

# Living Transnationally

## – ROMANIAN MIGRANTS IN LONDON



A RUNNYMEDE COMMUNITY STUDY  
BY ANDREEA R. TORRE



## About Runnymede Community Studies

In reflecting on the changing nature of ethnic diversity in Britain, it becomes increasingly clear that we have to move beyond binary notions of white and non-white to explain the ways in which racisms operate, identities are formed and people live out their lives. The societies in which we live are becoming more diverse and will continue to diversify as migration patterns change, and the impacts of globalisation are reflected in labour markets as well as in transnational movement of capital.

This series of community studies aims to promote understanding of the diversity within and between different ethnic groups. Our intention is to build up a collection of studies which focus on communities; their demography, links to civil society, and key political and social issues. We hope that over time this will provide a rich resource for understanding how diversity is lived and experienced away from the necessarily crude ethnic monitoring form, in a vital and dynamic multi-ethnic society.

To find out more about the Runnymede Community Studies series, please visit: [www.runnymedetrust.org](http://www.runnymedetrust.org)

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# Living Transnationally – Romanian Migrants in London

ANDREEA R. TORRE

## Romanians in London at a Glance

### Population and Geography

- According to the last Census, there were just over 7,500 Romanian nationals in Britain in 2001.
- The most recent estimates of the Labour Force Survey (April - June 2007) recorded 19,096 Romanian citizens residing in the UK.
- According to the 2001 Census, 3,000 were living in London at the time, accounting for 40% of the total Romanian population of the UK.
- The Romanian embassy estimates about 50,000 Romanians living in the UK.
- Although Romanians are widely distributed across Britain, London is by far the main destination. Within London, Romanians tend to be dispersed but the northern boroughs have a greater concentration.
- A significant presence of Romanian nationals is found in Oxford, Cambridge, Nottingham, Birmingham, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Cardiff.
- Most Romanian migrants have arrived to Britain in the last 6 years, with 41% of Romanian nationals arriving between 2000 and 2004.
- Traditionally, Romanian citizens would migrate to Germany, Hungary, France, Austria, Sweden, the US and more recently Italy, Spain and Portugal.
- Romanians have been migrating to the UK since the 1960s when small numbers of Romanian nationals arrived here escaping the communist regime.
- Since 1990, there has been a significant increase in both legal and irregular migration from Romania. Between 1990 and 1993, almost 200,000 Romanians emigrated.
- Britain, which was not among the first major destinations for Romanians in the 1990s, is growing in popularity, and is now the third most popular destination after Italy and Spain.

### Education and Employment

- Romania accessed the EU in January 2007. Since then Romanian nationals can freely enter the UK, but they still need permission from the Home Office to take up work. This arrangement is part of a transition period which will be reviewed in 2008.
- 84% of Romanians in the UK work full-time.
- Among the routes used by Romanians to enter the UK, the work permit scheme was the most used, together with au-pair and student visas. Between 2001 and 2004 there was a significant increase in the number of Romanians entering the UK with an au-pair visa. The growth was from 0 to 1,884.
- Romanians, as other Central and East-European citizens, can enter the UK also through the self-employed route (European Community Association Agreements, ECAA).
- Most male Romanian migrants are employed in construction. Other sectors with high presence of Romanian migrants are cleaning and agriculture. As far as highly skilled Romanians are concerned, these are mainly employed in the IT sector, health sector, academia/research, accounting and finance.
- Deskilling is common among Romanian workers. A significant number of secondary or university educated Romanians are often working as builders or in the domestic services and cleaning industry

## Relevant Organisations and Websites

### Romanian Embassy

Arundel House  
4 Palace Green  
London W8 4QD  
Tel: 020 7937.9666  
Fax: 020 7937.8069  
Email: roemb@roemb.co.uk

### London Resources Ltd (Romanian Community Business Growth Link)

75 Hoe Street  
Walthamstow  
London E17 4SA  
Tel: 0208 223 0790  
Email: simona@londonresources.co.uk

### Romanian Cultural Centre

54-62 Regent Street  
London W1B 5RE  
Tel: 020 7439 4052  
Fax: 207 437 5908  
Email: mail@romanianculturalcentre.org.uk  
Web: www.romanianculturalcentre.org.uk  
www.ratiufamilyfoundation.com/RCC/index.html

### Romanian Orthodox Church

St. Dunstan in the West  
186 Fleet Street  
London EC4A 2HR  
Tel: 020 7735 9515

### Romanian Cultural Institute

1 Belgrave Square  
London SW1X8PH  
Tel: 02077520134  
Web: www.icr-london.co.uk

### Romanian Saturday School

The Romanian Orthodox Church  
186 Fleet Street  
London EC4A 2HR

### Pro Patrimonio

PO Box 2297  
London W1A 5GG  
Tel: 020 7439 4052  
Email: mail@propatrimonio.com  
Web: www.propatrimonio.org

### Diaspora româneasca

Tel: 020 8802 2792  
Email: redactia@diaspora.com  
editor@diaspora.com  
Web: www.diasporaro.com/

### Romanians in the Third Millennium

Tel: 0800 731 26 80  
Email: r3m@romania3millennium.org.uk  
Web: www.romania3millennium.org.uk

### Romanian Association: "Românca"

1 Marshall House  
2 Dorncliffe Road  
London SW6 5 LF  
Tel: 020 7736 8668  
Email: ionela@talktalk.net

### Români in UK

110 Britannia House  
11 Glenthorne Road  
London W6 0LH  
Tel: 020 8735 6524  
Fax: 020 8735 6525  
Email: ziar@romani.co.uk  
Web: www.romani.co.uk

