

# ROMANIAN COMMUNITY OF BELGIUM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MIGRANT NETWORKS

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**Abstract:** *In realizing the main objective, we started from some main categories of information sources: theoretical sources, descriptive and empirical data sources obtained during the analysis. The empirical analysis presented can be grouped into: data from official statistical sources and data analysis from questionnaire-based survey. The social survey was carried out on a sample of 200 Romanian immigrants in Belgium who lived or worked in different cities or towns in the country. The spatial distribution of Romanian immigrants is not constant and alike, the number of Romanian origin persons varying greatly from one region to another and from one place to another one. Therefore, one of the challenges in setting the research methodology was that establishing the geographical boundaries in which we operate. The solution was identified and applied randomly, because it is difficult to establish a statistically step case. In determining the space of social inquiry we stopped in Brussels and its surroundings, where the number of Romanian immigrants is the largest.*

**Key words:** *migration, social investigation, migrant networks*

## Introduction

In the presented study, the data were obtained from a sociological survey based on an administered questionnaire, conducted from February to March 2014, when traveling in Belgium, to the Arthis Belgian-Romanian Cultural House, a Belgian non-profit association, recognized as the general organization of continuing education by the Belgian Ministry of Culture, to the European Parliament, the European Commission, in Gent, Brougge and Liege. Some of the questionnaires were applied via an online platform.

Then we asked each investigated person to recommend people or relatives of Romanian origin, except for small family, who were at that time in Belgium. We appreciated the “snowball method”, because it is the most appropriate in applying sociological investigation in this study because it allows the identification of subjects with similar migration experiences. Moreover, since it is difficult to identify the subjects of Romanian origin in a society as heterogeneous as the Belgian company,

this method of selection assures, by its nature, the fulfilling of the belonging criteria to a particular nationality.

### **1. Reference frame of the Romanian community in Belgium analysis**

While before 1990 the number of Romanian immigrants on the territory of Belgium was considerably lower than at present, the country is one of the favorite destinations of Romanian emigration. This is due to the agreements that Romania has concluded with the Belgian state, to the family ties that Romanian migrants have with Romanian immigrants in Belgium, but it is also due to the presence of increasing numbers of representatives of Romania in EU institutions located in Brussels and the European Parliament.

Belgium is a small country with 11 million inhabitants which hosts a large number of Romanian immigrants. Since 2010, starting with the strong economic crises that affected Spain, Italy, Greece, many Romanian who work in those states have chosen to work in Belgium. As shown in the explanations so far, there is no, however, an exact number of Romanian citizens immigrants in Belgium.

Like other communities in Belgium, the Romanians are found in organizations or associations, which celebrate important events to show their attachment regarding the Romanian culture and traditions, and not least, their mutual support and help. The Romanian Embassy in Belgium and the Belgian state recognize many economic, cultural, educational, religious and social associations. A special interest is given to the Romanian culture people in Belgium, personalities of Romanian culture, recognized by the Belgian society: Jana Cernatescu Nicolae Groza, Marcel Janco, Victor Baurer (painters); Vladimir Kazan (sculptor) etc. Royal Academy of Sciences, Letters and Fine Arts counted as members, two Romanian Emil Constantinescu Racoviță and Virgil N. Constantinescu.

For the Romanians who have emigrated, Belgium has been a very attractive destination. The massive migration of Romanians to other European countries, for whatever reason and consequences of the migration phenomenon, has attracted interest from sociologists, economists, demographers, etc., who undertook various scientific research. The purpose of these research studies was to investigate as thoroughly and deeply the specifics of these mobilities, the causes that generated it and the effects they have caused.

According to the study (<http://www.npdata.be/BuG/133-Roma/Roma.htm>) carried out by sociologist Jan Hertogen, a statistics of the Romanians in Belgium is presented, in September 2010. From the Belgian population numbering 10,666,866 inhabitants, 22,200 are

Romanians. Among these, 12,600 are established in the Brussels Region, 6160 in Flanders and 3440 are in Wallonia.

Taking into consideration the study on the 19 municipalities, the statistics shows that the number of the Romanian immigrants is as it follows: Anderlecht-1585, Schaerbeek-1392, Malenbeek-Saint-Jean-1172, Saint-Josse-Noode-1171, Saint-Gilles-633, Etterbeek-472.

