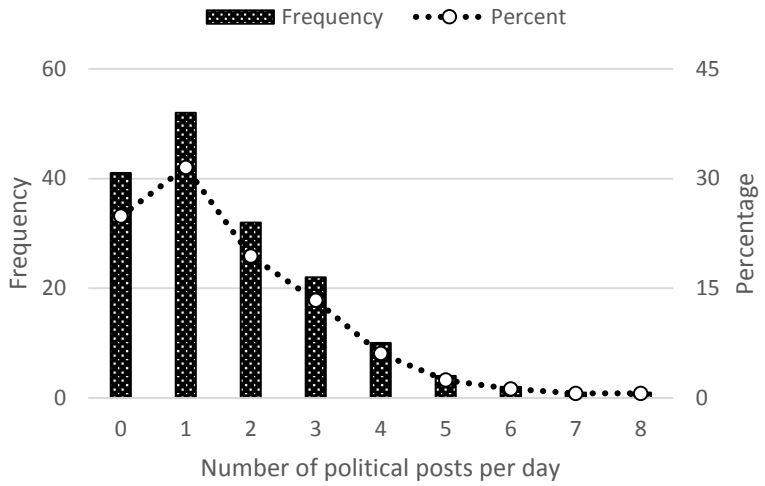
Empirical findings

Forms and patterns of political participation online of Vietnamese-migrant users

Statistically, 269 posts, made by 65 users, were related to political issues during the period of data collection (165 days). On average, nearly two political posts were generated daily. The maximum number of posts created per day is 8 and the minimum, zero. As explicitly portrayed in Figure 2, users created no political posts in 41 days, accounting for 24.8 per cent. Of those days when political posts were produced, the number of days having only one post is highest at 52 (31.5 per cent), followed by 32 days with two posts, corresponding to 19.4 per cent. The number falls to 22 days (13.3 per cent) for those with three political posts and drops considerably to 10 days (6.1 per cent) for those when four were generated. There were very few days in which the users made more than four political posts in the online community (five political posts in four days and six political posts in two). There was only one day in which users produced seven posts containing political messages and also one day for eight political posts. This finding, while preliminary, implies that the online political participation of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland exists. Though the engagement is staged moderately, the

online political involvement demonstrates that this migrant group is interested in politics, even though political issues are considered sensitive in the majority of Polish-Vietnamese people's view.

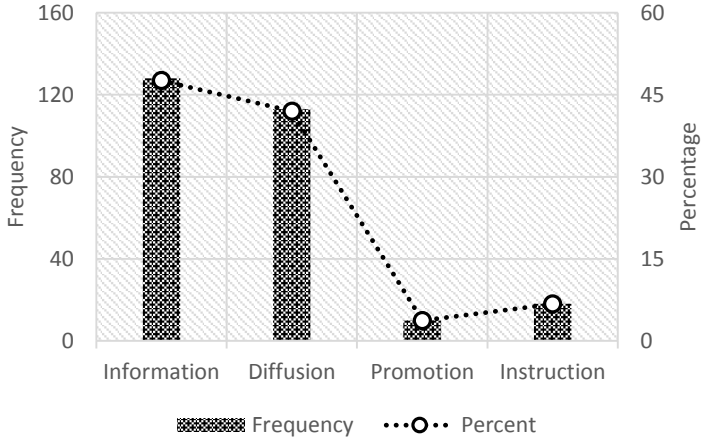
Figure 2. The frequency of creating political posts per day among users



As other social media operate, the researched platform helps Vietnamese migrants to easily engage in discussions of transnational political issues. Vietnamese-migrant users show a high degree of interest in homeland politics, with 62.1 per cent of the posts referring to political affairs in the country of origin – Vietnam. The migrant group also pays attention to the political sphere of the receiving country when about one-third of the posts (33.5 per cent) were created to touch on politics in Poland. In addition, this finding shows that the Vietnamese in Poland are also concerned about political affairs in other places when less than one-tenth of the created posts (7.8 per cent) discussed politics in countries which, to a certain extent, are closely connected to Vietnam, such as the United States, China, Great Britain, Venezuela and North Korea.

Forms of online political participation by Vietnamese-migrant users are summarised in Figure 3. A majority was created without calling for action, in which informative posts are the most popular, accounting for 47.6 per cent. This is followed by Diffusion posts, making up around 42 per cent and discussing political issues. Forms of calling for action were not prevalently made by Vietnamese migrants. Only 6.8 per cent of Instruction and 3.7 per cent of Promotion posts were created to instruct original calls for action or share political mobilisation from original posts. My finding indicates that both original and shared posts seem to be equally liked by the users, though the proportion of original posts is a little higher than those being shared. On the whole, Vietnamese-migrant users in the online community did not often initiate political calls on political participation. Instead, the online community tended to deliver political messages in non-mobilising forms of informative and diffusive posts.

Figure 3. Forms of political participation online engaged by users



Through conducting content analysis, three main topics were found to be at the centre of political discussions of the online community, namely that on homeland politics, on discussion and mobilisation for social justice and equality and discussion on politics outside the homeland. While the former two are related to either homeland politics or issues concerning the Vietnamese, the latter focuses on political affairs outside the country of origin. As mentioned in the data and methods section, the discussion on homeland politics involves critically debating the homeland political system, putting pressure on political elites and criticising the degradation in Vietnamese society. Discussing and mobilising social justice and equality involves criticising illegal acts committed by Vietnamese people and encouraging the Vietnamese to respect the law as well as to engage in civic activities. The last theme – discussion on politics outside the homeland – primarily touches on political events happening in the host country – Poland – and other countries, as mentioned above, such as the United States, China and North Korea. Table 2 further shows the distribution of themes conveyed through political posts created by Vietnamese-migrant users in the online community. Three-quarters of the posts were produced to reflect political issues related to the homeland or the Vietnamese. Of these, 104 posts – corresponding to 38.7 per cent – were linked to the discussion on homeland politics, while the number of posts for discussing and mobilising social justice and equality was a bit lower at 96 (35.7 per cent). For the third theme, the users created around a quarter of posts discussing political issues outside the homeland.

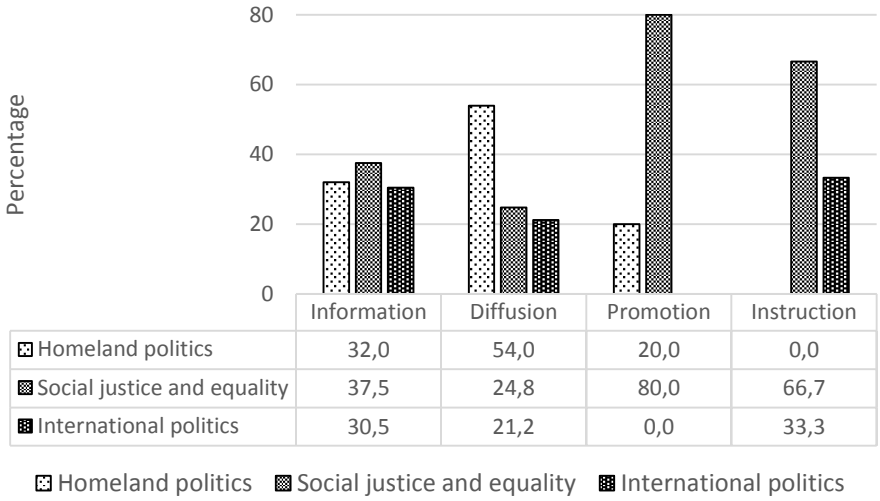
Table 2. Political themes of Vietnamese-migrant users' online participation

Themes	Frequent	Per cent
Discussion on homeland politics	104	38.7
Discussion on and mobilisation for social justice and equality	96	35.7
Discussion on politics outside the homeland	69	25.6
Total	269	100

Figure 4 provides a nuanced description of the relationship between forms of online participation and political themes among Vietnamese-migrant users in the online community. Interestingly, it is found that the way a post is created is closely connected with the political messages that it delivers. This association seems to be mainly manifested in the dimension of mobilising content. As explicitly illustrated in the figure, posts without mobilising calls (Information and Diffusion) were more prevalently produced than those with calls for action (Promotion and Instruction) to convey political messages regarding the homeland and international politics.

By contrast, posts with calls for action (Promotion and Instruction) were more often generated to discuss and mobilise social justice and equality instead of circulating information related to politics in the country of origin and outside the homeland. A chi-square test of independence showed that the association between forms of online participation and political themes is statistically significant, χ^2 (df= 6, N = 269) = 35.40, p < 0.001, meaning that this is a practical pattern of online political participation among Vietnamese-migrant users.

Figure 4. The cross-relationship between forms of online participation and political themes



	Information	Diffusion	Promotion	Instruction
Homeland politics	32,0	54,0	20,0	0,0
Social justice and equality	37,5	24,8	80,0	66,7
International politics	30,5	21,2	0,0	33,3

In sum, these findings suggest that the online political participation of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland, manifested through posting political messages on social media, differs in terms of its participatory form and political content. Although the Vietnamese-migrant users are more interested in politics in their home country than the political affairs in other places, there were also political posts generated to circulate and discuss political events happening in the host country as well as the countries that have a particular influence on their contemporary homeland. In addition, while the Vietnamese-migrant users employ all four forms of political participation online when carrying out their political practice, they tend to create informative and diffusive posts rather than to make the forms of Instruction and Promotion. A further interesting aspect of the findings lies in the pattern of online political participation among Vietnamese-migrant users in the online community, in which non-mobilising posts were produced to accommodate the discussion on homeland and international politics. On the other hand, posts with calls for action were generated mainly to circulate issues regarding mobilisation on social justice and equality.

Political issues in the online political participation of Vietnamese-migrant users

Thus far, I have provided descriptive analyses of the forms and patterns of online political participation staged by Vietnamese-migrant users. In this section, I discuss in more detail the political themes engaged in by the online community. As indicated in the previous section, the three main topics underlying political posts created by Vietnamese-migrant users include discussing politics in the homeland, discussing and mobilising social justice and equality and discussing politics outside the homeland.

Discussion on homeland politics. In discussing the Vietnamese diaspora's online political participation in Poland, it is worth referring to Brinkerhoff (2009), who pointed out that online migrant communities in the

United States appear to adopt the liberal values of the host country to justify their arguments and support their political positions. It is argued that the political landscape in Poland contributes towards shifting the political standpoint of the immigrants from which they can critique contemporary political ideology in Vietnam and relevant spheres.

It was observed in the online community that criticising communism and viewing the political ideology as a challenge for the development of the homeland takes the form of Information and Diffusion posts. For example, a number of posts recalled campaigns against capitalism in South Vietnam after the 1975 Vietnam War, which destroyed a thriving economy and triggered widespread poverty in the South and subsequently spread to the whole country. In another case, the humanitarian crisis after 30 April 1975 in which millions of Vietnamese people became refugees was also discussed as a result of the victory of communism in the Vietnam war.

> *Campaigns against the capitalist economy in the South of Vietnam were numbered by Hanoi with codes X1, X2, and X3. After these three attacks, the South's industry (in Saigon) was completely destroyed, giving up the position of the title of Asian dragon for Singapore, South Korea. The city* [Saigon – ANH] *has become an earthworm and never come back as before…*[2]

Moral erosion, social degradation, massive corruption and other social and political problems are also discussed as being inherent on the contemporary political ideology imposed in the country. Several posts were created to put pressure on senior Vietnamese political leaders, using both ridicule and condemnation. For instance, several posts ridiculed a regulation prohibiting members of the ruling party in the country from criticising the party even if it does something wrong. Vietnamese-migrant users also strongly criticised senior leaders for their moral deterioration or bad treatment of local people. They continuously updated information about the arrest of two former senior generals in the police force who took part in illegal online gambling and shared links to newspaper articles about the subsequent court judgment. Another case relating to the moral deterioration of a state official who sexually abused a female child was also mentioned. Analogous to what happened in Vietnam, Diffusion posts condemned an illegal act that was seen as an abuse of power by a local authority in Ho Chi Minh City to acquire land against the rights of local people. Those posts implied that if the local authority was for the people, the leader would act differently to ensure their security and well-being.

> *Did General Vĩnh use this way to cheat?*[3] *The Vietnamese should not dream of getting rich by engaging in this kind of illegal online gamble.*[4]

A large number of the posts expressed the online community's dissatisfaction with the dysfunctional education system and the degradation of Buddhism in Vietnam. For example, by referring to violence in schools and university admission fraud in Vietnam, the education system in the country is regarded as malfunctioning with regard to what is happening in Vietnamese society. In addition, there were frequent Diffusion posts condemning a Buddhist pagoda and its leaders as frauds for propagating superstition.

> *The problem of school violence has been alarming society! However, nothing has been done for stopping it but lessons learned for the authority! Pity for* [Vietnamese – ANH] *children who were born without enough protection.*[5]

The role of Vietnamese intellectuals in the development of Vietnam was of particular concern in online political discussions among Vietnamese-migrant users. Vietnamese intellectuals are expected to make a great contribution to the development of Vietnamese society by giving voice to criticism against social injustice and inequality or at least providing latent support for those who fight for social equality or social justice. However, in a number of posts, Vietnamese intellectuals were criticised for their lack of morality in ignoring serious social and political issues happening in the country, which are a threat to the nation.

> *Intellectuals are people who are highly educated and contribute their knowledge to life and society. So, for generations, people always respect such intellectuals. However, at present, people disappoint the Vietnamese intellectuals. They are qualified in terms of education but their moral and spiritual values are poor and frail…*[6]

Summing up, in discussions on homeland politics, Vietnamese-migrant users in the online community disseminated their propositions against communism, seeing the political ideology as the main obstacle to Vietnam's development. They also put pressure on political leaders, criticising the severe degradation of Vietnam currently taking place in spheres such as education and religion. The users also expressed their concerns about the Vietnam government's cooperation with China. The following sub-section touches on Vietnamese-migrant users' discussions and mobilisation for social justice and equality, a notable topic attracting a large share of posts produced by the online community.

Discussion and Mobilisation for social justice and equality. When observing Romanian diasporas in Europe, Trandafoiu (2013) found that immigrants used social media to call for a broader frame of social justice and equality. While doing ethnography on the online forum, this phenomenon appeared in the online political discussions among Vietnamese-migrant users. Firstly, they produced Information and Diffusion posts to criticise the widespread and intensive status of corruption in Vietnam, which they view as inherent in contemporary politics in the country. These posts revealed that a number of projects in Vietnam are designed with over-inflated and unrealistic budgets, enabling corruption by senior officials. This growing corruption in Vietnam is viewed as a serious threat to the country.