### Români Online Ltd

Tel: 077 1768 3616  
Email: admin@romani-online.co.uk  
Web: www.Romani-Online.co.uk

### Romanian groceries and restaurants: La Dumitrescu

141 Wood Street  
London E17 3LX  
Tel/Fax: 020 8807 4566  
Email: ladumitrescu@yahoo.co.uk

### International Foundation Constantin Silvestri

Web: www.constantinsilvestri.com/

### Top's Alimentara

2 Odeon Parade  
Sudbury Heights Avenue  
London UB6 0NA  
Fax: 020 8904 7097  
Email: charlie@romanianfoodshop.co.uk  
Web: www.magazinromanesc.co.uk

### Romanian LSE SU Society

Email: Su.Soc.Romanian@lse.ac.uk

### 32 Old Bailey

32 Old Bailey  
London EC4M 7HS  
Tel: 020 7489 1842  
Email: oldbailey32@yahoo.co.uk

## Introduction

The decision to focus this research on Romanians working in low-wage jobs followed a series of long conversations with women and men employed in the building industry, domestic services, and catering in different areas of London. What was striking in these narratives was the discrepancy between their accounts and a wider assumption that migrants coming to carry out elementary occupations in the secondary and tertiary (service) sectors<sup>1</sup> are poor, marginal, and uneducated people, who are pushed towards western European countries by pure economic intentions. Such images, boosted by frequent articles in the print media, have become part and parcel of British perceptions of migrants arriving from Eastern Europe since the 2004 EU enlargement. Initially, the tabloids' favoured targets were Polish migrants depicted as *hordes* ready to *invade* Britain. However, since mid 2006, Romanians - and to some extent Bulgarians - have taken their place on the tabloid front pages. In many ways, these groups are even less favourably perceived due to the "publicly held beliefs about Bulgaria and Romania's inclinations toward organized crime and corruption."<sup>2</sup>

Parts of the British media, along with certain segments of the political landscape, have contributed to an image of Eastern European migrants as poor, uneducated, inclined to crime and difficult to integrate. These apprehensions revolve around the potential of being overwhelmed by workers moving from the poorer countries of Eastern Europe stealing local jobs, contributing to undercutting local wages, taking advantage of social benefits, and threatening security and social cohesion. In other words, they represent a serious 'threat' to British society and to the integrity of the nation.

Contrary to the thrust of these accounts, a considerable part of migrant workers from Eastern Europe working in the building, catering, cleaning or domestic industries, not only are not criminals but often have medium to high levels of education and professional expertise. This

paradox reflects an established dichotomy, one which currently informs much of the immigration policy agenda: that of skilled vs. unskilled and wanted vs. un-wanted migrants. The experience of a growing population of Romanian migrants living and working in the 'super-diverse'<sup>3</sup> city of London illustrate this well.

This report draws on data and interviews collected for a larger ethnographic comparative research project which focuses on lives of Romanian families in London and Rome. Romanian migrants interviewed for this research have been chosen from the so-called 'new migrants,' people who arrived in London in the last 10 to 15 years. Although the decision to exclude long-term Romanian residents means that the study is not representative of the Romanian community as a whole, there are three main factors which may make this choice relevant: firstly, new migrants represent the majority of Romanians living and working in the Greater London; secondly, they were at the centre of the public concern with the imminent 'invasion' from Eastern Europe; and thirdly, the arrival of new migrants, Romanians among them, have in recent years significantly added to and thus transformed the social landscape of London.<sup>4</sup>

The first section of this report outlines the methods used for this investigation and an explanation of the reasons why such methods were chosen. A short review of previous research on Romanian migration, and of available information and statistics - such as those provided by Eurostat, Office of National Statistics, Border and Immigration Agency, and the IPPR - is presented in the following section. Exploring this secondary data sheds light on the main characteristics of these migrants in terms of age, gender, area of origin, settlement and employment. It also provides a broad picture of the perception of Eastern-European low-wage migrants, Romanians in particular, in policy makers' discourses and how these issues are connected to the wider debate on international migration. The analysis of these documents also serve to contextualise the individual circumstances within which migrants find themselves at the moment of arrival, as well as the ways in which their settlement is influenced by the conditions of the host country.

<sup>1</sup> The 'secondary' sector refers to the sector of industry which processes raw materials into a finished product, such as food processing and construction. The 'third' sector refers to the service industry.

<sup>2</sup> Drew and Sriskandarajah (2007)

<sup>3</sup> Vertovec (2006)

<sup>4</sup> Vertovec (2006); King (2002)

Following a brief outline of figures and immigration policies of concern to Romanian migrants in Britain, the following sections engage with issues central to Romanian migration, settlement, and work experience in London. These include motivations, time of migration, border-crossing networks and transnational daily practices, as well as the relevance of the more established Romanian community organisations and the ways in which changes in British immigration policy impact on the lives of Romanian migrants and their families living and working in London. The purpose of this approach is to demonstrate that migration in general, and migration of Romanians in particular, is not an individualistic one-way movement from one place to another motivated only by economic factors. A number of reasons interrelate and inform the decision to migrate, even if economic motivations may seem the most relevant at first sight.

The following analysis of migratory experiences and community formations is inclusive and holistic in its approach, considering the impact of macro-structures as well as motivations and actions of individuals and groups involved. Furthermore, the time-period of migration has been carefully considered. People may set out for a particular destination, but then spend time - often prolonged periods - in other countries *en route*. The process of staying or leaving, for instance, cannot be considered as a 'once and for all' decision.