However, in 2008, when in Belgium were officially registered a total of 16,347 Romanian immigrants, the Romanian Embassy advanced a number of 40,000 Romanian living in Belgium. (<http://www.npdata.be/BuG/133-Roma/Roma.htm>)

The final data of the Romanian population Census conducted in 2013 shows that the number of Romanian immigrants in Belgium is of 11611 people. (<http://www.gandul.info/stiri/recensamant-date-finale-cati-romani-sunt-in-afara-romaniei-situatia-pe-tari-11083702>.) Migration in Belgium is “very diverse”, a Belgium publication says on 22. 05 2014 and it specifies that “those more willing to settle in Belgium are French, and they were of a total of 13,000 when they came in 2012. They were followed by the Romanians and Dutch. It also increased the number of Portuguese.” According to NordEclair.be there were 28,000 Romanians and 5,800 Bulgarians, and 93,000 Dutch and 39,000 Germans in 2012 in Belgium. (<http://www.ziare.com/diaspora/romani-strainatate/si-belgienii-sunt-sperati-ca-romanii-si-bulgarii-le-ar-putea-invada-tara-de-la-1-ianuarie-1271133>)

## **2. Role of the migrant networks**

Our research made on the group of 200 Romanian immigrants in Belgium aimed to identify the role that the existence of migrant networks had in the process of migration and whether the existence of networks has influenced the decision regarding the chosen destination.

In general, the Romanian immigrants go in search of a job after receiving information from their friends, relatives etc. or through specialized agencies of job placements abroad. It is natural for everyone to want to have a living space before reaching the destination. I felt that the Romanian migration is strongly influenced by the migrant networks established and therefore the influence of these networks on the migration process of particular interest.

We considered that the Romanian migration is strongly influenced by the established migrant networks and therefore the influence of these networks on the migration process of particular interest.

**Network 1. Did you have friends/relatives in Belgium before you came here?**

<i>Respondents options</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>
Yes	<b>86.6</b>	175
No	<b>12.9</b>	26
Don't know/don't answer	<b>0.5</b>	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>202</b>

We were interested to find out if respondents initially have acquaintances or relatives in Belgium. Most of the respondents, 86.6% answered affirmatively. Perhaps this was one of the factors that have led them to choose to emigrate to Belgium and not in another state.

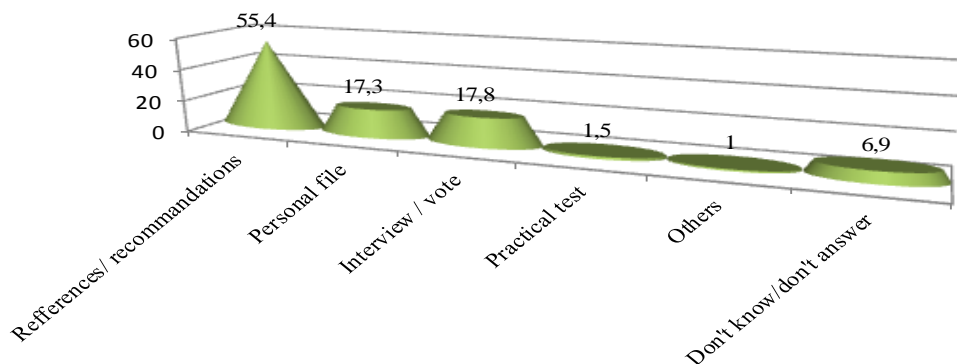
Also through relatives and acquaintances, many of them have found work in Belgium. Thus, whether it was about information or recommendations from employers, the most already benefited from the fact that they knew some people in Belgium in order to get a job here. The migrants in Belgium have basically opened roads for them, they were guides for those who emigrated from Romania.

When asked *How did you get your first job in Belgium?* more than half of the respondents answered that they had received references and recommendations (55.4%), 17.8% were employed after presenting at an interview and 17.3% had to submit a personal file including acts required for employment. Those who just needed references or recommendations they were given by relatives, acquaintances or friends they already had before leaving the country. They basically gave their endorsement to them. Of course for those works which require more knowledge or appropriate expertise an interview, an employment personal file or even both were required.

**Network 2. How did you get your first job in Belgium?**

<i>Respondents options</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>
References/ recommendations	<b>55.4</b>	112
File	<b>17.3</b>	35
Interview / vote	<b>17.8</b>	36
Practical test	<b>1.5</b>	3
Others	<b>1.0</b>	2
Don't know/don't answer	<b>6.9</b>	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>202</b>

From the number of the interviewed respondents, almost all acknowledged that they needed support from the compatriots, in a smaller or greater extent, depending on the situation, and this support has been granted according to their need and possibilities.



The support given to the Romanians who came to work in Belgium, has made them to have different experiences in finding employment. When asked about the difficulty of finding a job, 59.4% said that it was relatively difficult. Perhaps their compatriots gave them a suggestion or informed their relatives they had in Belgium.

The difficulty to find a job, however, is conditioned by the activity they want to do, the conditions required by the employer, the qualification in the field etc.