> *The country would not be developed if these 'terrible rats'* [implying corrupt officials – ANH] *still existed'*[7]

or

> *This is the time of ruin, sabotage, and corruption, which makes Vietnam stay in set-back.*[8]

In addition, illegal action taken by Vietnamese immigrants in Poland, Europe and elsewhere were also popularly addressed. Diffusion posts circulated about forbidden acts committed by Vietnamese immigrants in Japan, South Korea, Australia and Singapore, such as the extensive smuggling of cigarettes carried out by a group of Vietnamese in Poland. These acts were strongly condemned, resulting in the Vietnamese migrant community being perceived, internationally, as disreputable. Other Instruction and Promotion posts specifically warned against those Vietnamese who are illegally issuing VAT (Value Added Tax) receipts in Poland. This kind of unlawful act has been popular and many Vietnamese have been arrested as a result. Apart from being encouraged to stick to legal jobs, the Vietnamese community was also urged to respect the law when living in Poland. For example, it is indicated that a large number of Vietnamese people in Poland have become rich by smuggling for several years, something which has been taken for granted by many Vietnamese people. This type of smuggling has resulted from loopholes in Polish laws. However, the Polish government has now

issued tighter regulations; thus, smuggling will involve huge risks. As a result, several posts were created calling for greater awareness and emphasising obedience to the law as an essential principle for living in a democratic state like Poland. Instruction posts advised Vietnamese people to make a legal case if facing unjust administrative affairs or being racially discriminated against. This kind of discussion implies that, because Poland is a state of the rule of law, only a court can make final decisions regarding right or wrong. This practice is different from that which takes place in Vietnam, where not all law enforcement agencies entirely respect the law.

> *Under the increasing transparency of information and the increasing level of knowledge of our community, scams, cheats and robbery will lead to catastrophic failures. Even if you achieve something by unkind doing, your reputation will be lost. So think carefully before doing something that could harm people… No one can resist the development of society. We are the people who can make development faster or slower. It depends on us who are members of society. Learn to change! Changes will come sooner or later…*[9]

As observed in the online community, the importance of civic engagement, in particular the role of citizens, was actively discussed. Some Information posts debated that social changes not only result from acts by people in power but are also due to the active engagement of ordinary people in public concerns. An individual can do nothing but a collective of people has huge power and can change anything. Diffusion posts circulated political activism fighting against social injustice, reflecting what happens in the country of origin. This kind of politics is highly attractive and strongly supported by users, who consider it a motive for the development of Vietnam. A striking case circulated and discussed in several posts is a social movement against BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) in Vietnam. BOT is a form of contract between a private company and the government, which aims to build a transport project (a section of a highway or a new highway bridge) – and later allows the company to operate a toll booth for a number of years to collect money from commuters to recover their investment (Tran 2019). The operation of several BOTs faces opposition from drivers and local people in Vietnam because the toll booths were wrongly situated to collect as much money as possible from people who did not use the service (road or bridges). Those BOTs are labelled 'dirty BOTs'. The projects were criticised not only by Vietnamese in the home country but also by Vietnamese in Poland, notably the migrant users in the online community.

> *When people get indignant over something in society, people can adopt their rights to protest against unjustness according to international human rights conventions. Thus, when a citizen thinks that dirty BOTs are set up in a wrong way to unreasonably collect money from the people, he has the right to oppose wrongdoing…*[10]

The movement against 'dirty BOTs' turns out to be a typical illustration of the theoretical approach viewing political participation as a process involving latent and manifest activities and the phase of mobilisation. Nevertheless, in this case, the process progressed in a reverse direction, from manifest to latent. The commencement of the movement happened offline with the congregation of hundreds of local people and drivers at several tollbooths in Vietnam to raise voices against the BOTs. Vietnamese-migrant users in the online community, after reading news regarding the movement, created several forms of post – Diffusion, Instruction and Promotion – to support activists who led the movement against dirty BOTs and were repressed by local authorities and armed forces.

Other Instruction and Promotion posts called for petitions to support activities against social injustice. These calls requested that the authorities take action for change. For example, one petition asked the Vietnam National Assembly to amend the law to protect children and women when increasing cases of sexual abuse have been found in Vietnam. Other calls asked the Vietnamese public to give a voice against social injustice. For instance, some posts protested against the ignorance and indifference of senior leaders in Bac Ninh Province (in the North of Vietnam), where hundreds of pupils in a primary school developed taeniasis due to consuming contaminated pork.

Because their very silence creates a society full of insecurity and ruthless lies.[11]

Political discussions outside the homeland. The Vietnamese-migrant users are not only interested in political issues in Vietnam but also engage in discussions of politics in Poland (the receiving country) and other third countries. They created Information posts to congratulate the country on National Independence Day and to thank Poland for being a great place of residence for generations of Vietnamese immigrants. Other Informative and Diffusion posts were created to update people on an important event in Polish politics related to the assassination of a mayor. These posts also expressed the love and anguish of people regarding the death of the mayor and called for Vietnamese immigrants to take this case as a lesson in cultivating tolerance as well as avoiding acts of racial, religious discrimination and political hostility; such acts will only incite hatred among people and be a threat to society. In other aspects, the users showed opposing views against policies issued by the governing party PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwoś – Law and Justice) in Poland. They highlighted the demagogy policies that the PiS party is implementing in Poland to gain the support of the Polish people for the next election. The online community was also interested in cooperation between Poland and China, which was exposed in posts pointing to the precautions that Poland should take in relation to the Chinese government because China is considered as not completely trustworthy.

In addition to the demagogic expenditure that PiS is spending (which is supported by many people), the chairman of the PiS party has come up with a new game: spending the month 13 salary for retired people (who are active voters)...

In addition, the first child will also receive 500+... [500 PLN for each child – ANH]

Therefore, everyone should not expect that the Polish government will reduce tax checks because they have to find all sources of money for the state budget...[12]

China is the country receiving the most concerns from online discussions by Vietnamese-migrant users in the online community. The country has been the focus of condemnation for what the government of China has done to Vietnam. Several discussions in the forms of Information and Diffusion reminded Vietnamese people never to forget the Vietnamese–Sino War in 1979. The war is referred to by users as China's invasion of Vietnam. Links to newspaper articles were shared to show the cruelties committed by China's military forces in the war. The anti-China attitude was shown in Diffusion posts which confirmed that cooperating with China is not the only way to strengthen Vietnam. Users also criticised the many advantages that Vietnam gave China through economic projects. In addition, China was described as a threat to democracy for developing technology to control citizens. Some posts discussed the satisfaction of Chinese people toward the rapid growth of the economy as the main reason why most Chinese people do not fight for democracy in the country. The anti-China sentiment is also expressed through Diffusion posts which highlighted the boycotting of China by other

countries. For example, one post shared a video showing Indian men burning China's national flag and asking for the eviction of the Chinese presence from the country. In particular, posts called for the recognition of the Lunar New Year as a New Year for several Asian countries, not just for China.

Vietnamese users also created Information or Diffusion posts regarding politics in other countries closely connected to Vietnam. For example, posts relating to the massive political crisis in Venezuela, a country having a political regime analogous to that in Vietnam, were continuously updated. In another case, the summit conference between the US and North Korea held in Vietnam was of particular interest to the online community. Notably, Russia has also appeared as a dictatorship country in discussions in the online community.

> *Please take the liberty to call on the entire Polish community in particular and the European community in general. Please speak up and explain to those who do not know that the Lunar New Year is Asian, not Chinese.*[13]

Discussion

While Segesten and Bossetta (2017) developed the typology of online political participation to deal with the way that citizens used Twitter to mobilise during the 2015 British national elections, my study employed the typology to investigate online engagement in politics for a different actor and a different social media platform. This research examined the online political involvement of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland. In general, it was staged by the Vietnamese in Poland, manifested through political discussions underlying posts on social media and was attached to political practices occurring either in the homeland or other places (Postill and Pink 2012).

Unlike the findings of Segesten and Bossetta (2017) in which British citizens often made calls to mobilise in the election, this study found a modest share of posts with calls for action and a substantial number of non-mobilising posts generated by Vietnamese-migrant users in their daily online political participation instead. This pattern might lead to the conclusion that the migrant group's online political participation is the preferred way of engaging in latent forms, which can be further attributed to the reluctance to participate in politics among most Polish-Vietnamese people (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2017). While the premise seems reasonable, a significant relationship between forms of online participation and political themes shown in the analysis provides an essential foundation for offering another possible and justifiable explanation for the Vietnamese-migrant users' pattern of online political participation. It was found that the users tend to employ non-mobilising calls to circulate messages regarding the homeland and international politics while being inclined to generate posts with calls for action to mobilise social justice and equality. This finding indicates that Vietnamese-migrant individuals' striking characteristics of a disinclination to get involved in politics, as addressed in earlier studies, might not be the only factor driving the pattern of online engagement of the migrant group. Instead, the reality of politics as another essential force should be acknowledged when justifying such a tendency among Vietnamese-migrant users. Indeed, it was observed that several mobilising posts were created in the online community during the movement against 'dirty BOTs'. In contrast, non-mobilising posts were extensively created during a time when no other significant events occurred in Vietnam or Poland, which could lead to them adopting a more 'instructive' or 'promotive' approach – rather than an 'informative' or 'diffusive' one. As such, the existence of a substantial number of tweets with mobilising calls in the study of Segesten and Bossetta (2017), which focused exclusively on a political event – a national election – is understandable.

Although our empirical data do not provide evidence to demonstrate the translation of mobilising calls into manifest participation, which was not observed either in Segesten's and Bossetta's work (2017), the results of

this study support the theoretical perspective approaching political participation as a process. While our findings reveal the connection between latent participation and manifest engagement and the appearance of mobilising calls in the case of the movement against 'dirty BOTs', this process occurred in a converse way. First, manifest activities (the congregation of local people and drivers at wrongly located tollbooths to voice against 'dirty BOTs') initiated the emergence of latent engagement (following news about the movement against 'dirty BOTs' in the homeland among Vietnamese-migrant users in the online community). The participation was then manifested with the generation of mobilising calls (posts calling to support the movement and protect activists leading the movement created by the users). This empirical evidence thus further validates the theoretical argument that political participation is not necessarily a linear process and that each phase (latent, mobilising, manifest) can happen on- and/or offline. Whereas latent engagement is conventionally seen to have less significance, this processual approach helps to more accurately disclose the important role of latent activities in incorporating mobilisation and concrete actions to ensure particular political engagement and achieve the desired political outcomes.

The findings of this study reflect those of Brinkerhoff (2009), who pointed out that online migrant communities in the United States adopt the liberal values of the host country to shift their political positions. In addition, this study uncovered similar evidence to that found in an earlier study by Trandafoiu (2013), who observed Romanian diasporas in Europe using social media to call for a broader frame of social justice and equality. By analysing political themes delivered by the online community, this study has revealed that Vietnamese-origin immigrants in Poland have become more critical towards the contemporary politics in the homeland and more active in mobilising social justice and equality. It is argued that this phenomenon reflects the change in the political standpoint of the migrant group as a result of their being socialised in the political landscape of Polish society. Thus, despite being a migrant group closely connected to the home country, critical attitudes towards contemporary homeland politics are prevalent among Vietnamese-origin individuals in Poland and are not only limited to activist groups who advocate for democracy in the homeland (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2017, 2021).

Although this study has found a relative prevalence of critical attitudes towards the contemporary politics of Vietnam prevalent in online discussions made by Vietnamese immigrants in Poland, political mobilisations against the state were not observed in public discourse in the online community. Consequently, this study did not find a tendency towards negotiation to reconstruct ethnic and political identities among the Vietnamese diaspora in Poland, as shown in previous research on other migrant groups (AlRawi 2019; NurMuhammad *et al*. 2016). This practice is a shared feature among the Vietnamese diasporas in Central and Eastern European countries – described as diasporic groups with a state-bound nature. The Vietnamese group in Poland, as documented in the literature, is a state-linked community. The close connection of the migrant group with the Vietnamese government has remained since its emergence in Polish society and has been facilitated primarily by Vietnamese associations in Poland. These collective actors play a vital role in imposing the influences of the state on the community through organising cultural and political activities in order to retain a strong image of the homeland in the life of Vietnamese-origin individuals (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2017, 2019). This typical characteristic makes them essentially different to their counterparts in the United States, especially highly political refugees, who display a high sense of disconnection from the contemporary Vietnamese state (Phan 2015).

Conclusion

With the growing usage of social networking sites for engaging in politics, especially among migrant actors, the question arises of whether and how online political participation is staged by Vietnamese-origin immigrants

in Poland who identify politics as a sensitive issue (Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2017, 2019). This study took an online forum – created by Vietnamese users on social media, one of the largest online communities of Vietnamese immigrants in the country – as a case study. Following up a typology of online political participation developed by Segesten and Bossetta (2017) to account for the case of the Vietnamese, this study found that online political engagement staged by Vietnamese-migrant users endures, indicating the interest in the political sphere among the Vietnamese in Polish society.

The participation also varied in the forms and themes of political messages delivered. Vietnamese-migrant users are involved in politics in the online community by producing a high share of non-mobilising posts compared to those with calls for action. In addition, the findings show that the Vietnamese tend to criticise contemporary politics in Vietnam and deliver political messages to mobilise social justice and equality. The criticism is exposed in various aspects: for example, they circulated information demonstrating the communist ideology as the main obstacle to the development of Vietnam and created posts to put pressure on political leaders, criticising the serious degradation of Vietnam's education system and moral erosion in Buddhism and condemning the negative cooperation with China. Vietnamese-migrant users mobilised social justice and equality by disseminating messages that condemn criminal acts, calling for the Vietnamese to respect the law and raising support for civic engagement.

Its application to the research platform and migrant actors in this study is of importance in examining the feasibility of the typology developed by Segesten and Bossetta (2017) for accommodating the online political participation of civic actors. While the typology serves at best in accounting for political messages generated in the form of posts, it cannot capture political messages circulated by lower-level users in the form of comments on a particular post. As a result, employing this typology might lead to overlooking political mobilisation conveyed through messages produced in the form of comments, which facilitate the possibility of transforming latent engagement into concrete actions. In this regard, modifying this typology to account for the political message left by lower-level users in the form of comments is necessary. Future research might deal with this limitation by referring to the typology proposed by Bossetta and his colleagues (2017), which is composed of four degrees of online political engagement, including Making, Commenting, Diffusing and Listening.