The transnational nature of Romanian migration, and of the networks involved in this process, is the central theme of this study. This aspect comes to the fore in each section of the report, which reflects the fundamental role played by both receiving and departure countries and communities in the process of migration and settlement of Romanians in London.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Sigona and Torre (2006)

## Methodology

This study looks at Romanians' experience of migration and settlement in London primarily through in-depth narrative interviews with ten families living in London and Romania. The use of qualitative methods is particularly appropriate for this research. In contrast to instrumentalist views which consider migration as an event occurring at a given moment in time, the qualitative approach brings to the fore the situatedness and rootedness of migration in the flow of the everyday life. Furthermore, it allows for the possibility to examine individual aspects of migration histories embedded in the wider structural and social environment.

Interviews were conducted with recent Romanian migrants (men and women) living in London and working in low-wage jobs, as well as their relatives living in Romania.<sup>6</sup> Men were mainly employed in the building industry and catering, while women were working in the domestic, cleaning, and catering sectors. Although the sample is not representative of the wider population of Romanian migrants in London, the findings of the research give valuable insight into patterns and dynamics of the community. For this reason, most of the people interviewed were purposely, rather than randomly, selected. Interviews, which were conducted in Romanian, investigated topics related to different forms and dynamics of the migratory experience, such as the role of the family, networks, interaction and contact within the community and outside social environment, access to work and services, future plans, etc.

Ten semi-structured interviews with key informants - from community and cultural centres, churches, the Romanian embassy, NGOs and immigration offices - were also conducted. These interviews provided more grounded information on the history and patterns of Romanian migration to London, as well as background information on numbers, city location and housing issues, employment and legal status. Furthermore, as the fieldwork coincided with a crucial time for Romanian migration, interviews were conducted before and after the date (January 2007) of Romania's EU accession. This event was an opportunity to explore migrants' expectations, effective changes or disillusionments deriving from the EU enlargement.

<sup>6</sup> The names of interviewees used throughout this study have been changed in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

## Setting the Background for Romanian Migration

The process of migration of Romanian nationals towards other European Union countries needs to be framed within the larger mobility models which characterised Romania before and after 1989. Three migratory factors are of particular importance:

- 1) Internal migration: Before 1989, due to the forced and intensive programme of industrialisation and radical transformation of the rural economy, migration in Romania was primarily internal, characterised by movements from village to city. Following the collapse of the communist regime, an increase in urban unemployment and general poverty levels prompted the development of new adaptive strategies for many Romanians. Lower costs in the rural areas, where families could have small plots of land and where taxes were lower, reversed the pre-1989 trend: people returned from the cities to the villages.<sup>7</sup>
- 2) Trans-border migration: People living in communities close to the borders were allowed to take limited numbers of short trips every year to bordering countries. In reality, those trips were an occasion for buying and selling consumer goods. This type of migration continued also in the wake of 1989, when people were practising occasional or frequent trade with nearby or far off countries, or trans-border commuting for work.
- 3) International migration: Within the international migration category, a dynamic web of different but interrelated types of spatial mobility<sup>8</sup> should be considered: a) forced migration;<sup>9</sup> b) temporary long-term migration (non-seasonal); c) circular, seasonal migration; d) permanent migration.

In practice, the boundary between these different types of migration is not clear cut. External or

unexpected factors can intercede and modify initial plans, where commuting or short term mobility may develop into longer term migration, and vice versa. In the immediate aftermath of the 1989 revolution, an important emigration flow started, blurring the boundaries between permanent and temporary, as well as internal and international, migration. In terms of international migration, motivations for emigrating were centred on the criterion of family reunification, or that of belonging to a certain ethnicity. Therefore, two main groups migrated: members of ethnic minorities (mainly Germans, Hungarians and Roma) and people who participated in the revolution, fearing the return to power of the Communist regime. These flows, which were largely confined to 1990-1993, were mainly characterised by permanent settlement in the countries of arrival. During these years people headed mainly for Germany, Hungary, Austria and Israel.

The years following 1996/97<sup>10</sup> marked a second turning point in the dynamics of the Romanian migration system. The nature of Romanian migration changed substantially, and back-and-forth movements and informality became more consistent. Temporary migration abroad was fuelled by the increase of domestic poverty, the rise in return migration from cities to villages, the decline of permanent international migration, and the return of migrants from abroad.<sup>11</sup>

The year 2002, a third turning point, introduced free circulation of Romanians into the Schengen area. As the importance of the ethnicity criteria - which linked emigration to specific regions of Romania - declined, areas of departure diversified throughout the country. Migration streams also started to be directed towards new destinations in Europe. From this year onwards, Romanian citizens had the possibility to enter Schengen countries with a tourist visa lasting three months. New migratory strategies were established with people moving back and forth every three months. Circularity and *l'installation dans la mobilité*<sup>12</sup> have become almost regular organisational strategies.

In the first stage of Romanian emigration, it was mainly men (88 per cent) leaving the country. Subsequently, the number of migrant women rose so that from 2002 onwards male and female outflows started to balance each other out: men representing about 55 per cent

7 Sandu et al. (2004)

8 Sandu (2002)

9 During the 1970s and 80s, despite interdictions, Romanians fled their country of origin mainly for political reasons, escaping an oppressive dictatorial regime. In their countries of asylum, they were recognised as refugees. Ethnic Roma were recognised as refugees in the period following the 1989 revolution as well.