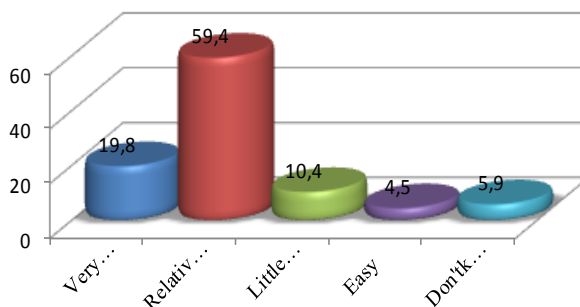
### Network 3. How difficult do you appreciate it is to find a job in Belgium?

<i><b>Respondents options</b></i>	<i><b>Percentage</b></i>	<i><b>Frequencies</b></i>
Very difficult	<b>19.8</b>	40
Relatively difficult	<b>59.4</b>	120
Little difficult	<b>10.4</b>	21
Easy	<b>4.5</b>	9
Don't know/don't answer	<b>5.9</b>	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>202</b>

Among 10.4% of respondents said they found it very difficult to get a job, the explanation being that they began to work in Belgium with friends, relatives or acquaintances who were already there.

A category of those who had difficult experiences in finding employment are the intellectuals, the students who had to fulfill the

necessary formalities and the required steps to find a job in the field they are specialists.

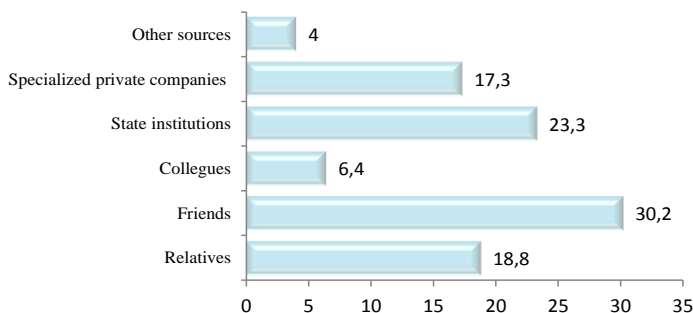


With friends (30.2%), relatives (18.8%), colleagues (6.4%), which represent more than half of the respondents who claimed to have needed their help, many of the migrants needed certain information from the state institutions (23.3%), but also from private companies specializing in recruitment (17.3%). Most of those who responded in this way indicated that there were some additional information, formalities where the authorities only could grant. For example, the Hague Apostille is given by the formalities of the state institutions.

**Network 4. Where did you get the information about the destination place when you decided to immigrate?**

<i>Respondents options</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>
Relatives	18.8	38
Friends	30.2	61
Colleagues	6.4	13
Public institutions	23.3	47
Specialized private firms	17.3	35
Other sources	4.0	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>202</b>

Although the specialized companies and the public institutions could be the most relevant information sources in such situations, migrants prefer to enjoy the experiences of those who migrated before them and to exploit the idea of following a procedure already checked and having the expected results.

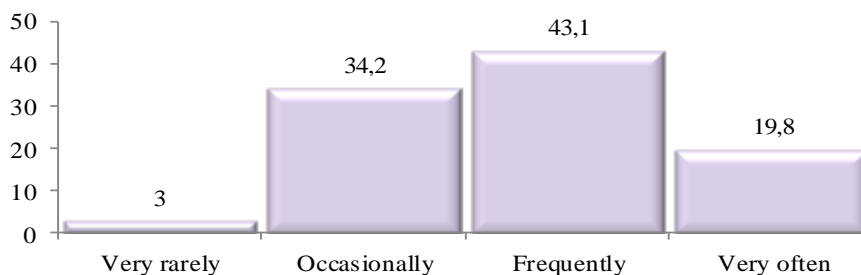


It remains to be seen whether these links remain after the migrants' arrival in Belgium, who were helped by their compatriots.

**Network 5. Currently, do you keep in touch with the people who have helped you get to Belgium?**

<i>Respondents options</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>
Very rarely	3.0	6
Occasionally	34.2	69
Frequently	43.1	87
Very often	19.8	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>202</b>

Most migrants (43.1% frequently and 19.8% very often) said they often meet the Romanians who originally helped them to reach Belgium. A percentage of 34.2% of them said they meet occasionally, and only 3% said they rarely see each other.



Almost two thirds of respondents kept very close links with those who helped them to come to Belgium to find work, to integrate into Belgian society. This is a very common aspect to those who come here for a short period of time.

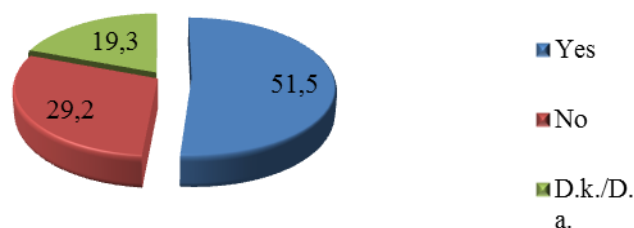
It is, however, another third of them which does only keep occasionally links to those who helped them. It is mainly due to the lack of free time or distance that occurred due to finding a new job.