Likewise, future research can replicate the analysis of online political participation among the Vietnamese in Poland to deal with limitations adherent to the empirical data employed in this study. First, the data used in this research do not consist of non-political posts, which leads to a lack of information regarding the weight of political posts over all posts made by the users during the data collection. Consequently, the degree of Vietnamese-migrant users' online political participation that can be drawn out by looking at the proportion of political posts compared to non-political posts is not available. Besides and more importantly, the dataset was simply constructed by collecting posts created by the first-level users in the online forum. This means that an abundance of political messages in the form of comments left by several Vietnamese-migrant users who are not the owners of the collected posts was ignored. This shortcoming could lead to the neglect of political messages containing mobilising contents that could be possibly transformed into concrete actions, which are not delivered in the form of a political post.

Despite the limitations, by focusing on the online political participation of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland, this study makes a significant contribution to the extant literature on the Vietnamese diasporas in Poland and Central and Eastern European countries, which is plethoric in its cultural and economic aspects. It would be naïve to state that the Vietnamese diaspora in Poland is indifferent to politics. Their political activism does exist and varies. Social media have greatly facilitated the phenomenon by allowing them to freely and easily engage in transnational politics. In a general sense, it can be said that modern communication technologies (including Internet-mediated communication, such as social media) play a central role in shaping the political

activity of immigrants. Taking this fact into account helps associations and state actors in both receiving and sending countries to formulate appropriate strategies and policies for social changes resulting from migrant actors' political engagement and mobilisations. In the case of Vietnamese-origin immigrants in Poland, the sending country, Vietnam, needs to be familiarised with the growing evolution of the community. The adaptating of the liberal values prevailing within the political landscape of Poland is more or less conducive to abandoning 'political nostalgia' among the Vietnamese – while the receiving country, Poland, should be aware of the political orientation of the community when it comes to multicultural democracy in the country.

Notes

[1] The original title of the project is in Polish: 'Polityczna aktywność diaspory w epoce globalnych współzależności. Społeczność migrancka Wietnamczyków z Polski i jej transnarodowe powiązania polityczne'. The project is funded by National Science Centre, Poland, number: 2017/25/B/HS6/01201.
[2] This is a Diffusion post. The quote is a caption constituting a part of the post. The rest of the content was shared from another informative post.
[3] One of the two Vietnamese military generals in charge of cybersecurity who had been tried for committing illegal online gambling in Vietnam.
[4] This is an Information post. The quote is the caption of the post. The post comprises the caption and an external link shared from another site.
[5] This is an Information post. The quote is the caption of the post. The post comprises the caption and an external link shared from another site.
[6] This is an Information post. The quote is a part of the original content of the post.
[7] This is an Information post. The quote is the caption of the post. The post comprises the caption and an external link shared from another site.
[8] This is an Information post. The quote is the caption of the post. The post comprises the caption and an external link shared from another site.
[9] This is an Instruction post. The quote is a part of the original content of the post.
[10] This is an Information post. The quote is a part of the original content of the post.
[11] This is a Promotion post. The quote is the caption of the post. The post consists of the caption and an external link shared from the other site. The external link presents a post of another address calling on everyone to protect children by circulating information about a former state official committing sexual abuse.
[12] This is an Information post. The quote is the original content of the post.
[13] This is an Instruction post. The quote is the original content of the post.

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'We Are Not Just Asking What Poland Can Do for the Polish Diaspora but Mainly What the Polish Diaspora Can Do for Poland': The Influence of New Public Management on the Polish Diaspora Policy in the Years 2011–2015

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This article describes and analyses Polish diaspora policy changes in the years 2011–2015. Two decades after the rebirth of the Polonia policy in 1989, it was completely rebuilt. Emphasising values and Poland's obligations towards the diaspora was replaced by paying more attention to the interests and profitability of this policy. The authors demonstrate how New Public Management (NPM) concepts influenced this shift. Analysis of two different sources – documents programming Polish diaspora policy and interviews with experts and persons designing the Polonia policy – confirmed that NPM principles influenced Polish diaspora policy on five dimensions: organisational restructuring, management instruments, budgetary reforms, participation, marketisation/privatisation.

Keywords: diaspora, diaspora policy, New Public Management, diaspora engagement, public administration

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Introduction

Although, for many years, migration research has focused more on immigration policies than on policies regulating emigration and relations with emigrants (Gamlen, Cummings and Vaaler 2019), more recently, states have shown a growing interest in maintaining contacts with their diasporas. Traditionally the term 'diaspora' has been used in the context of communities – such as Jews and Armenians – that experienced expulsion and the loss of a homeland. Nowadays, its scope is broader and includes non-traditional emigrant groups. The standard and perhaps most important feature that defines the modern notion of diaspora is maintaining a psychological or material relationship with the homeland (Cohen 2008; Reis 2004).

Many perceive diasporas simply as national assets. While, quite interestingly, this has traditionally been true for countries of the Global South like India or Mexico (Malone 2020; Tigau, Pande and Yuan 2017), more and more countries from the Global North (Weinar 2017), like Scotland (Leith and Sim 2022), Ireland (Hickman 2020) or Denmark (Birka and Kļaviņš 2020) also seek opportunities to engage with their diasporas. Central and Eastern European countries also try to develop their diaspora policies (Heleniak 2013), as in the case of Poland and Hungary (Lesińska and Héjj 2021) or Moldova (Moşneaga 2014).

Poland has a long-standing tradition of pursuing a diaspora policy, traditionally referred to as the *Polonia* policy (*polityka polonijna*). Although modern Polish diaspora policy has been evolving since as early as 1989, it was not until between 2011 and 2015 that the change process gained considerable momentum. The dynamic changes, which – as it seemed then – were to permanently alter the Polish diaspora policy to a great extent in terms of goals, organisation process and leading actors, were so significant that this process was labelled as the creation of a 'new' *Polonia* policy (Fiń, Legut, Nowak, Nowosielski and Schöll-Mazurek 2013; Nowak and Nowosielski 2021). The change in approach has been reflected in some of the key documents which set the policy's premises with considerable implications for implementation practice.

This article shows the extent to which the 'new' Polish diaspora policy premises are consistent with selected features or 'themes' characteristic of New Public Management or NPM (Barzelay 2000: 241). In our opinion, the fundamental tenets of the 'new' diaspora policy may be summarised as embracing the principles of NPM (cf. Laegreid and Christensen 2013; Menz 2011). The reasons for the adoption of NPM tools by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the planning and execution of the *Polonia* diaspora policy seem to be twofold. Firstly, it may be interpreted as an adjustment to the general changes that affected the public administration and financial policy of the Polish state (Marchewka-Bartkowiak 2014). Secondly, they served as a pretext to redefine the rudiments of the *Polonia* policy. This redefinition may have resulted from a political change in the perception of the dominant objectives of the Polish diaspora policy although it could also be the result of a struggle for leadership in the planning and implementation of diaspora policy (Nowak and Nowosielski 2021).

The article begins with a theoretical context by introducing the concept of NPM, which gained significant popularity in 1990 as a contribution to both practical doctrine and management theory. Secondly, the results of an empirical study examining two types of source – documents for programming and implementing Polish diaspora policy and interviews with persons in charge of designing and executing such policy – are presented.

New Public Management: development and principles

New Public Management is an approach to public-sector management that has been present in literature and practice since the 1980s. It emerged from the criticism of 'the classic public administration paradigm' (Homburg, Pollitt and van Thiel 2007: 1). In the 1990s, management experts dealing with the public sector (Hood 1991; Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Pollitt 1990) began to invent concepts and to coin terms such as 'managerialism', 'efficiency', 'results orientation', 'customer orientation' and 'value for money' (Homburg *et al.* 2007).

The approach, which was dubbed NPM (Osborne and McLaughlin 2002), is not internally homogenous, however, as several variants have been observed (Gruening 2001; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). For further analysis, we use Schedler and Proeller's (2002) proposal of a 'set of generic categories of NPM', which seems to describe the basic rules of this approach exhaustively.

Table 1. Set of generic categories of NPM

Category	Characteristics/objectives	Examples
Organisational restructuring	Delegation of responsibility Reduction of hierarchy Political and managerial roles	City managers Holding structure
Management instruments	Output orientation Entrepreneurship Efficiency	Performance agreements Products Performance-related pay
Budgetary reforms	Closer to private-sector financial instruments	Cost accounting Balance sheet P+L statements
Participation	Involvement of the citizen	Neighbourhood councils E-democracy
Customer orientation Quality management	Gain legitimacy in service delivery Re-engineering	One-stop shops Service level agreements E-government
Marketisation Privatisation	Reduction of public sector Efficiency gains through competition	Contracting out PPP

Notes: P+L = profit and loss; PPP = public–private partnerships.

Source: Schedler and Proeller (2002: 165).

Its most cited forerunner countries are the United Kingdom, the USA, Australia and New Zealand, followed by the regions of Scandinavia and continental Western Europe (Christensen and Laegreid 2003; Lane 2000). Developing countries – primarily Asian – also undertook reforms consistent with NPM guidelines (Lee and Haque 2006).

Some Central and Eastern European countries followed suit and began applying selected NPM practices after launching their systemic reforms in 1989 and subsequent years (Lucica 2009; Niznansky and Pilat 2001). This implementation took place in three main phases: (1) the post-communist transformation period (1988–1996) – the reforming and re-creation of public administration systems directly after the systemic transformation; (2) the pre- and EU-accession period (1997–2004/2007) when many CEE countries were adapting their public administration system to EU standards; and (3) the post-EU-accession period (starting in 2004/2007 with the intensification of NPM application after the global financial crisis in 2008), which focused on the constant 'fine-tuning' of the administrative systems and adapting them to post-crisis conditions (Drechsler and Randma-Liiv 2014: 7–8).

In the case of Poland, there is evidence that NPM has been implemented in different sectors of the public administration (Czarnecki 2013; Kordasiewicz and Sadura 2017; Marona and Van den Beemt-Tjeerdsma 2018; Rózak 2011; Sześciło 2014). In some cases, these attempts have been quite successful – e.g. the development of cooperation between public administration and the third sector (Nowosielski 2010); in some, less so – e.g. higher education reform (Czarnecki 2013).

As in other CEE countries, NPM in Poland has been introduced in three phases; however, it seems that only since 2009 have most of the NPM practical instruments found their grounding in the strategic programmes introduced by the authorities (Marchewka-Bartkowiak 2014). The main document of this kind was the long-term strategic programme 'Poland 2030' (Boni 2009)[1] introduced by the neoliberal Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*) ruling in Poland in the years 2007–2015.

While analysing the impact of NPM in Poland, one should be aware of a kind of hybridity model of the public-management model in Poland. As Anna Kordasiewicz and Przemysław Sadura (2017: 797) observe:

> *The real model of delivering public services resembles a Russian 'matryoshka' doll, where the outer ideological layer of governance masks the underlying contradictory attitudes: while tasks are indeed outsourced (in accordance with the NPM model), public administration monopolises resources and exerts hierarchical control in style typical of the traditional model of government.*

Data

This article presents the outcomes of research built on a model consisting of two key components. It begins by reviewing the programming and implementing documents associated with the *Polonia* policy since 2010. We have also examined a number of other key documents related to this field which date back to 1991, when the diaspora policy of the Polish state first began to emerge in the wake of systemic transformations. This has helped to track the evolution of diaspora policy over the span of 25 years.

Secondly, the article uses the findings of an empirical study conducted between 2015 and 2016 with 25 representatives of diaspora institutions and organisations (Gamlen 2014) participating in the formulation and implementation of Polish diaspora policy. The research relied on individual in-depth interviews (based on an interview guide composed of open-ended questions) to provide insights into the way in which the so-called institutional agents perceive ongoing processes in the field of diaspora policy organisation (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The study included representatives from a wide range of institutions involved in devising and implementing diaspora policy, including governmental institutions, both chambers of the Polish parliament, Polish NGOs as well as research organisations which provided their expertise. The applied sampling technique was purposive; we have chosen institutions perceived as having significant roles in Polish diaspora policy and contacted those representatives who might provide expertise because of their positions in the organisations. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The analytical approach applied was based on Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin's classical content-analysis method (Gibbs 2008) and led to the compilation of a map of categories (Czarniawska 2014).

Results

New diaspora policy in the light of documents

Although the Polish diaspora policy dates back to the 1920s, it was developed anew after the democratic breakthrough of 1989. Despite this long tradition, one should speak of discontinuation rather than continuity. There were specific solutions applied before World War II that seemed to have been recreated after 1989. The examples are the special role and care over the Polish diaspora by the upper house of parliament – the Senate – or the involvement of non-governmental organisations established to support *Polonia*, such as the Polish Emigration Society (*Polskie Towarzystwo Emigracyjne*), and the Adam Mickiewicz Society for the Cultural

Support for Poles Abroad (*Towarzystwo Opieki Kulturalnej nad Polakami Zamieszkałymi za Granicą im. Adama Mickiewicza*) (Górecki 2011; Palko 2021). However, closer analysis shows that, in terms of both organisation and concept, the *Polonia* policy after 1989 constitutes a new realm. The more than 40-year period of the Polish People's Republic and the often hostile activities taken by its authorities towards the Polish diaspora (Kraszewski 2011) successfully deconstructed the previously functioning institutions and policies.

Aware that the relationship between the Polish state and the diaspora (referred to as *Polonia* in the Polish language) had been tarnished by the negative experience of the preceding 45 years as well as the fact that Poland itself, as well as Poles living abroad, saw it as critical, the Senate (the upper chamber of the Polish parliament) as the first institution in the new democratic Poland, recognised the need to establish robust relations with the diaspora. The Senate was supposed to 'play a leading role in caring for Poles abroad' (Czerniawska, Łanczkowski and Orzechowska 2014: 28–29).

The paradigm which the Polish state adopted for the treatment of Poles living abroad has undergone multiple transformations since 1989. Although mainly general and vague, the tenets and objectives of the diaspora policy were defined in a range of documents. The first document of this type: 'The Objectives and Priorities of the Government's Policy on *Polonia*, Emigration and Poles Living Abroad', was comprised of an annex to Governmental Act 145/91 of 5 November 1991 on collaboration with the diaspora, emigrants and Poles living abroad. The document stated that

> *maintaining and developing multifaceted relationships between the home country and the diaspora shall be the responsibility of the entire nation and shall be pursued by the state administration, non-governmental organisations as well as members of migrants' family members and professional and other communities.* (Council of Ministers 1991)

This paradigm was further strengthened in the ultimately supreme legislation, i.e. the Polish Constitution of 2 April 1997, which entrusted the responsibility for the diaspora to the Polish state. Its Article 6.2 states that: 'The Republic of Poland shall assist Poles living abroad in maintaining a relationship with the nation's cultural heritage' (Constitution of the Republic of Poland 1997). This provision lends legitimacy to the efforts of the Polish state concerning the diaspora. It also makes it clear that the key focus of such efforts should be to preserve ties with Polish identity.