10 During this period, the country experienced increasing domestic poverty, prompting a return migration from cities to villages as well as the decline of permanent migration.

11 Sandu et al. (2004)

12 Diminescu (2001)

and women around 45 per cent of the total of Romanian emigrants. In specific destination countries, such as Italy, there is a particularly high share of women (50 per cent). This phenomenon is related to two important factors: one is family reunification while the other, which can be found in other European countries as well, is the large demand for domestic and care work.<sup>13</sup> As far as labour market incorporation in the EU countries is concerned, men and women are employed in different economic sectors: the male labour force is clearly predominant in sectors such as the building industry (98 per cent male) and agriculture (72 per cent male), while in the domestic and care sectors 88 per cent of Romanian migrants are women working (often irregularly before EU accession) as cleaners, care workers, or babysitters. The most popular age category is 18-35 years old with a secondary level of education.<sup>14</sup>

According to a survey investigating Romanians' intentions to migrate conducted in Romania this year (2007), the intention to migrate after EU accession is not high. Also, the majority of those who would like to work in a foreign country intended to migrate for a period of one to two years.<sup>15</sup> Intentions of permanent migration are very low, meaning that in many cases, Romanian migrants do not intend to permanently remain in the destination countries but aim at making some economic gains in order to return home to a better life-style.

## Facts and Figures

According to the 2001 Census, there were just over 7,500 Romanian nationals in the UK while the most recent estimates of the Labour Force Survey (April - June 2007) recorded 19,096 Romanian citizens residing in the UK. Although

this figure is not as high as for Italy or Spain, the two main destination countries for the current outflows from Romania, there is evidence that Britain, which was not among the first preference destinations for Romanians in the 1990s, is now growing in popularity. Indeed, a recent poll has revealed that Britain is now the third most desired migration destination after Italy and Spain.<sup>16</sup>

In 2001, Romanian nationals were fairly evenly distributed around the country with a significant presence in the south-east, Yorkshire, and the north-east, and in cities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Nottingham, Birmingham, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Cardiff.<sup>17</sup> However, London - especially its northern boroughs - is by far the most popular destination. 3,000 Romanians were living there in 2001, accounting for 40 per cent of the total Romanian population of the country. At the beginning of 2006, the Labour Force Survey estimated that this number had risen to 4,300; between April and June 2007 the estimate was 11,411.<sup>18</sup>

However, these figures overlook certain types of migration which escape official statistics, such as recent arrivals, some forms of temporary stay, seasonal migration and other forms of work permits, and irregular migration.<sup>19</sup> Considering that this was - and to a large degree still is - the way in which many Romanian and Bulgarian nationals enter Britain, it is reasonable to think that these numbers will be severely underestimated.

Using 2006 data from Eurostat,<sup>20</sup> Blanchflower et al.<sup>21</sup> were able to estimate a figure of 21,659 Romanian migrants living and working in the UK. In June 2007, the Home Office<sup>22</sup> published figures regarding the number of Romanian nationals who had registered with the Workers Authorisation Scheme since January 2007 in order to commence employment in the UK. Surprisingly, numbers were low, in contrast to the tabloids' and public opinion's predictions of a massive invasion of hundreds of thousands of Romanians from the start of 2007.<sup>23</sup> Figures on workers' registration for accession worker cards and registration certificates from January to March 2007, provided by the Home Office's Border and Immigration Agency, show that Romanian nationals numbered less than 7,000. According to these figures, almost half of applicants were women, indicating that the current Romanian migration to the UK is

13 Constantin et al. (2004)

14 Open Society Institute (2006)

15 Nitulescu and Oancea (2007)

16 Ibid.

17 Kyambi (2005)

18 LFS April-June 2007 (data from the LFS were elaborated by Dr Alessio Cangiano, COMPAS, University of Oxford)

19 Indeed, the LFS data does not include people who have been resident in their household for less than 6 months, and the population totals to which the results are weighted exclude those staying in the UK for less than a year.

20 Eurostat (2006)

21 Blanchflower et al. (2007)

22 Border & Immigration Agency (2007)

23 See, for example, Doughty (2006)

balanced in terms of gender.<sup>24</sup>

Previous research has shown that Britain is a popular destination for people with secondary and tertiary education.<sup>25</sup> However, despite the presence of highly educated Romanian workers in London, deskilling is common. In many cases, secondary or university educated Romanians are working as builders or in the domestic services and cleaning industry. Many Romanian-born migrants are likely to enter the UK in the higher skilled routes of work permits, but also on au pair and student visas.<sup>26</sup>

## Living and Working in a Global City

### Should I Stay or Should I Go?

#### Motivations and Time of Migration

Research on Romanians' aspirations to migrate identifies temporary migration as the most common pattern of current Romanian migration. The last Romanian Census from March 2002 indicates around 360,000 temporary emigrants from Romania. This type of migration allows migrants to save money to buy a house, open a business, or achieve other goals in their home country.<sup>27</sup>

Sofica (34) and George (38) came to London in 2004 from Romania, where Sofica was a school teacher and George worked as an electrician. When they were asked why they moved to London, their initial answer was the money; what they earned in Romania was not enough to guarantee a decent life for them and their two sons. However, a more informal conversation with Sofica revealed other reasons behind their decision:

You see, how shall I explain this to you ... It is not that in Romania our life was bad ... we both worked there. There are families where only the man works, or where both of them are without a job. We both had a job, and also quite good jobs. But ... you see, we wanted something more, something more not for

us, something more for our two kids. I want them to be able to go to very good schools, to have the opportunity to become somebody. And I think you need money for this. Now they are going to better schools because we send them money from here and then, who knows, if they want, if God wants maybe ... maybe we will be able to bring them here ... well we thought about this as well.