More than half of the respondents said they are part of at least one association of Romanians in Belgium (51,5%).

#### Network 6. Are you part of any Romanian association in Belgium?

<i>Respondents options</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>
Yes	<b>51.5</b>	104
No	<b>29.2</b>	59
Don't know/Don't answer	<b>19.3</b>	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>202</b>

Moreover, they appreciate the role of these associations as being particularly important in the integration of immigrants in the host country.



From a social point of view, membership in such an association, when you are in a foreign country and without the company of family, can mean the only way of socialization and communication outside the service.

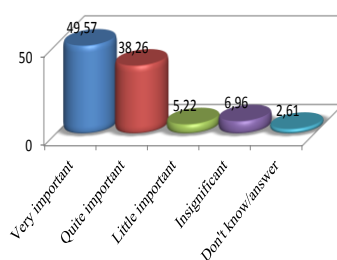


### Network 7.

for those who answered affirmatively at the previous question):  
**What do you think is the role of these associations in support of new immigrants?**

<b>Respondents options</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>
Very important	<b>49.57</b>	54
Quite important	<b>38.26</b>	44
Little important	<b>5.22</b>	6
Insignificant	<b>6.96</b>	8
Don't know/Don't answer	<b>2.61</b>	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>115</b>

The relaxed, non-institutionalized frame in which these meetings are conducted is a way to feel closer to home, of Romania, a way to get your other knowledge among Romanians, a way to remember the Romanian values and traditions. All through these associations, they attend the cultural and literary events for those who are interested, watch Romanian movies, read Romanian journals or write, create in Romanian, commemorate important Romanian national events etc. Within these associations, the Romanian immigrants have the opportunity *to feel like home*.



Almost half of the Romanian immigrants (49.57%) considered the role of integrating the Romanians in Romanian associations in Belgium very important, and 38.26% considered quite important the implication of these associations in welding the Romanian community in Belgium. It is appreciated that three-quarters support the work of the association and

participate with interest. Most of people said that they helped the other Romanians who wanted to emigrate, almost half of them (48.5%). Therefore, migrant networks operate in both directions.

**Network 8. Have you ever helped a migrant to come in Belgium?**

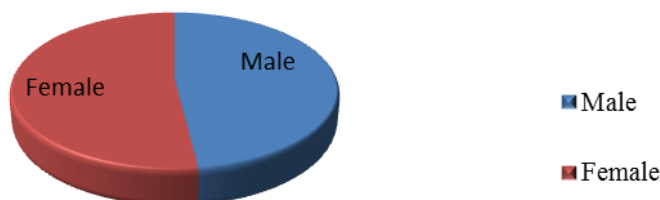
<i>Respondents options</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>
Yes	<b>48.5</b>	98
No	<b>51.0</b>	103
Don't know/Don't answer	<b>0.5</b>	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>202</b>

The existence of some migration networks and the contact with these can influence migration in a geographical direction. Moreover, the human being, as a social person, feels safer when he is part of a group, feels the need to belong to a community. Besides the fact that these networks provide information, advice, recommendations, they provide necessary social and microclimate mental wellbeing of each individual.

We must notice that the subjects who participated in this study were almost similar proportions of both sexes, 48% men and 52% were women.

**Table 1. Representativeness by gender**

<i>Respondents options</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>
Male	<b>48.0</b>	97
Female	<b>52.0</b>	105
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>202</b>



We made this sample choice to get a clearer picture of the reality on issues that we followed in the questionnaire.

## Conclusions

For each emigrant, this migration process was one of exploration, search and, in reality, few were those who said they would rather live in another country than in Romania. For those who have done this deal and moved their families abroad or built new ones there, planting roots, it became somewhat incorrect to continue to consider them Romanians, taking into consideration the fact that they themselves do not want to return there.

Finding a job outside the borders meant for most Romanians after 1989, an exploitation of the geographical sense, but especially of the social term. It involved strategies, risks, accumulation and consumption of resources to enter a different world, often remote and unknown. The process was a search by different national space exploration from one period to another; exploration was performed alone or especially with those close-relatives, friends or acquaintances; this was done through legal, semi-legal or illegal ways; with interruptions or returns; aimed at identifying some work niches and economic and social success in the world abroad.

The failures and successes people who migrated have had, from stage to stage, depending on their own assessment of the scale that has made the search. Exploring migration differs in structure from the classic explorer. Both are motivated, have a strong desire to get into a world where you've never been and for which there is little data around. For migrants, at one extreme there is only desire to get to "the Promised Land" and at the other extreme is the desire and the material and social resources, the knowledge to reach the *Promised Land*. In this case, it is essentially the country where you may earn more, better and in less time. The opposition is not between rich and poor, but between what we have here and what we could have that for a while we should earn more.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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