Although the *Polonia* policy, to some extent, evolved over time with the introduction of new governmental programmes of collaboration with the *Polonia* and Poles living abroad, formulated in 2002 (MFA 2002) and 2007 (MFA 2007), it can be said that the basic assumptions remained unchanged:

1. Emphasis was put on issues related to cultural affirmation: maintaining national identity, knowledge of the Polish language and Polish culture, and strengthening the ties of the Polish diaspora with the homeland (Nowosielski and Nowak 2017b).
2. Relations between the Polish state and the Polish diaspora were perceived in terms of axiologically conditioned obligations of the state towards the diaspora; Poland was to be obliged to support Poles living abroad (Nowosielski and Nowak 2017b).
3. A clear distinction was made between two categories of the Polish community: Poles in the East – who were treated as a priority, as requiring care and support due to a worse financial situation and their symbolic 'abandonment' by Poland – and Poles in the West, who were perceived as a community with a better financial position and as people who left the homeland of their own free will (Nowosielski and Nowak 2017a).

4. Contrary to most diaspora policy engagement systems (Agunias 2009; Gamlen 2014), a specific organisation of this public policy was observed in Poland from 1989 to 2011. This specificity was based on the powerful position of the upper chamber of the parliament – the Senate.[2]
5. The functioning of strong non-governmental organisations supporting or, in some cases, even implementing *Polonia* policy like The Polish Commonwealth Association (*Stowarzyszenie Wspólnota Polska*), the Semper Polonia Foundation and Support for Poles in the East Foundation (*Fundacja Pomoc Polakom na Wschodzie*).

It was the year 2011 that brought about perhaps the most crucial paradigm shift aimed at formulating a 'new' *Polonia* policy (Fiń *et al*. 2013).[3] Interestingly enough, contrary to its predecessors, the paradigm relied primarily on short-term planning and specific measures. This is because, despite all its prior attempts, it was not until 2015 that the government managed to adopt and implement a new strategic document. The year 2011 saw the release of a draft governmental programme for collaboration with the *Polonia* and Poles living abroad (MFA 2011) which was supposed to be adopted in 2013. Although some of its objectives were later pursued, the programme itself was never brought into force. However, based on the draft programme and other documents such as 'The Priorities of Poland's Foreign Policy in 2012–2016' (MFA 2012) as well as the annually announced 'Plans for Collaboration with the *Polonia* and Poles Living Abroad', one can characterise several leading features of the 'new' *Polonia* policy. The face of these changes was the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the years 2007–2014 – Radosław Sikorski. A summary of the fundamental principles of the 'new' Polish diaspora policy adopted for the years 2011–2015 and its implications for diaspora organisations is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Tenets of the 'new' *Polonia* policy implemented in 2011–2015

Diaspora policy as an instrument for pursuing Poland's policies of Poland and, in particular, its foreign policy and *raison d'état*
Being a public contract, the policy towards the diaspora has formed an integral part of the policies of the Polish state. Never before has the role of diaspora policy – as an instrument for pursuing Poland's national interests and policies with a particular focus on foreign policy – been reasserted so firmly. This can be contrasted with the precepts and practice of prior programmes, which have suggested a more-idealistic and less-pragmatic approach to diaspora issues.
The shift of emphasis from Poland's responsibilities towards the diaspora to those of the diaspora towards its homeland
Although past programmes have mentioned the diaspora's support for Poland, much more emphasis has been placed on presenting the links between Poles living abroad and their homeland as an obligation. Prior policies have focused on the duties of the Polish state and even referred to a debt towards the diaspora. The new policy, in its turn, has formulated expectations of support for the state to be provided by the diaspora. This principle found its fullest expression in words spoken in 2013 by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski, during the annual information on the assumptions of Polish foreign policy 2013 – 'We do not just ask what Poland can do for the Polish diaspora, but mainly what the Polish diaspora can do for Poland' (Sejm 2013: 12).
Empowerment of the diaspora and partnership
The tenets of the new diaspora policy were an apparent attempt to portray the diaspora as an empowered entity. The diaspora was supposed no longer to be limited to the role of a subject of Poland's policies but was also to act as its empowered agent. The approach was Poland's response to the need to stimulate Poles living abroad and drum up their backing for Poland's national interests. Instead of supporting the diaspora, the Polish state searched for a partner to reach a common goal.
Responsibility for pursuing diaspora policy to be delegated to the diaspora
Responsibility for carrying out diaspora policy has mostly been shifted to the diaspora itself, which was thus expected to follow the lines of 'state policies' and, in keeping with the mutuality of this relationship,

revise their premises. The role of the state was to present policy goals, secure funding for their implementation and make any necessary adjustments by engaging with the diaspora.
Reorganisation
Over the last 26 years of pursuing diaspora policy, various institutions in Poland have assumed the role of shouldering the primary responsibility for its formulation and implementation; however, usually, the role of the Senate was the most important. From 2011 to 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs undoubtedly moved to the forefront. A particular feature of the new diaspora policy was a shift, which took place in 2012, of the primary responsibility for financing diaspora policy and supporting Poles living abroad and their organisations – from the Senate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although seemingly a mere technicality, the shift significantly changed diaspora policy practice, mainly through new rules for awarding funds to institutions supporting the diaspora.[4] While, earlier, most funding in support of the Polish community came from the Senate, after 2011 the MFA became the primary source for activities directed at the diaspora. The new financing approach was two-pronged. On the one hand, Polish consulates held competitions for local Polish diaspora organisations. With the subsequent approval of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, funds would be appropriated for winning projects. In parallel, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held an open competition for Polish institutions and NGOs expected to submit projects for collaboration with the diaspora.
Breakdown of the collaboration model
Diaspora policy has invariably been pursued in collaboration with different public administration bodies and NGOs (or rather GONGOs – government-organised non-governmental organisations) specialised in supporting Polonia. Under the new diaspora policy, such ties were to be pursued in cooperation with various public administration bodies and other non-state actors. The non-state actors were to be selected mainly in open competitions. One of the results of holding such competitions was to restrict the involvement of organisations that traditionally specialised in diaspora policy implementation while opening the field up for new organisations, many of which had vast experience in developing and carrying out a wide range of projects not necessarily focused on *Polonia* issues.
Competition
The competitions held by consulates and those organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs created rivalry between organisations. The NGOs were supposed to compete for the limited resources.
Rational use of funds
One of the assumptions underpinning the new diaspora policy was that its principles and – in particular – the open competitions held by governmental institutions would help to make more-reasonable use of the funds earmarked for collaboration with the diaspora and Poles living abroad.

The analysis of the strategic documents that defined the new diaspora policy shows that the *Polonia* policy was perceived as a tool with which to pursue Poland's national interests – especially in the field of foreign policy. Clearly, it shows an interest-driven approach in which relations between the Polish state and its diaspora were supposed to be pragmatic. This normative shift was complemented by institutional and financial changes because of the strengthening of the role of the MFA and the weakening of the position of the Senate. The MFA reorganised the financial system for support of the *Polonia*: open tenders to Polish institutions and NGOs to realise projects that addressed Polish diaspora needs began to be organised.

New diaspora policy as seen by Polish diaspora institutions

A review of the findings of the empirical study should begin with the presentation of a map of the scope of the research which, during the investigation, formed a framework for developing a map of the meanings (Czarniawska 2014: 98) found in the ongoing discourse. An examination of the in-depth interviews with the Polish institutions and NGOs involved in implementing diaspora policy has revealed three significant issues that bond the 'new' *Polonia* policy with NPM principles: effectiveness, 'projectification' and competition.

Effectiveness: 'Our diaspora policy boils down to the effective utilisation of the funds'. One of the criteria applied to assess the implementation of diaspora policy was the effectiveness achieved in managing the state funds appropriated for that purpose. As perceived by the representatives of state institutions, effective use of such budgets is critical for the ultimate assessment of efforts to pursue the tenets of diaspora policy: 'In view of such financial considerations, the pragmatism and effectiveness of our diaspora policy boil down to the effective utilisation of the funds' (1_ IDI_ PI).

Adopting certain principles of NPM logic, governmental institutions (and specifically the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which took over the lion's share of the budget appropriated to diaspora relations in 2012), chose to promote the economically effective management of public funds. The competition procedure has been treated as a tool for achieving the objectives resulting from that priority. The decisions that were made rested on the assumption that was fundamental in the NPM approach, which is that the non-governmental sector offers more superior efficiency and that it is best to delegate public work to that sector: '(…) the state only extends its support while the associations act much more flexibly and rationally than state institutions' (10_ IDI_ PI).

Projectification: 'We approve of and deploy projects in all areas'. The acceptance of the primacy of the logic of economic effectiveness in managing public funds and the adoption of the competition procedure led to another result that seems to be relevant. Since 2012, the system for implementing diaspora policy has begun to 'projectify' public work (Godenhjelm, Lundin and Sjöblom 2015):

> *We choose our means to fit the method, fit what is referred to these days as the project method. We approve of and deploy projects in all areas – we use them in sports, culture, education, and secure sizable funding for publishing and other media.* (4_ IDI_ PI)

The competition and 'projectification' brought about by the adoption of the NPM framework caused the relations among individual organisations to be described in terms of the economic effectiveness of their actions. The benchmark the respondents used for comparing the role of their own institution with those of the others were the outcomes generated with the use of state funding:

> *The way I see it, the only reasonable efforts directed at the diaspora are those that generate a return for the country which provides the financing. Every investment must produce a return.* (4_ IDI_ PI)

Competition: The creation of the 'diaspora serving market'. It appears justified to posit that a new form of rivalry has been emerging among the diverse institutions engaged in diaspora policy. In this new rivalry, organisations compete on how effectively they can utilise state funds and maximise the resulting benefits.

Nevertheless, the competition influenced not only state institutions but also the Polish non-governmental organisations engaged in diaspora policy. Such NGOs are significantly influenced by the NPM approach in both their status and their mutual relations. At the level of discourse, the most significant influence has resulted from the use of the notion of the 'diaspora serving market' – which is a neoliberal idea describing the opening of the possibility of applying for funds for cooperation with the Polish diaspora, thus far only allocated to a few select and specialised NGOs (like The Polish Commonwealth Association, the Semper *Polonia* Foundation, and the Support for Poles in the East Foundation) which had previously been established by state institutions. The adoption of the tender procedure was to reform the scene. To use a common metaphor in the research field at the time, the process was to create a 'free diaspora-serving market' for services for the *Polonia* open for competition and to 'liberate' it from its domination by a well-entrenched oligopoly. Therefore, the competitions were not only to boost the efficiency and rationality of diaspora policy implementation but also to broaden the base of Polish NGOs participating in efforts targeted at the diaspora and Poles living abroad.

As far as we could ascertain, the notion was first used by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in a discourse in the organisational field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). An examination of publically disclosed documents (Senate 2013) showed that the term was soon picked up by other institutions.

The narratives provided by the representatives of the institutions outlined the influence of 'liberating the diaspora-serving market' in three ways. Firstly, the real broadening of the range of the NGOs assigned to implementing diaspora policy may be proof of the successful reform, as it helped to overcome the prior domination by a small number of government-organised non-governmental organisations or GONGOs and contributed to greater transparency in public spending. Access to funds for projects targeted at the diaspora and Poles living abroad became more equal:

> *That was a significant benefit: back in the day, when no tenders were held, there was practically no competition to speak of. You could see – and everyone knew it – who in the Senate could count on financing – it was, in fact at this level that a certain degree of free competition for funding emerged. Everyone stood an equal chance of securing the financing.* (11_ IDI_ PI)

Secondly, a higher number of Polish NGOs were allowed to conduct public work. It included many organisations that were highly efficient or even specialised in fundraising and securing public funds in various tender procedures but which nevertheless lacked the technical and operational expertise to carry out the proposed projects targeted at the diaspora:

> *On the other hand, there are certain restrictions today that have been imposed by the system of competitions held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These have affected the awarding of funds to the NGOs that help the diaspora (…) There have been cases where organisations were awarded funds for activities they knew very little about.* (3_ IDI_ PI)

Thirdly, the intention behind adopting the competition procedure was to provide multiple NGOs with incentives to vie for limited resources. That kept them from collaborating and prevented them from better responding to the needs of the diaspora in their performance of public work. In other words, as a result of adopting the competition system, competition for public contracts among NGOs and GONGOs became a goal unto itself rather than a means to ensuring the better implementation of diaspora policy:

> *The competition procedure and the drive to serve the diaspora market (…) were designed to create competition. Now that the scene has become competitive, mutual relationships have eroded and collaboration has dissipated. This is precisely where we lost track of the needs of the diaspora and moved to a system in which the real beneficiaries are local entities expected to compete against one another.* (13_ IDI_ PI)

Discussion

The diaspora policy was not the only Polish public policy influenced by NMP at that time. As noticed earlier, it was a broader tendency related to the rule of the neo-liberal party – Civic Platform and its long-term strategic programme 'Poland 2030'. As a result, in many areas of the public administration, there is clear evidence of NPM-driven reforms, e.g. in energy policy (Rózak 2011), higher education (Czarnecki 2013), and healthcare (Sześciło 2014).

However, when considering the influence of NMP on Polish public policies, including diaspora policy, one should bear in mind that it seems that this influence might not only be superficial – as Kordasiewicz and Sadura (2017) suggest – but also limited in time.

The end of the term of office of Radosław Sikorski as the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the years 2007–2014 can be considered the beginning of a hybrid policy (Nowosielski and Dzięglewski 2021) combining the features of both the old and the new Polish diaspora policies. Sikorski's successor, Grzegorz Schetyna – although from the same political party – withdrew from some of the more radical solutions and plans related to Polish diaspora policy. During his term in office, a new government cooperation programme with the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad for the years 2015 to 2020 was adopted (MFA 2015). In its final version, many proposals perceived as too radical were abandoned. The emphasis placed in earlier documents and recommendations on the involvement of the Polish diaspora in the implementation of the Polish *raison d'état* has also been significantly weakened (Nowosielski 2016). After the parliamentary elections in 2016 there was a power shift in Poland. The new ruling political party Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) further deepened the process of withdrawing from some of the changes enforced by Radosław Sikorski. However, it is worth emphasising that it was not a complete reversal of logic and a total return to the old Polish diaspora policy. An expression of this hybrid approach may be that the programme introduced in 2015 is still valid today.

As part of the hybrid Polish diaspora policy, elements of the old Polish diaspora policy are implemented, such as the emphasis on supporting issues related to cultural affirmation: maintaining national identity, knowledge of the Polish language and Polish culture, strengthening the ties of the Polish diaspora with their homeland, as well as solid support for Poles in the East.