Cornel (25) comes from a small town in the north-east of Romania where he finished high school. He used to work for a local NGO as a computer programmer. In London, he works as a builder for an Italian company, but his dream is to improve his career opportunities once back in Romania:

I came here because I want to start up a business. I want to start up my own business ... with computers I mean. I know how to fix computers, I know a lot about computers and I like this job. Plus next year I plan to get married ... we decided to get married and I think we need something better than what I was doing before. So I need to work for a while here, to save money you see ... and maybe she will also come to work for a while. We don't know yet but we are thinking about this as well ... as an option you see.

Cornel's words demonstrate how a number of reasons interrelate and influence the decision to migrate, even if the economic one can appear the most relevant. In his case, the wish to build a family together with his future wife is pushing him to improve his career as well as his economic position. Cornel feels that the opportunities he has in London will allow him to achieve this dream in Romania in the future.

Although it is true that Romanians are often seeking an *interim* solution, especially when moving to other European countries, these migratory movements cannot be simply defined as "short-term migration."<sup>28</sup> Defining their movement in this way would be misleading in the case of Eastern European migration in general, and Romanian migrants in particular. Such a definition misses the complexity and

<sup>24</sup> Border & Immigration Agency (2007)

<sup>25</sup> Radu (2003); Csed\_ (2005)

<sup>26</sup> Ippr (2006)

<sup>27</sup> World Bank (2007: chapter 8, figure 8.5)

<sup>28</sup> Constantin (2004)

often long-term and transnational nature of the phenomenon, as well as ignoring cases of informality and secondary migration which are also involved in the process.

When analysing migratory experiences, it is important not to adopt an exclusive focus on the impact of the macro-structures, such as the state and its policies or other large scale institutional factors, but to consider these carefully in relation to the motivations and actions of individuals and groups involved. Motivations, as well as individual or collective decisions, are not predetermined or permanent, and may change over time. In his discussion about the use of the expression ‘migratory process,’ Castles<sup>29</sup> points out that migration is not a single event or a one-off act, but a process which is affected by and affects all aspects of the lived reality of migrants. Staying or leaving, for instance, “is not a once and for all decision but simply one step in an ongoing pattern of migration.”<sup>30</sup> Decisions regarding the time-period of migration, therefore, can not be easily delimited. People may set out for a particular destination, but then spend time - often prolonged periods - in other countries en route.<sup>31</sup>

Maria arrived in London five years ago with her husband. Back in Romania she was a midwife and he had just finished a veterinary degree. Their jobs did not allow them to save money for a house, or to travel during their holidays. They were planning to stay in the UK for a few years to allow them to save up money. Last year they had a baby, which has now become their primary reason to stay in London until her daughter finishes school. Despite their decision, Maria and her husband repeatedly spoke nostalgically about their town and its beauty, the beauty of the mountains close to their house, about their old friends and family still in Romania. Their words were the manifestation of a long-term intention (or maybe just a wish) to go back at some point, although they acknowledged themselves that going back would not be simple. Living abroad for many years changes your way of thinking, of seeing things, of doing things:

That is our place, and at some point we will definitely go back there...you should

<sup>29</sup> Castles (2000)

<sup>30</sup> Spencer et al. (2007: 86)

<sup>31</sup> This is often the case of Italy which can be a transit place, or a starting place, for a so called ‘secondary migration’ which is testimony of an ongoing ‘geographical mobility.’

see the grass, the stream ... we would stay there all summer. It wasn’t anything rich or extraordinary. It’s a very simple landscape, but ... I know that it will be difficult because we’ve got used to the way people live here. There are things which here are done better than in Romania ... but there are also things ... in a way I’m sad that I’ll not be able to bring up my daughter in our town ... well, but now we are here, now we have to stay here and then, who knows.

Children often influence the decision to continue to stay in a foreign land. Coming to study for a year long master’s degree programme, Silvia arrived in the UK four years ago with her daughter, who was three years old at the time. Even though she experienced difficulties finding a job, she is now on a self-employed visa and runs a cleaning company. Silva explained the difficulty in returning to Romania now that her daughter has ‘become English’:

My daughter never asks me about our country because she was very young when we left. Last year I took her back during vacation time. We stayed with my parents but when we left she was happy. There she finds it difficult to interact with other kids because of the language. Even if I always talk to her in Romanian in the house, she finds it difficult to speak. She was not as enthusiastic about being there as I was. And I think this is normal. She speaks English as her first language, all her friends are English, or other nationalities, kids, she is English, you see. I’m afraid that it will be very difficult to go back ... I didn’t think about all this when I left Romania. At the time I thought I would leave for a year ... what’s the problem, the kid is young ... she’s not going to be affected by this ... but then ... well now, things are quite different.

These parents both expressed the desire to bring up their children with Romanian culture and language and admitted how migration complicated this desire. They were torn between offering their children more opportunities afforded by living in Britain, and their own

aspiration to return home some day.