At the same time, some elements of the new Polish diaspora policy are maintained, including the emphasis on cooperation with the Polish diaspora in the West. One of the NPM rules also still seems to be used – the perception of the *Polonia* policy as an instrument for implementing the policy of the Polish state and the Polish *raison d'état*; this time, however, the Polish diaspora is seen as a tool for performing both public diplomacy and historical policy.

Our objective was to show how diaspora policy may be subject to changes that do not result from changing conditions, such as the size or shape of the diaspora but, above all, from dominant approaches in public administration. Applying the NPM principles was supposed to bring about a permanent revolution in the shape of the Polish diaspora policy and make it not so much a tool for building relations with the diaspora but, rather, a way to use it to achieve the state's goals.

So far, most of the research on diaspora policies has focused on specific activities (Başer 2019; Bhattacharya 2009; Mencutek and Baser 2018), tools (Lesińska and Wróbel 2020; Sendhardt 2021; Udrea and Smith 2021) and institutions (Gamlen 2014; Garding 2018). Some of them had clear theoretical ambitions – indicating, for example, what particular inspirations lie behind different types of perspectives for conducting diaspora policy (Gamlen *et al.* 2019). However, the goals and principles of diaspora policy implementation are relatively rarely presented from the perspective of public administration research. In our opinion, such a point of view allows us to broaden our knowledge of how this specific type of public policy functions. Therefore, we hope that our approach will open a discussion on goals that lay behind the different kinds of policy toward the diaspora.

Conclusions

Our research has helped to identify how diaspora policy design and implementation have changed over time. Our findings show that the diaspora policy pursued by the Polish state in the years 2011–2015 relied noticeably on implementing – in public policy realms – the precepts of New Public Management, as formulated by Hood (1991) and Schedler and Proeller (2002). Firstly, changes can be seen in the nature of the relationship between the sending state and the diaspora. These involve a shift of emphasis from the obligations of the Polish state

towards the diaspora to the obligations of the diaspora towards their homeland and the benefits that Poland stands to derive from their fulfilment. Consequently, diaspora policy tasks are being increasingly delegated to the diaspora itself. Secondly, steps have been taken to restructure the diaspora policy implementation system and dismantle the collaboration model in order to create competition among the various relevant players and marketise the performance of public tasks. Thirdly, the above features of the 'new' diaspora policy were primarily an attempt to make the utilisation of public funds more effective.

On the one hand, dramatic changes were made in the approach to the relations with the diaspora and its representative organisations. Any spending by the Polish state was to produce benefits (such benefits did not necessarily need to be financial). Meanwhile, non-governmental actors were expected to perform public work in the field more effectively and rationally.

The policy reforms appear to influence different types of entities, i.e. state institutions responsible for diaspora policy and Polish NGOs assigned to the implementation of that policy and diaspora organisations. In the case of the state institutions engaged in the diaspora policy, a new form of competition has been emerging focused on effectiveness in utilising state funds for maximum effect. As for the Polish-based NGOs involved in diaspora policy, the consequences of adopting NPM guidelines include the emergence of a 'diaspora-serving market'. The actual broadening of the spectrum of the NGOs participating in diaspora policy implementation and the greater effectiveness achieved in utilising public funds created a 'market' of 'unfair competition'. Organisations that were well skilled in securing access to public funds through tenders that succeeded in MFAs competitions often turned out to be ill-prepared to carry out the projects they were expected to complete. The use of competition procedures has also led to replacing collaboration with rivalry. Finally, other reform outcomes are those pertaining to the adoption of tender procedures in awarding public funds and its impact on the collaboration with the diaspora and Poles living abroad. Such impacts included the 'projectification' of diaspora policies and the resulting discontinuity in relations with Polish communities abroad, as well as the uncertainty felt by the Polish immigrant organisations benefiting from the services delivered by the Polish-based NGOs that have won tenders.

Table 3. Generic categories of NPM and their influence on the 'new' Polish diaspora policy

Category	Occurrence	Characteristics of influence
Organisational restructuring	+	• Shift of control over diaspora policy from the Senate to the MFA • Delegation of responsibility to multiply organisations
Management instruments	+	• Concentration of power and financial resources in the MFA • Focus on efficiency • Open grant competition as the main tool of diaspora policy
Budgetary reforms	+	• Open grant competition • More objective evaluation of applications
Participation	+	• Responsibility for pursuing diaspora policy delegated to the diaspora • Involvement of diaspora organisations • Involvement of diaspora members outside organisations • Focus on cooperation and partnership
Customer orientation Quality management	–	–
Marketisation Privatisation	+	• Efficiency through competition • Diaspora serving market • 'Projectification'

The results of our analysis are summarised in Table 3, which shows that the changes in Polish diaspora policy in the years 2011–2015 are consistent with most of the generic categories of NPM as proposed by Schedler and Proeller (2002: 165). In the category of organisational restructuring, we have observed, firstly, the shift of control over diaspora policy from the Senate to MFA and, secondly, as a consequence, the delegation of responsibility for concrete tasks to multiply organisations like NGOs participating in diaspora policy implementation and diaspora organisations. In the category of management instruments, we have observed both the concentration of power and financial resources in the MFA and the focus on efficiency of budgetary spending and, as a specific way of achieving this goal, an open grant competition as the primary tool of diaspora policy. This can be perceived as a peculiar management toll used for paying only for actions evaluated as effective during the application procedure. This category is closely connected to the other – budgetary reforms. In this case, we can refer to open grant competition and the more-objective evaluation of applications which are not only tools for more effectiveness and efficiency in spending public money but also for financial instruments closer to the private sector. NPM reforms of Polish diaspora policy also presumed the development of different forms of participation – the involvement of both diaspora organisations and of diaspora members outside organisations. The 'new' *Polonia* policy also foresaw strong cooperation and partnership between the state and the diaspora. The last category observed in our study – marketisation and privatisation – is strongly connected to the phenomena of reaching efficiency through competition, the diaspora-serving market and 'projectification'. Although the entities dealing with diaspora policy are either public or non-governmental rather than private, the NPM rules applied during the reform force these entities to apply for funding by proposing projects and competing with one another.

Out of the list of categories proposed by Schedler and Proeller, only one – customer orientation and quality management – was not confirmed in our research.

Notes

[1] Anna Kordasiewicz and Przemysław Sadura (2017) claim that this strategy was based less on NPM and more on principles of 'responsive management' and co-governing (governance); however many of the proposed tools are grounded in the NPM approach.

[2] Senate was, among others, responsible for financing support for the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad. Therefore, it was a very important tool for shaping Polish policy towards the *Polonia*.

[3] To some extent the changes to the *Polonia* policy after 2011 may be interpreted as a sort of late adaptation to the changes that took place in the Polish diaspora after the mass post-accession migration to EU countries which significantly changed the structure of the Polish diaspora.

[4] The transfer of funding from the Senate to the MFA caused great controversy, among both the diasporic institutions and the Polish diaspora itself. Sometimes it was interpreted as the deprivation of the Senate's prerogative to care for the Polish diaspora, which it had not only after 1989 but also before the Second World War.

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— Special Series —

Belarus in the Eurasian Migration System: The Challenges of the Last Decade and Their Consequences

Yuliya Petrakova*

This article presents the main recent developments in migration trends to and from Belarus. It studies these trends via the migration systems theory lenses, according to which Belarus belongs to the Eurasian migration system. The most significant migration flows are directed towards Russia, due to the existence of the Union State. However, over the last decade, Belarusian statistics have shown a gradual transformation in the direction of these migration flows. After the recession in Russia in 2015, the number of emigrants from Belarus to EU countries increased. The most significant changes have occurred in the migration dynamics between Belarus and Poland and Lithuania. The existence of the Pole's Card makes it more difficult to measure the number of Belarusian immigrants in Poland, therefore, I provide a comparative analysis of Belarusian and Polish statistics in order to show a more realistic picture of the number and structure of Belarusian emigrants and the problem of underestimation in the sending country. Particular attention is paid to the consequences of the political situation in Belarus after 2020; this has become an additional push factor for emigrants and may also lead to a further reduction of Belarusian migratory links within the Eurasian migration system. Thus, the statistics for 2021 show a significant increase in the number of Belarusian emigrants to the EU, while emigration to Russia has remained at the same level.

Keywords: international migration, Eurasian migration system, quantitative data, Belarus, migration flows

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Introduction

Belarus is a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)[1]; geographically it is a transit country from the European Union (EU) to the CIS with transport links and economic ties to all neighbouring countries. Although migration flows are diversified, bilateral migration flows with Russia clearly outweigh the rest. According to official Belarusian statistics, the country's population of 9,255 million is relatively immobile in terms of international migration and Belarus is a country which sees net immigration (Belstat 2022). As already argued by other authors, Belarus belongs to the Eurasian migration system, which can be defined as a group of post-Soviet countries connected by strong and numerous migration flows that are determined by the interaction of several factors (Ivakhnyuk 2003; Ryazantsev and Korneev 2013). These include historical and cultural ties (use of the Russian language, common cultural history), legal regulations (visa-free regime, simplified access to citizenship, multilateral agreements on migration cooperation), economic compatibility, geographical proximity and an extensive transport network between countries. The creation of the CIS after the dissolution of the Soviet Union facilitated the preservation of these linkages and, in particular, the free movement of people between the selected post-Soviet countries. At the same time, Russia is constantly trying to increase its political and economic influence in the region (Galimova 2016). Apart from the association of a number of post-Soviet countries within the CIS, there are other integration entities in the region that facilitate the free movement of people, especially labour migration. Thus, in 2015 the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) was created, which provides for the free movement of labour, capital, goods and services between Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The formation of the Union State of Belarus and Russia in 1996, which ensures unhampered access to residence, employment, education and health care for citizens of the two countries on the territory of the Union State, has formed an additional incentive for Belarusians to migrate to Russia.

Despite the persistence of political and economic ties between the CIS countries, in particular those belonging to the EAEU, the continued future existence of the Eurasian migration system is far from clear-cut. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Moldova and Ukraine have been gradually decoupling from this system. Additionally, after Russia, Kazakhstan has become a new destination country for migrants from Central Asia. Labour emigration from Central Asia and the Caucasus to outside the Eurasian migration system has increased since 2015 (Ryazantsev and Ochirova 2019). Migration flows from Belarus, which traditionally have been directed towards Russia, have also started to reorient towards European Union states (Yeliseyeu 2018).

The aim of this paper is to evaluate changes regarding the place of Belarus in the Eurasian migration system and to examine the factors influencing these changes, with the focus being on political and institutional ones. Therefore, the main general research question relates to the dynamics of migration flows between Belarus and CIS and non-CIS countries in the twenty-first century. Special attention is paid to the case of Poland as an example of a non-CIS country constituting a central destination for Belarusian emigration, the country having grown in importance in recent years. Finally, the article attends to the most recent developments in emigration from Belarus observed after mid-2020. While this year should be considered as exceptional due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and political events in Belarus, its consequences may significantly influence the direction of Belarusian migration flows in the future.

The article examines the main quantitative data on migration from and to Belarus, in particular data from administrative sources, the census and the Labour Force Survey. In addition, it refers to data from administrative sources in destination countries (Poland, Lithuania, the USA, Russia, Germany) to provide a comprehensive analysis of emigration from Belarus. It is structured as follows: in the first section, the main theoretical positions of the migration systems theory are considered, with the aim of explaining the place of Belarus in the international migration system through this approach. Next, based on Belarusian statistical data, the intensity and directions of migration flows from and to Belarus are examined. This part of the analysis allows us to

evaluate changes in the direction of migration flows in Belarus. The third section presents cross-country comparisons of migration in order to show the significant underestimation of emigrants from Belarus in Belarusian data and compares Polish and Belarusian statistics in detail. The example of Poland is relevant due to the country's significant popularity among Belarusian emigrants and as a result of certain difficulties in migration registration owing to the status of migrants with the Pole's Card. Finally, the changes and dynamics of emigration from Belarus after mid-2020 are presented, which might predetermine a tendency for the coming years and form possible reasons underlying new migration patterns.

The Eurasian migration system and the place of Belarus

Mabogunje (1970) was the first to propose a systems approach to explaining migration, not as a linear, one-way movement but as a circular phenomenon included in a system of interdependent variables. In this approach, migration patterns took the form of a system of multiple flows of persons, goods and services between origin and destination places. Mabogunje applied the systems approach to rural–urban migration but this was later extended to cover international structures of both macro and micro levels, which have some sort of exchange in resources, capital and people (Bilan 2017). Sustainable linkages are necessary to form a migration system. As examples of this, Fawcett (1989) points to the economic and political ties between countries, the activities of migration agencies and the media etc. Kritz and Zlotnik (1992) differentiate between the social, political, demographic and economic contexts. They argue that the formation of the migration system is affected by a shared historical and cultural past and by contemporary economic and political ties. These components contribute to large-scale migration flows within the system, which are more intense than those outside it. Based on those principles, Zlotnik (1992) explains the existence of migration systems in the Americas and Western Europe, highlighting the importance of flows centred on particular countries. Massey *et al*. (1998) identify five migration systems: North American, European, Gulf States, Asia-Pacific and South America.

In line with the arguments of migration systems theory, Ivakhnyuk (2003, 2008) identifies migration flows and linkages between post-Soviet countries as a Eurasian migration system. Based on the existence of close historical and cultural ties, the continuous development of political institutions, mutual economic and demographic interests such as wage differences and changes in the working-age population between countries, she highlights features of the overall system and identifies several sub-systems. These latter are divided into those that develop within the system and those that link the Eurasian system with other systems or countries. The 'internal' sub-systems include the Central Asian countries (centred around Kazakhstan) and the migration between Belarus and Russia due to closer ties within the Union State. Ukraine and Moldova are defined as countries belonging to two migration systems because they exchange migration flows within the Eurasian system and the European countries simultaneously. After joining the EU and the redirection of migration flows, Baltic states are no longer considered as part of the Eurasian migration system. The core of the Eurasian system is represented by the countries with the highest share of intraregional migration flows: Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan. More-recent works point to the transformation of the Eurasian migration system and more often consider it solely as migration between CIS countries (Ryazantsev and Korneev 2013). Brunarska, Nestorowicz and Markowski (2014) have, in turn, questioned whether post-Soviet countries are actually forming a Eurasian migration system, as this region is clearly integrated into global migration patterns. The authors found that some countries in the system have significant migration flows outside it. However, the study takes into account the Baltic states, although they are not part of the system according to other authors (e.g. Ivakhnyuk 2008). Moreover, Brunarska *et al.* (2014) argue that,

while assessing the presence of a migration system, labour migration flows should also be taken into account, as they show more objectively the density of links within the system.

The theory of migration systems has been criticised on many points. Firstly, the division of the world into migration systems is controversial, because the same countries may be part of different migration systems – this is particularly the case for sending countries. Secondly, it is difficult to empirically substantiate the existence of the system because of problems with publicly available migration data, especially on labour migration (DeWaard, Kim and Raymer 2012). Moreover, it has not been specified what minimal intensity of relationships between elements is needed to define a system (Brunarska *et al.* 2014). Fourthly, the theory explains that such a system exists but says nothing about how it forms and develops (Bakewell 2014).

Despite the above remarks, this paper uses the migration systems approach to evaluate changes in migration flows in Belarus. I argue that pre-2020 migration patterns, characterised by the long-term migration exchange with Russia, the overall low international mobility of the Belarusian population, the high level of interdependencies between Russia and Belarus and the advanced political-economic integration between them render migration systems theory relevant to study the migration dynamics of Belarus. Nevertheless, I also agree with de Haas (2021) that it is necessary to re-conceptualise migration as an intrinsic part of broader processes of economic, political, cultural, technological and demographic change, embodied in concepts such as social transformation, 'development' and globalisation. This wider understanding of the migration systems concept in particular guides the analysis of post-2020 migration from Belarus, inspired by the assumption that migration systems may undergo transformations. Modifications of migration systems can be associated with 'exogenous' changes in the macro-level factors that caused migration, such as income and other opportunity differentials, political transformations or migration policies (de Haas 2010). In addition to external causes, changes in the context of a migration system and the linkages between countries may also be caused by international migration itself. Thus, a large inflow of international migrants induces the development of profit and non-profit organisations – which can be formal or informal – to provide, for instance, transport, labour contracts, (counterfeit) documents, dwellings or legal advice for migrants.

Main sources of quantitative data on international migration to/from Belarus

The combination of data from several sources is an accepted method by which to produce a coherent picture of migration processes (Willekens 1994). To assess the place of Belarus in the international migration system, Belarusian statistical data on the number of long-term and short-term migrants are analysed. In this article, labour migration is treated as an example of short-term migration, which is an important complement to long-term migration, because temporary migration can lead to long-term residence in a destination country (Global Migration Group 2017). Belarus has two different registers that separately collect and represent statistics on long-term and labour migration.

The National Statistical Committee is responsible for collecting and publishing data on long-term migration flows (Belstat 2022). Unfortunately, since mid-2020, data on long-term migration are not published. According to the methodology of the National Statistical Committee, long-term migrants are persons who either arrived or left Belarus for a period of more than 12 months. Belarusian statistics on long-term migration are based on the two forms, 'P' and 'B', filled in by immigrants and emigrants respectively (Bobrova, Shakhotska and Shymanovich 2012). The outflows are more difficult to monitor than the inflows as there are fewer incentives and legal obligations for emigrants to report their departures (Bircan, Purkayastha, Ahmad-Yar, Lotter, Dello Iakono, Göler, Stanek, Yilmaz, Solano and Ünver 2020). At the end of 2018 there were changes in the methodology of defining long-term migrants, which increased the number of migrants.[2] Two groups of countries are usually identified in the aggregation of statistical data: CIS countries and non-CIS countries.

Statistics on labour-migration flows are collected and published by the Ministry of the Interior of Belarus (MVD 2022). A labour migrant is a person who moves from/to Belarus for employment on the basis of an officially concluded labour agreement or contract. Many labour migrants prefer looking for a job directly in the destination country rather than through Belarusian intermediary firms, so these migrants are not counted in the labour-migration statistics, which significantly increases the underestimation of labour emigration. A more objective picture can be obtained from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), which has been conducted in Belarus since 2012 by the National Statistical Committee (Belstat 2022). The LFS is carried out in all Belarusian regions and covers 0.6 per cent of the total number of households. It provides data on the number of Belarusians working outside the country (up to 1 year). The population census also provides information on migration in general and labour migration in particular. To assess changes in the direction of migration flows, the data from the 2009 and 2019 censuses are analysed (Population Census 2011, 2021). There are no other representative data on migration in Belarus. Sociological surveys are carried out rarely, are not large-scale and tend to provide expert estimates rather than an accurate picture.

For a more comprehensive view of emigration, data from selected destination countries on the number of immigrants from Belarus are simultaneously studied. A number of authors and organisations have tried to compare the immigration and emigration statistics (Beer, Raymer, Erf and Wissen 2010; UNECE 2010; Willekens 2019). Thus, Poulain and Gisser (1993), on the basis of a comparative table of migration flows between EEC and EFTA countries, found that more than half of the countries had a difference between the emigration and immigration recordings in excess of 100 per cent. Wils and Willekens (1993) observed a tendency to overestimate immigration and to underestimate emigration, arguing that immigrants are often defined according to shorter periods of stay than emigrants are when it comes to leaving. Moreover, there may be a time lag between the publication of immigration statistics based on the actual duration of stay and the emigration statistics.

For a more complete assessment of emigration from Belarus to Poland in particular, this study compares statistical data from both countries. Data from Belarusian administrative sources are used to estimate the number of emigrants, whereas the number of immigrants from Belarus staying in Poland is estimated according to Polish statistical sources. There are two main sources of administrative data in Poland: the PESEL population register, which provides information on permanent-stay migration flows and the Pobyt system, which collects data about all types of residence permits. Both sources are used for the preparation of estimates of immigrants in Poland by the Central Statistical Office (CSO 2011). For the purpose of this study, data on permanent residence permits and EU long-term residence permits, which together represent data collected by Eurostat, are used to estimate flows of long-term migrants (Eurostat 2022b). However, year-on-year data should be compared with caution, as permanent residence permits are usually obtained after a certain period of time.

There are different types of document issued to foreigners that can be used for the estimation of temporary migration in Poland. Firstly, there are temporary residence permits, which are issued for certain purposes but for no longer than two years. The majority of temporary residence permits for Belarusians are issued for work or study. An important source for estimating labour-migration flows is data on the number of Belarusians who have received work permits and a declaration from an employer to entrust a job to a foreigner (changed as from 1 January 2018) (MFSP 2021).

Belarus on the map of international migration in the twenty-first century

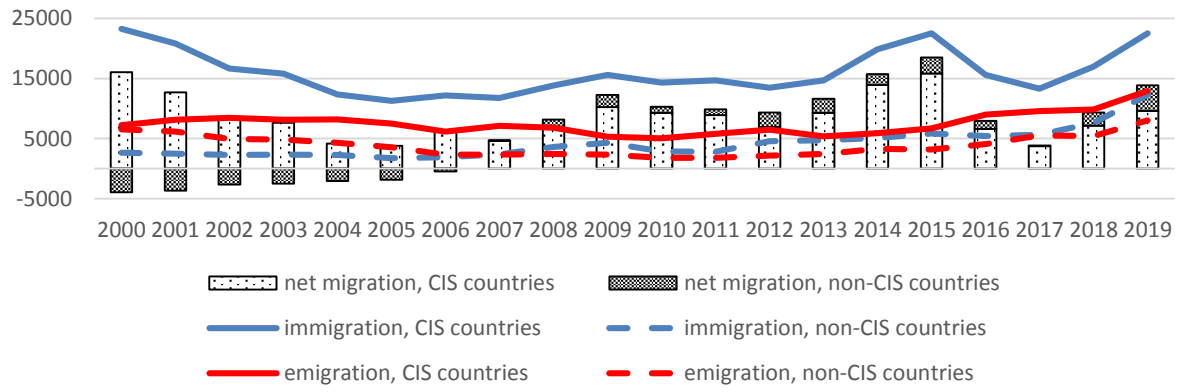
According to the assumptions of the migration-system concept, flows within the system dominate over flows outside it (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino and Taylor 1993). In Belarus, which is a member of

the Eurasian migration system, migration exchange with CIS countries prevails. However, there are a number of countries which are not part of the Eurasian migration system but which have, nonetheless, played a significant role in the migration exchange of Belarus.

Long-term migration

Between 2000 and 2019, according to Belarusian statistics on long-term migration, Belarus remained a country with a constant migration growth (Figure 1). Throughout this period, migration flows to and from CIS countries dominated and accounted for 80 per cent of immigration, 66 per cent of emigration and 97 per cent of migration growth. The same proportions of migration flows remained for both rural and urban areas. However, there were slight internal variations among the regions of Belarus. Thus, the western regions and the capital – with a younger and more mobile population – had closer migration links with non-CIS countries than the rest of the regions (Belstat 2022).

Figure 1. Long-term immigration, emigration and net migration based on registration of residence, Belarus 2000–2019



Source: author's elaboration based on the National Statistical Committee of Belarus (Belstat 2022).

Among the non-CIS countries, Belarus had the highest migration turnover with Lithuania, China, the USA, Germany and Israel. In 2007, the migration balance with non-CIS countries became positive for the first time, due to a decline in emigration to traditional emigration countries (the USA, Israel, Germany) and a rise in immigration from economic partners of Belarus (China, Iran).

Despite close ties with CIS countries, the recipient countries for Belarus (emigration) differ from the sending countries (immigration). The latter were dominated by CIS countries (Figure 2), while the leading emigration countries included non-CIS countries (Figure 3). As noted by Ivakhnyuk (2003), the existence of sustainable migration links with countries outside one migration system is possible, especially for emigration from sending countries to classical immigration countries such as the USA or Israel.

Figure 2. Main immigration countries, Belarus, 2000-2019

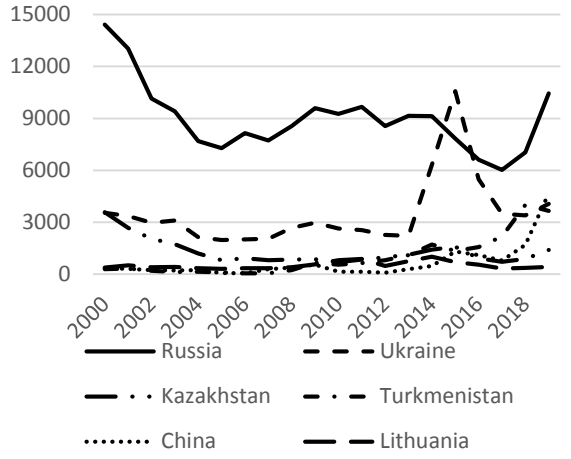
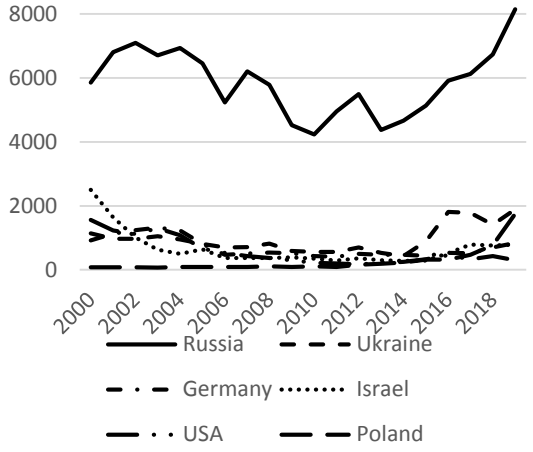


Figure 3. Main emigration countries, Belarus, 2000-2019



Source: author's elaboration based on the National Statistical Committee of Belarus (Belstat 2022).

Figures 2 and 3 show the countries with the highest migrant flows with Belarus between 2000 and 2019. Russia was Belarus' main partner in migration exchange. Close historical and cultural ties, in addition to political and economic agreements, contribute to this. About 80 per cent of immigrants from Russia have Russian citizenship whereas, among emigrants to Russia, they are only about 35 per cent. Long-term migration between Belarus and Ukraine has always remained at a high level and increased significantly after 2014, due to the armed conflict in the east of Ukraine. The Belarusian authorities adopted a timely decree on the conditions for residence in Belarus of Ukrainian citizens from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions (Decree 2014), which made it easier for immigrants from these areas to legalise their stay in Belarus. Among CIS countries, migration with Kazakhstan was also significant yet, over the last decade, migration links have started weakening, despite the existence of free movement within the EAEU. Immigration from Kazakhstan predominates among flows from Central Asia and more than half of immigrants have Kazakh citizenship. Immigration from China and Turkmenistan is mainly driven by the immigration of students who study in Belarus. After completing their studies, most of them return home. In its migration exchange with Lithuania, as well as with other Baltic states, Belarus has always gained population but, in recent years, immigration has decreased while emigration, on the contrary, has increased.

The most popular countries for long-term emigration include non-CIS countries: the USA, Israel, Germany and Poland. Since 2015 there has been an increasing trend of emigration to neighbouring Poland and Lithuania, which increased by 4.6 and 2.3 times respectively, when comparing data for the periods 2010–2014 and 2015–2019. The statistics of the main receiving countries also show that emigration to Russia,[3] Poland and Lithuania has significantly increased over the last 5 years (Table 1). In general, the statistics of the most popular receiving countries for Belarusians demonstrate more significant changes in the directions of long-term emigration flows and the scale of underestimation in the Belarusian data.

Table 1. Belarusian and receiving-country estimates of the numbers of long-term migrants, 2000–2019, per 1,000 persons

	Emigrants according to Belarusian data				Immigrants from Belarus according to receiving-country data			
	2000–04	2005–09	2010–14	2015–19	2000–04	2005–09	2010–14	2015–19
USA	6.4	2.3	1.0	1.8	11.1	13.0	9.6	10.1
Germany	5.9	2.8	2.3	3.0	20.2	8.8	8.2	11.8
Russia	33.4	28.2	23.7	32.1	34.6	29.8	65.3	91.1
Poland	0.4	1.3	0.8	3.6	1.4	3.0	4.1	16.8
Lithuania	0.5	0.6	1.0	2.3	2.4	4.4	2.5	14.5

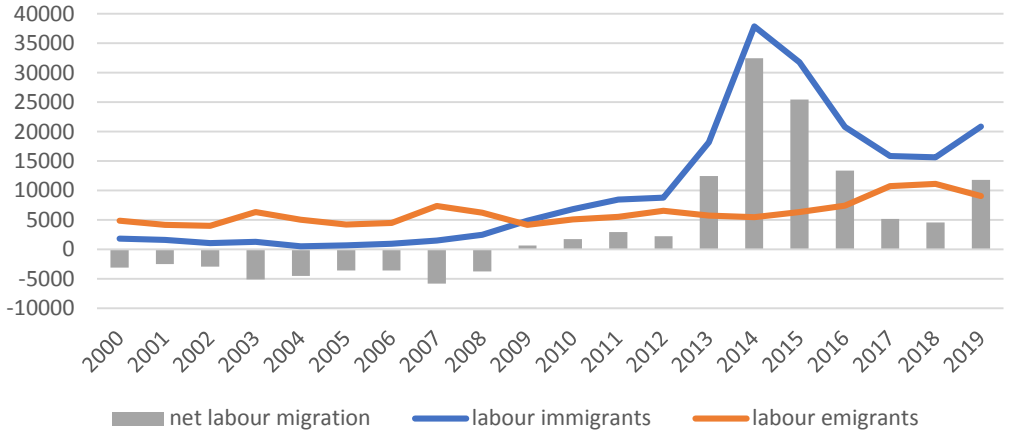
Source: compiled by the author based on the data of migration flows in 5-year periods (OECD, Eurostat, Federal State Statistics Service, Belstat).