Another factor impacting the decisions and plans migrants may make is the way they are treated in the host society. Migrants may be influenced by public attitudes towards immigration, and if this climate, often depicted through media accounts, is hostile - as has been the case for Romanians in the UK - they may choose to leave. One interviewee pointed out, however, that sometimes the treatment in the workplace is of greater importance.<sup>32</sup> After leaving Romania in 2002, Bogdan arrived in London after staying a few months in France. Upon arrival, a cousin who was already living in London for two years found him work on a construction site, where he has been working since. Bogdan felt that the work environment was more revealing of the attitudes towards immigrants than the press:

I know British people are not very happy about us being here, they think we are here to steal and to do God knows what other sorts of crimes, or they say we steal their jobs. I don't watch British television but in the morning, when I go to work I usually take one of those free newspapers ... you know, just to read a bit of English, to practice a bit. And there I can see there are many articles, and more than once I could read what they think about migrants in this country. But, you see, you can deal with this, you feel sad about it, but you can deal with this. What is worse is how you are treated when you go to work. I think that is important. If you are treated well, if you see that people need your work and they appreciate your work, then it's fine. You find the strength to keep going, this is very important, I think, because these are the people you have to see and deal with day by day. This is important, if they treat you bad, well in that case ... I don't know, in that case it's very difficult.

<sup>32</sup> The implications of working environment and of the way migrants are treated by their employer for the weighing up of the pros and cons of staying or returning to their home country, is a finding supported also by Spencer and her colleagues in their research on Eastern Europeans' lives in the workplace and beyond. One of the primary purposes of the analysis of their large survey data was to point out exactly this discrepancy between the time migrants think they will spend in the UK when they arrive and the time they actually spend working and living in the UK in practice, and the factors that may impact on this decision (see Spencer et al., 2007)

<sup>33</sup> Vertovec (2004); Horst (2006)

The experiences migrants have of their new environment can alter their future plans of settlement. Even though many of these migrants had only planned for short-term migration, they decided to stay longer. Some of the interviewees expressed their desire to return to Romania, but for some, such as Silvia, Maria, Cornel, Sofica and George, this desire was complicated by what they felt was best for their families. Besides family, legal status, transnational connections and economic situations influence migrants' reasons to stay, return or to move on. For the interviewees in this sample, along with the drive to provide more opportunities for themselves and their families, they had to work within the context of a popular feeling of anti-immigration, as conveyed through the media. However as Bogdan pointed out, sometimes the realities of every day interactions are more influential towards decisions to stay than media reports.

### **Here and There (and There): Living Your Life Transnationally**

Though existing literature concerning Romanian migration in Europe is sparse, the few studies conducted to date have revealed that Romanian migrants are involved in several types of transnational activities. Activities range from community wide organised projects to contact with the homeland such as remittance sending, regular and temporary returns, regular phone calls, or watching satellite television. While many of these contacts are on a small scale, they nonetheless represent a significant way of maintaining a continuous engagement with the homeland.

These kinds of connections have scarcely been of focus in transnationalism debates, although they often represent everyday routines through which migrants simultaneously engage with both origin and destination countries. Recently, however, studies have begun to explore the importance of regular activities such as telephone exchanges, internet use, community newspapers and satellite television programmes. While these activities may appear trivial, they powerfully promote intimate homeland engagement, as well as stronger participation in, and understanding of, the migration process by those staying behind.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Romanian migrants in London keep family links very much alive in spite of the distance. The use of new media to keep family links strong means that

family back in Romania are able to actively participate in emigrants economic and social life despite geographical distance; families are able to feel close which has an important role to play in the everyday life of Romanians abroad.

Iolanda arrived in London in 2002, leaving her life as geometriician in Romania, and now works in an Italian restaurant. Working around the distance between herself and her family, Iolanda maintains family links through a variety of ways, such as frequently speaking to her elderly mother on the phone and using Skype<sup>34</sup> to speak to her brother in Romania. She regularly sends them presents or money which, in her case, are not meant to symbolise her economic success in the UK, but rather her commitment to her family:

Every month, on Tuesday, there is a bus leaving from here, from London, and going to Romania. I usually prepare a parcel, or in case I don't have enough time that month, I will just have an envelope ready with some money. They are organised for this, and they take your stuff to Romania ... For me this is a way of showing them that I'm not forgetting my family, that family for me is important even if I'm far away, it is a way to make them feel part of my life here and to make them understand that they can count on me.

For another young Romanian couple working in London, Andreea and Marin, the internet and the use of Skype technology have become vital in cultivating and maintaining their relationship with family and friends in Romania. They married in January this year, and their wedding aptly illustrates the social significance of communication technology. It was a small but carefully prepared party in their new house in a borough of north east London. Amongst the guests were Romanian friends from London, as well as the bride's mother and the groom's brother who were the only people able to come from Romania. However, as the guests gathered in the living room, the bride gave a glass to everyone and asked, "Is everybody ready for a toast with my family?" At that point, guests could see a computer with an attached camera

overlooking the room. The screen displayed a group of people, all close to each other, smiling to the guests in London and raising their glasses. As the London party moved closer to the camera, with the bride and the groom at the front, family in Romania and family in London toasted to the bride and groom, together as if in the same room.

Migrants may adopt different strategies to facilitate interactions of families which are split between two countries. The telephone, for instance, becomes an instrument not only for nurturing familial closeness, but also for regulating dynamics of decision-making in the transnational family. Petra's words show how family relations are not necessarily weakened by the distance:

My father-in-law always calls us when a decision has to be taken for the apartment. He is supervising the construction for us even if we don't really know if we will ever live in that house. Well, who knows. We also call them when an important investment for instance has to be made. I also call my brother for this. Just to tell you...last year we had to buy a car. Well, my brother back in Romania was of great help for us. He told us what sort of car to buy, how much we should pay for it, what to watch out for when buying it and so on.

The telephone enables migrants to continue to have support from their families. Maria's family has been actively involved in her daily life with the aid of new and inexpensive communication technology:

Since I've had the baby, my mum calls me even twice a day. She wants to be part of the life of her granddaughter. Next year, she has decided to come to London to help me with her, but until then ...you know, for me this is the first baby, I need to have my mum close even if she is in Romania. She can help me, she can give me advice.

Families physically separated by international borders may appear emotionally divided as well. Certainly, in some cases distance may undermine parental authority when one or both parents are away and children are left behind with grandparents or other relatives, or when a child

<sup>34</sup> Skype is a software programme which allows users to communicate over the internet with other Skype users free of charge.

migrates with only one of its parents. Yet, at the same time, many of these families manage to hold together despite geographical distance through dedication and the development of mass communication. Having frequent communication with family can help lessen feelings of loneliness through continued advice and support. Similar to Maria, Sonia has used communication technology with family in Romania to raise her daughter. Even though Sonia lives in London and her husband is still in Romania, she insisted that they are a very united family:

Both me and my husband are always present. We both take care of our daughter; we both help her with homework. When she does something we consider wrong, we both explain to her why, and how we think things should be done. Even if my husband is far away, our daughter feels he is close to us and part of our every day life. Every day, when he comes from work, Skype is on in both houses, here, and in my in-laws house where my husband is staying. Our daughter sees her father every day and when she needs to ask him something she knows that he will be there .... I know, this is not perfectly the same as having your father in the same house with you, but still ... for now we have to live separated so I think this is a good way of keeping the family together.

Again, the use of modern communication technologies can help to sustain and reinforce transnational linkages among Romanians, providing a source of support and identity. Along with sustaining communication with friends and family, technology such as television can aid in creating greater ties to popular culture. For example, all the interviewees had a television set, and in most cases it was located in the living room or in the kitchen where most spent their time when at home. The television would always be turned on, and strikingly, all of the television channels and programmes were Romanian:

We never watch British television. We always watch a Romanian channel. We want to know what happens at home.

We watch the news, the weather forecast; we also watch films or shows. You see, when I talk to my friends in Romania we have things in common to talk about, plus they don't need to explain to me everything happening there, I know it, I know it from the television. It is ... how shall I say ... it is as if I am a little bit there as well. Plus it's good for the kids. They watch cartoons and they listen to Romanian, I think it's good for them not to forget the language. And they can also see their country.

Romanian diaspora newspapers which are sold in London advertise satellite television. For a reasonable amount of money, people can have a satellite receiver box imported to London from Romania and installed in their homes. This is one of the services provided by and for the wider Romanian community in London, and has become a common feature in many Romanian households. Additionally, many also make use of other services aimed towards the Romanian community such as the transport of people, goods, or money. The increasing number of Romanian shops, groceries and restaurants have also signalled the emergence of a growing London-based community. Together with advancing communication technology, these ethnically marketed goods and services support Romanian identities abroad.

### **The Relevance of 'Community' and Informal Transnational Networks**

Migration is not the mere concern of the single individual who is moving from one country to another. It is a process that is rarely undertaken in isolation but rather it includes the involvement of families, friends, or acquaintances at different stages of the journey. The decisions made by migrants are inextricably linked to their own networks, and the lives of non-migrants and communities in both sending and receiving countries are also affected. Migrants' families and social networks are thus at the centre of this process. As a number of studies have demonstrated, these networks can vary in intensity. Some academics have argued that 'weak' ties with acquaintances and the wider community are no less important to the process of migration than 'strong' kinship relationships.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Gurak and Caces (1992); Granovetter (1982)

Networks can take many forms; they overlap and change over time, but the importance of all networks - regardless of whether they are informal and family oriented, based on relations with co-villagers or co-nationals, friendship and acquaintance connections, or institutionalised through government policies - lies in their ability to facilitate communication of information and risk reduction strategies essential to migratory flows.

The first cohort of Romanian emigrants following the 1989 revolution could in many ways be described as pioneers, leaving without much information or previous contacts in the country of destination. From 1995 onwards, as recent research on Romanian migration has indicated, emigration increasingly built on family relations, distant relatives or close friendships. According to a study conducted in different areas of Romania among people who migrated for work between 2002 and 2006, relatives comprised the most significant source for help in the process of migration (23 per cent received help from relatives), followed by close friends (16 per cent) and acquaintances (5 per cent). In most cases relatives are already in the country of destination and their crucial help involves providing accommodation and finding employment.<sup>36</sup> This indicates that the main reason for Romanians choosing a specific EU country as a destination is the presence of relatives or friends in that country.

Strong ties became even more central to Romanian migration after the turning point of 2002; research investigating the impact of social networks on migration of Romanian nationals differentiates between the features of networks before and after the 2002 turning point.<sup>37</sup> After that year, the emergence of new forms of temporary migration paved the way for change in the networks' characteristics. Networks became more selective and kin oriented - particularly in relation to low-wage labour - in response to the needs of new short-term migration strategies. The short time frame of the migration cycle and the rapid turnover of people increased the need for strong and reliable connections (i.e. close relative or friend) to act as guarantors with employers, allow for a job exchange, and so on.

The few existing studies on Romanian and Eastern European migration to London describe this process as based on individual strategies and 'weak' ties, rather than 'strong' family or social networks.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, the interviewees of this study described family ties - close family, extended family, or very close friends perceived as family relations - as essential. Many migrated to join siblings or other members of the extended family already living in London, often with their spouse and children. Tonia and her husband's story typify such social networks. In 2007 Tonia arrived to London from Rome with her ten year old son in order to be with her husband who was already settled and working with his brother:

Interviewer: Did you know anybody in London before coming here?