Labour migration

Existing research on Belarus indicates that the main reasons for labour migration are economic: wage differences, shortage of employment opportunities in the country of origin and attractive working conditions in the destination country (Jaroszewicz and Lesińska 2014). Labour migration typically takes place over shorter distances and the choice of destination country depends, apart from economic factors, on the possibility of access to the labour market. Existing institutional and economic conditions facilitate close migration links between Belarus and the CIS countries – primarily the EAEU countries with a single labour market, as well as Russia within the Union State agreements.

Official Belarusian data (MVD 2022) indicate that, since 2009, labour immigration has prevailed over emigration in Belarus (Figure 4). The highest migration growth was observed in 2014–2016 and was provided primarily by Ukrainian citizens arriving in Belarus.

Figure 4. Labour migration flows in the Republic of Belarus, persons, 2000–2019



Source: author's elaboration based on the Ministry of Interior of Belarus (MVD 2022).

Between 2000 and 2019 the main immigration countries for the Belarusian labour market were Ukraine, China, Russia and Uzbekistan. Most of the immigrants were skilled industrial and construction workers. Labour immigrants from Ukraine and China accounted for 50 per cent of all arrivals. Ukrainian immigration had

been gradually reducing since 2016, due to the declining economic attractiveness of Belarus for Ukrainian nationals (Rudnik 2017). Chinese labour migrants were usually employed in infrastructure projects built with Chinese loans, so their numbers do not depend on economic conditions in Belarus. The number of Russians constituted about 13 per cent of the foreign labour force but this is in no way comparable to the counter-flow of Belarusians to Russia.

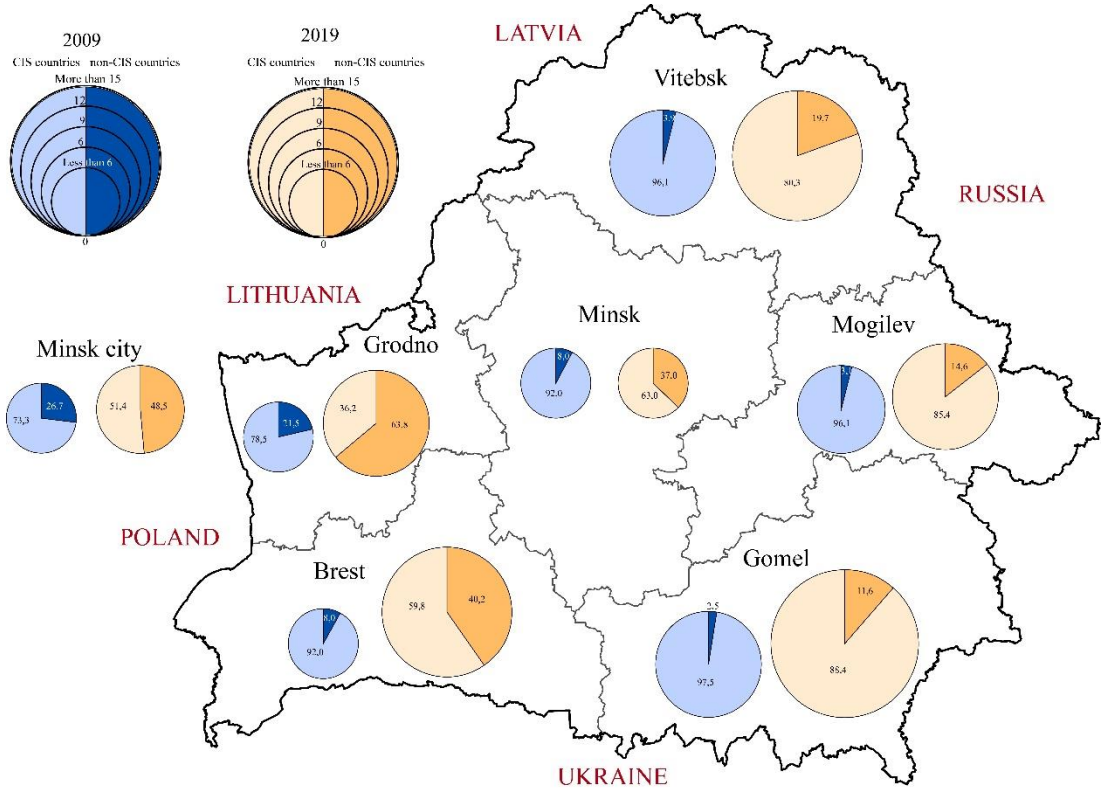
Russia has been the main destination country for Belarusian labour emigrants, accounting for up to 80 per cent (about 4,000–5,000 people annually) of the total outflows. After the economic recession in Russia in 2015, the number of emigrants remained the same at around 4,200, while the share decreased to 46.1 per cent in 2019. At the same time, there was a partial reorientation of labour emigrants to neighbouring Lithuania and Poland. Between 2015 and 2019, the number of emigrants from Belarus to Lithuania increased from 118 to 1,260 and to Poland from 150 to 1,600 – a share which increased from 1.9 to 13.9 per cent and from 2.4 to 17.7 per cent in the total outflow, respectively.

Administrative data on the number of labour emigrants do not reflect the real figures. More-reliable data are provided by the population census (Population Census 2011, 2021). According to the 2009 population census, 41,800 persons (0.9 per cent of the employed population aged 15 years and older) worked abroad, of whom 91.8 per cent worked in CIS countries, including 90.2 per cent in Russia. The remaining 8.2 per cent worked in non-CIS countries, including 1.7 per cent in Lithuania and 1.5 per cent in Poland. Data from the 2019 census also showed a significant increase in the number of labour emigrants (78,600 persons or 1.6 per cent of the employed population), with the fraction of migrants to non-CIS countries amounting to 31.2 per cent. The share and number of labour emigrants departing for CIS or non-CIS countries exhibits some differences by region (Figure 5) – the number of emigrants was higher in the eastern regions, where people prefer to migrate to CIS countries. At the same time, the share and the number of emigrants to non-CIS countries increased during the intercensal period, especially in the western and central regions.

While the 2019 census does not provide exact data on destination countries, given that emigration to Lithuania and Poland has increased significantly over the last 5 years according to administrative data, it can be assumed that these two states were the main non-CIS destination countries for Belarusian labour emigrants. Therefore, a significant increase in the number of emigrants from western and central regions to neighbouring countries during the intercensal period is logical and is caused by geographical proximity and the presence of closer social ties, which have strengthened in recent years (Yeliseyeu 2018).

The increase in the number of labour emigrants and the gradual reorientation westwards was also confirmed by the Labour Force Survey data. Unfortunately, there is no information about labour migration by country – only Russia is singled out, as it has been the main host country for labour migrants for a long time. According to the LFS, the number of Belarusians working abroad increased from 62,200 in 2014 to 98,400 in 2019, with Russia's share falling from 91.7 per cent to 75 per cent respectively (Belstat 2022). Thus, there is a growing demand among Belarusians for employment outside the country; however, Russia is no longer the single most popular destination country, having given way to non-CIS countries, especially Poland (Yeliseyeu 2018).

Figure 5. Number (thousands; the size of the circles) and share (the numbers in the circles) of population working abroad, by regions of the Republic of Belarus



Source: author' elaboration based on the census data (Population Census 2011, 2021).

Nevertheless, census and LFS data may underestimate labour migration, as people tend to hide their irregular sources of income, so it is important to take into account the data from receiving countries. Statistics from several European countries and from Russia show an increasing number of labour immigrants from Belarus – the number of first permits issued to Belarusians for remunerated activities in the EU increased from 5,800 in 2015 to 40,800 in 2019 (Eurostat 2022b). Most are issued in Poland for seasonal workers but their numbers have also increased significantly in Lithuania (from 351 to 6,725) and the Czech Republic (from 267 to 2,452).

Poland as an example of the underestimation of emigration to countries outside the Eurasian migration system

In Belarus there are significant problems with the underestimation of migration, especially to Russia and Poland. The number of Belarusian emigrants in Russia cannot be counted due to the absence of migration restrictions and Belarusians' free access to the labour market. However, this paper does not focus on emigration to Russia since, in terms of the existence of the Eurasian migration system, there is still a substantial migration exchange between Russia and Belarus. In order to better assess the growth of emigration from Belarus to countries outside the CIS group, let us look at statistics of the receiving country in question and compare them with Belarusian statistics. Firstly, Poland is one of the non-CIS countries to which emigration increased significantly in last decade, according to the Belarusian data. Secondly, there is a procedure for obtaining the Pole's Card, which provides Belarusian citizens with Polish roots with a quick legalisation path (Brunarska

and Lesińska 2014) and introduces additional factors into the study of migration statistics between the two countries.

Belarus leads in the number of Pole's Cards issued, with a total of 144,000 such documents distributed in 2008–2019. Additionally, the number of the Pole's Card-holders is growing every year – the changing of the criteria for obtaining one (EC 2016) has only served to stimulate its issuance in 2017 (12,500 were issued in 2016 and 16,200 in 2017). The card provides its holders with a range of entitlements, such as work permit exemption, the right to set up a business enterprise in Poland on the same basis as Polish nationals, the right to study in Poland, as well as the right to receive health care in emergencies (ISAP 2007). The fact that Belarusians obtain the Pole's Card does not directly imply actual emigration to Poland but, rather, an assessment of migratory potential – many Belarusians apply for the card for a free short-term stay in Poland and other EU countries (Yeliseyeu 2018). At the same time, however, most Belarusians granted a permanent residence permit in Poland or Polish citizenship are holders of the Pole's Card. Since the possession of the card exempts Belarusians from the obligation to obtain a work permit or an employer's declaration, the real number of Belarusian workers in Poland is higher than shown in the official statistics on labour migrants (Brunarska and Lesińska 2014).

Long-term emigration to Poland

The emigration flows from Belarus to Poland in the first decade of the twenty-first century were relatively insignificant, with Polish data showing only 4,400 migrants between 2000 and 2009. Only since the middle of the second decade has emigration markedly increased. Górny (2017) notes that immigration to Poland can be conventionally divided into pre-2014 and post-2014 periods. Therefore, in this section I focus on emigration to Poland from 2010 to 2019 in order to show the period of transformation.

The number of migrants who arrived in Poland from Belarus between 2010 and 2019 was 4,400 according to the statistics from Belarus and 20,900 according to Polish sources (the number of permanent residence permits and EU long-term residence permits issued). In particular, the number of immigrants from Belarus to Poland increased significantly in 2017. Thus, according to Belarusian statistics (Belstat 2022), the emigration of Belarusians to Poland in 2010 was 113 persons; by 2015, it increased to 319 and by 2017 to 472. In 2018 and 2019, the intensity of emigration grew markedly, to 765 and 1,751 people respectively. According to official Polish statistics (Pobyt 2022), the number of immigrants from Belarus rose from 664 persons in 2010 to 1,469 in 2015 and 3,924 in 2017. At the same time, the number of immigrants in 2017 increased by 2.3 times compared to 2016. In subsequent years this rising trend continued, reaching 4,666 in 2018 and 5,059 in 2019. One of the reasons for this was the simplification of the law on receiving a permanent residence permit based on Polish roots and the Pole's Card (ISAP 2016). Therefore, card-holders who had previously lived in Poland decided to secure their legal status and obtain a permanent residence permit.

On average for the period 2010–2019, Belarusian statistics (Belstat 2022) present the profile of the long-term emigrant as follows. The majority were men (77 per cent) and people aged 20–30 years (including 32.3 per cent aged 20–24). The emigration of people with higher education (45.4 per cent), general secondary education (27 per cent) and secondary specialised education (22.8 per cent) was prevalent. Territorially, 87 per cent of emigrants came from cities – predominantly from the Brest (29.5 per cent) and Grodno (37.5 per cent) regions that border Poland and the capital Minsk (20.8 per cent) – and were mostly directed to cities within Poland. After 2015, emigration from the eastern regions of the country increased by several percentage points.

A different picture emerges from the Polish statistics (Pobyt 2022). Among immigrants from Belarus, men form a slight majority (54.3 per cent). The age profile of the immigrants was more balanced than shown in the

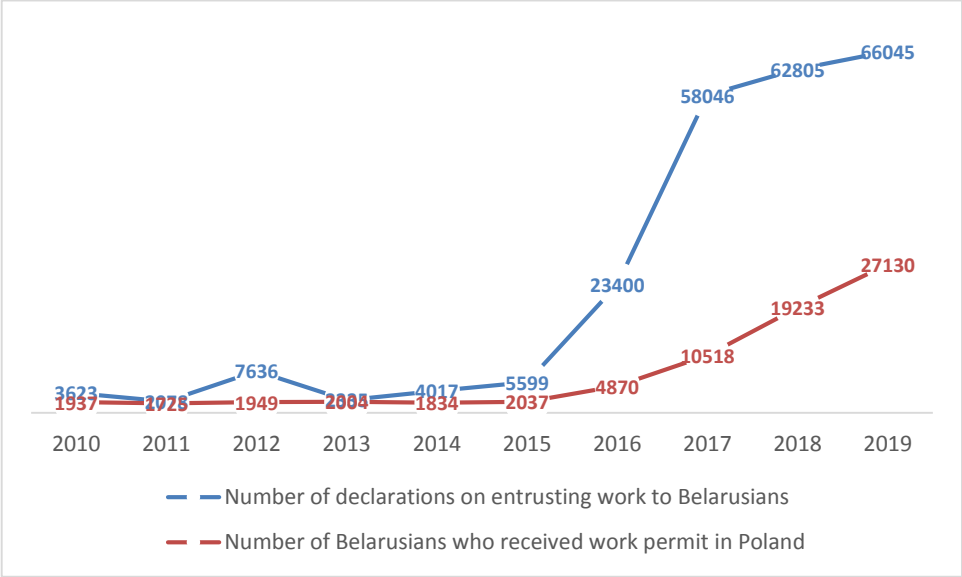
Belarusian data: persons aged 20 to 30 formed the largest group, with a share of 37.1 per cent, among whom young people aged 20–24, accounting for 18.5 per cent. Unfortunately, there were no characteristics for migrants by education level, though it seems that persons with higher and general secondary education predominate. Most immigrants from Belarus resided in the Mazovia (37.3 per cent) and the Podlasie region (20.6 per cent) that borders Belarus.

Labour emigration to Poland

According to data from the Belarusian Ministry of the Interior (MVD 2022), 9 900 people left Belarus for Poland between 2010 and 2019. The number of emigrants grew significantly in 2017–2019. Until 2017, the average annual number of emigrants was around 200 while, in recent years, it has stood at around 3,000 per year. Together with the increase in numbers, there has been a change in the length of stay: prior to 2017, flows of 6 to 12 months dominated; after 2017 more than 90 per cent left for up to 6 months. However, this does not mean that workers return at the end of their current contract – realistically it is highly likely that they will extend their work permit in Poland. On average, between 2010 and 2019, about 70 per cent of emigrants were men and more than 80 per cent were employed in working professions.

A clear difference in the volume of labour immigration from Belarus is evident from examining the Polish statistics (MFSP 2021). There are several resources for estimating the number of labour immigrants in Poland. One can begin by looking at the data on the number of work permits issued. From 2010 to 2015, about 2,000 work permits for Belarusians were issued annually. Since 2016, the number has doubled every year (Figure 6). In terms of qualitative characteristics, more than half of those granted work permits in 2010–2019 were skilled workers employed in the construction and transport sectors (MFSP 2021).

Figure 6. Dynamics of work permits and declarations on entrusting work to Belarusians, persons, 2010–2019



Source: author's elaboration based on the Public Employment Services of Poland (MFSP 2021).

In addition to the work permits, there is another type of short-term labour permit, namely an employer's declaration on entrusting work to a foreigner. The number of declarations issued to Belarusians increased from

3,600 in 2010 to 66,000 in 2019 (MFSP 2021). On average, only 25 per cent of women received this type of document between 2010 and 2019. About half of the declarations were issued to migrants aged 26 to 40 and employment was the most often found in construction (27.9 per cent), administrative and support services (15.2 per cent), transport (22.9 per cent) and industry (22.3 per cent).

The simplification of the procedures for work permits and declarations of intent has led to a notable increase in the number of documents issued; however, the total figure does not match the number of foreign workers who arrived in Poland during the same period. For example, an employer may have completed several declarations for one employee or the employee did not appear to work on the basis of the received document. It has been estimated that only two-thirds of the declarations are used as intended (Górny, Kaczmarczyk, Szulecka, Bitner, Okólski, Siedlecka and Stefańczyk 2018).

An indirect indicator for estimating the number of migrants on the Polish territory is the number of foreigners claiming pensions and disability insurance. Their number increased for Belarusian citizens from 4,900 in 2010 to 42,800 in 2019 and, as with previous indicators, the highest growth was observed after 2016 (ZUS 2020).

Thus, both Polish and Belarusian statistics show an increasing number of migrants from Belarus on Polish territory. In addition, there were changes made in 2020 which have further influenced the increase of emigration flows from Belarus to non-CIS countries, especially to Poland.

The changing conditions and dynamics of emigration from Belarus after 2020

The year 2020 began with a long-awaited event for Belarusians: the agreements between Belarus and the EU on visa facilitation and readmission were signed. These agreements represent an important step in EU–Belarus relations and pave the way for the improved mobility of its citizens, contributing to closer links between the EU and its Eastern Partnership neighbours (EC 2020). However, even before these agreements came into force, free movement between the countries was interrupted – the Covid-19 pandemic drastically affected all forms of human mobility, including international migration. Hundreds of thousands of migrants were stranded, unable to return to their home countries, while others were forced to return there earlier than planned, when job opportunities dried up and schools closed (UN 2020).

In response to the pandemic, most countries in the world placed restrictions on the free movement of people. The lockdown has affected many sectors of the economy, with the service sector, where many jobs are filled by migrants, being hit the hardest. In the first wave of the pandemic, Belarus did not impose severe restrictive measures to combat the spread of the virus. All sectors of the economy continued to function as usual and kindergartens and schools also stayed open. Between March and June 2020, a number of companies that were able to carry out their production activities remotely switched to this form of work, in whole or in part. In spite of the lack of administrative restrictions, people fearing for their health and feeling a social responsibility towards vulnerable groups curtailed their social activities and, wherever possible, kept their children out of kindergartens and schools (KB 2021).

The Belarusian authorities did not close the borders until the end of 2020. Nevertheless, entry restrictions in all neighbouring countries had automatically ceased movement across borders for Belarusian citizens. This affected the activities of certain sectors of the economy and labour migration. Belarusian labour-migration data showed a marked decrease in emigration, especially in the first half of the year. In total, 4,723 persons left Belarus in 2020, which is almost 50 per cent down from 2019 (MVD 2022). There was a decrease in the number of labour emigrants to many countries – but most of all to Russia – while the number of emigrants to Lithuania and Poland remained at the same level.

According to a sociological survey conducted in June 2020 by the Ministry of the Interior of Belarus, 47 per cent of labour migrants who had left the country in 2020 returned, while the rest stayed abroad. The return of migrant workers and their inability to freely leave to work in other countries increased the pressure on the domestic labour market. As the IOM (2021) study shows, the majority of labour emigrants who had to return to Belarus due to Covid-19 restrictions do not intend to stay in Belarus in the future; they simply await the removal of restrictions on movement and the emergence of employment opportunities abroad.

The political situation after the August 2020 presidential elections provided an additional incentive for emigration and led to a significant increase in the number of forced migrants.[4] Most of them moved to neighbouring Ukraine, where there is no visa regime, or to Lithuania, Poland and other European countries. According to Eurostat (2022c), the number of Belarusians who applied for asylum in EU countries for the first time tripled in August 2020. The total number of Belarusian asylum-seekers from August 2020 to December 2021 was 3,995, including 255 in France, 2,495 in Poland, 270 in Germany and 320 in Lithuania. This represents a small portion of all forced migrants, since most of them remained in the country of destination on humanitarian visas or applied for other forms of international protection. For example, Poland issued 33,342 humanitarian visas between August 2020 and April 2022 (OF 2022), while Lithuania issued 6,700 permits for specific humanitarian reasons between August 2020 and October 2021 (Troianovski 2021). Despite the absence of a visa regime, forced migrants do not depart for Russia because of the fear of deportation and the similar political system. Forced migrants do not typically plan to emigrate for good, regarding it as more of a temporary measure instead. However, the current political crisis in Belarus continues with no resolution in sight, while being exacerbated by an economic crisis. At the same time, forced migrants can end up settling down in the receiving country, so there is every likelihood that a short-term form of forced migration will turn into labour or even long-term migration.

An additional factor reducing the costs of emigration, especially forced emigration, is assistance in the destination country. The role of diasporas and migration policies in the receiving country plays a large part in this respect. The Belarusian diaspora has become more active since 2020 (Rudnik 2021), with financial and informational support being provided to all newly arrived migrants, particularly forced migrants.

The EU countries provide significant assistance to forced Belarusian migrants. A number have announced additional recruitment and scholarship programmes for students and scientists from Belarus. They are also interested in attracting highly qualified specialists and provide assistance in the relocation of business and IT employees from Belarus.[5] In September 2020, Ukraine, Latvia and Lithuania all started setting up programmes which offer certain conditions for the relocation of highly qualified specialists together with their family members (ERR 2020). Some of the most significant support for Belarusians is provided by Poland, where there are several support programmes for students and researchers, the opportunity of employment via a humanitarian visa and a large-scale programme for the relocation of business and IT specialists (Poland Business Harbour (PBH)). Under the PBH programme, individuals (and their family members) with an engineering degree or experience in the IT industry are able to take advantage of the fast-tracked visa procedure (PBH 2021).

The effectiveness of such programmes can be measured by the growth in the number of firms partially or fully relocated from Belarus, as well as the interest shown among employees in relocation. According to surveys of IT professionals (Kozhemyakin 2021), the number of respondents from this sector who wish to emigrate from Belarus increased from 33.7 per cent in September 2020 to 41.8 per cent in January 2021. The proportion of those who left during the same period rose from 3.8 per cent to 14.2 per cent. Poland was mentioned as among the countries to emigrate to by 64 per cent of those planning to move and 42.6 per cent of those who have already moved away. In addition, Ukraine, Germany and Lithuania were also high on the list. In March 2022, the proportion of respondents who had left had risen to 27 per cent, with 28 per cent planning to leave. Poland remains the top country for relocation, with Georgia and Lithuania also being considered

(DEV 2022). According to the Office for Foreigners in Poland, while – from mid-August 2020 to the end of the year – 1,116 visas were issued under the PBH, by April 2022 their numbers had risen to more than 33,000 (Grzegorczyk 2021; OF 2022). In addition to the increase in the number of visas issued, between August 2020 and April 2022 the number of Belarusians granted different types of resident permit in Poland rose from 28,000 to 48,000 (OF 2022).

The support of European countries for the Belarusian people in resolving the political crisis affects how Belarusians feel about certain EU countries and their intention to emigrate to them. According to research conducted at the end of 2020, Belarusians rated Poland's policy towards the political crisis the highest (38.6 per cent), followed by Germany (37.6 per cent), Russia (31.2 per cent) and Lithuania (30.5 per cent). Poland also occupied the top spot among countries where Belarusians would like to work. As many as 40.6 per cent indicated a desire to work in Poland, ahead of Western Europe (36.7 per cent), Russia (30.3 per cent) and Lithuania (21.3 per cent) (OSW 2021).

Despite the great emigration potential and obvious push factors, the data for 2020 do not show a noticeable increase in emigration. Firstly, the pandemic influenced the decline in population mobility and, secondly, many Belarusians hoped for a resolution to the political crisis and the beginning of reforms in the country, which together restrained emigration. However, in 2021, emigration from Belarus increased significantly, for both political and economic reasons. Since 2020 there has already been a rise in inflation, a reduction of wages in certain sectors, the growth of unprofitable state enterprises, job losses and the closing down of private companies (Kruk and Lvovskiy 2020) – all factors which will lead to a reduction in household incomes and an increase in unemployment.

Conclusions

According to the migration-systems concept, Belarus remains part of the Eurasian migration system; however, a gradual transformation of Belarus' place in this system is under way, particularly in the wake of the economic crisis in Russia since 2015. Throughout the twenty-first century, Belarus has had the closest migration exchange with Russia and this confirms the identification of a special sub-system consisting of the two countries within the larger Eurasian system. At the same time, migration links with other CIS countries have been weakening, despite the existence of all the requisite conditions for free movement and facilitated access to the labour market within the CIS. The exception is Ukraine, where the rise in immigration in 2014–2016 had a forced character. In parallel with these developments, there are countries outside the Eurasian migration system, such as Germany, the USA and Israel, with which Belarus has maintained stable migration links, especially with regards to emigration. It can be argued that this fact does not significantly influence the changes affecting the place of Belarus in the Eurasian system, as emigrants to these countries have been predominantly long-term and their numbers remain small and do not change much over time.

Labour migration has a more significant impact on the transformation of the migration system, which is determined primarily by economic reasons and can change direction in a short period of time. It is the data on labour migrants that demonstrate the transformation of Belarus' place in the Eurasian migration system. After 2015, there has been a gradual reorientation of labour migrants from East to West, particularly evident in the western and central regions of the country. The economic crisis in Russia triggered this phenomenon, while certain institutional and economic conditions in neighbouring Western countries stimulated its further development.

In order to better assess the changes taking place in emigration flows from Belarus, it is important to look at the statistics of the receiving countries. A comparative analysis of Polish and Belarusian statistics shows

a significant difference in the number and structure of emigrants from Belarus. Thus, in Belarusian statistics, men between the ages of 20 and 30 prevail among long-term migrants, while Polish data show almost equal numbers by gender and a more-even age profile. According to Polish data, both labour and long-term emigration are several times higher than the Belarusian administrative data indicate. It is problematic to measure this underestimation reliably, especially the number of labour migrants. However, the data show an increase in the number of immigrants from Belarus after 2015 – and especially after 2017 – due to institutional changes regarding the recruitment of foreign labour. An increase in the number of labour migrants, together with an accumulation of Belarusian long-term migrants in Poland, is likely to contribute to the growth of social links between the countries, which may further create an image of Poland as a new centre of attraction among the Belarusian population.

Prior to 2020, the direction and dynamics of emigration flows from Belarus were influenced primarily by external factors in the form of economic and institutional conditions in certain countries. In 2020, an internal political crisis co-occurred, which has led to the formation of a steady flow of forced emigrants and given rise to further alterations in the direction and scale of emigration from Belarus. The increased role of diasporas and support from several European countries also influenced the choice of emigration destinations after 2020. One of the most widespread instruments for emigration among Belarusians has been the Poland Business Harbour programme, as demonstrated by the steady increase in the number of Belarusians who have obtained this visa. At the same time, Russia is not suitable for political emigrants, which further contributes to the reversal of emigration flows.

It is possible that, in the coming years, Belarus will experience serious economic problems. Labour migration constitutes a good opportunity to solve these problems in the short term. The recovery of neighbouring economies and the opening of borders could lead to large-scale labour emigration. If the current position of Belarus in the geopolitical system is maintained (there is a possibility of severe restrictions on movement to EU countries after the outbreak of war in Ukraine) then the social and institutional determinants that emerged or intensified in 2020 might contribute to an increase in the number of Belarusian emigrants to neighbouring EU countries. Thus Belarus, as was previously the case for Moldova and Ukraine, will continue to expand the geography of emigration, primarily in terms of labour emigration. At the same time, this could lead to a further reduction of migration links within the Eurasian migration system and, above all, with Russia.

Notes

[1] Includes all post-Soviet countries except the Baltic states and Georgia.

[2] Since 1 October 2018, foreign nationals who have received a temporary residence permit for more than 9 months are counted in the statistics while, before this, only those who received a residence permit for 12 months or more were included. [3] Russian statistics should be treated with caution, as the methodology of migration registration changed there in 2011 (Chudinivskikh 2016).

[4] Here, forced migrants are people who have left Belarus for fear of persecution for political reasons.

[5] Programmes for attracting highly qualified specialists existed in selected European countries until 2020. They were the part of immigration policies aimed at meeting the demand of the domestic labour market – for example, programmes to attract doctors in Germany and Poland or IT specialists in Germany, the Netherlands, etc. The specific situation of Belarus after 2020 is caused by push factors within the country, which have created a mass emigration of highly qualified specialists.

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