Tonia: My husband came here from Italy before me. He decided to come because his brother is here. He's been living in London with his family for four years ... His brother called him, saying that there was work for him and that it was better paid than in Italy. So he came and after few months, when the kid finished school, we came too. [...] They would help us with the house, we all live together now and our two kids go together to school. We are going to stay here for a while. I'll look for a job. But who knows. For the moment, we are keeping the house we were renting in Rome.

Transnational family networks used to facilitate employment are not uncommon to other migrant groups in London, particularly within the domestic sector. As Anderson observes, of 2,800 migrant domestic workers registered with Kalayaan, an advocacy group for migrant domestic workers, only 2 per cent used an agency to find a job. Informal recommendations through friends or relatives to employers or to friends of employers were more common than the use of agencies.<sup>39</sup> In the sphere of domestic work in private households, trust and the importance of a personal relationship with the employer often entails that the employer has a particular type of person in mind. Special personal recommendations respond to a need that a formalised placement agency might not meet. Such requirements would instead be met

<sup>36</sup> Open Society Institute (2006)

<sup>37</sup> Bleahu (2004)

<sup>38</sup> Ciobanu (2005)

<sup>39</sup> Anderson (2001)

through accessing the worker's social and family network, which becomes simultaneously an essential tool for hiring and being hired.

Also exemplifying the use of networks during the migration process, Ecaterina and her husband decided to move to London where her sister was already living. Both trained as mechanical engineers, their initial plan was to come for six months and explore employment possibilities. At the time of interview, Ecaterina was working as a cleaner in a private house where her sister helped her to get a job, while her husband was working from time to time as a plasterer with his brother-in-law:

I work as a cleaner in a lawyer's house. She has two kids and a big house ... yes, a big house with eight rooms, can you imagine? My husband also works for her, he is driving kids to school, drives her around when she needs, he also does some repairing in the house when something goes wrong. We both got this job through my sister, she's been working for this woman for four years but seven months ago she got pregnant. She couldn't go anymore. The woman then asked her if she knew someone who could come to work for her. It was then that me and my husband came from Romania.

Transnational linkages are not limited to the connections between country of origin and country of destination. As the cases of Tonia and Ecaterina demonstrate, transnational linkages also include relations between migrants in different countries. Romanian migrants in the UK are often 'secondary migrants',<sup>40</sup> arriving in London via other European countries, such as Italy and Spain. Being part of a group of people in more than two countries allows for the creation of a transnational network that transcends the boundaries of different nation-states. Transnational networks thus facilitate the movement and settlement of migrants, acting almost as informal reception programmes for the newly arrived. Because of this dynamic, it is understandable how Romanian migrants come from 'multi-destination origin communities', or in other words, people from the same family often

concomitantly migrate to several different countries of destination.<sup>41</sup>

Geta, along with Tonia and her family, represents an example of a secondary migration strategy. Before coming to London, Geta went to Italy where her mother was working in the care sector. Initially, she was planning to stay there for at least a few years, but quickly her plans changed:

I met my husband, you see ... [smiles happily] He was living in London ... we fell in love and what I could do? I decided to come to the UK. I think it was a good idea, now we are married, we both work and we are buying this house. It was difficult in the beginning, I didn't have documents and you know how difficult it is to enter the UK. But still, we thought that this was the best thing to do. Of course he could come to Italy instead ... but we thought that London was better. It looks better for us.

While migrants' connections to their homeland is important, links with people from the same country (often family), who are dispersed in other countries, is of equal significance. Thus, studies of contemporary migration in Europe which seek to explore the motivations and decision-making processes of migrants should consider the direct and indirect cross-border ties and interconnecting social networks. As can be seen from Tonia's case, the plans of migrants can change direction as opportunities present themselves. Transnational networks are used to understand where better chances and opportunities are located.

In terms of contacts within the local Romanian community, an interesting issue surfaced during interviews. Namely, no one mentioned the Romanian NGOs or cultural centres. The only services mentioned in interviews were the ones already outlined above - i.e. Romanian satellite television, newspapers, restaurants, groceries - as well as the Romanian church in some cases. Interviewees had not taken advantage of services offered by NGOs, and no one had participated in gatherings or activities organised by them. Long working hours and limited leisure time were some of the primary reasons given, but also irregular immigration status of many before January 2007, and mistrust towards the notion of

40 Bhachu (1985) calls them 'twice migrants.'

41 Constantinescu (2006)

a Romanian 'community' as defined by outsiders. Geta observed that time and lack of interest were her reasons for not attending:

We never go to these gatherings, I work from 8 to 7 every day except Sunday and the same goes for my husband. So when do you want me to go? I only go to mass from time to time. But even in that case, I started to prefer staying home on Sunday. When you go there you only see other Romanians very well dressed who come there just because they want to show off. Yes, this is the Romanian community if it is this that you are asking about!

Another interviewee also emphasised the distrust and suspiciousness existing among Romanians living in London, that it was safer to trust friends and family than acquaintances who also happen to be Romanian:

Interviewer: It is easy to find people who would help in the Romanian community?

Interviewee: It was normal for them to help us, they are part of the family, they trust each of us. But otherwise ... you see, we heard about people helping with jobs, for instance, but then what happened ... you tell them that there is such and such job, they would say they come and then ... when the time comes they disappear! Maybe because they find something better, or because they just changed their mind. So who is the one who has to pay for this? It is you, you because you've talked with the employer, you vouched for that person's honesty and so on ... so, no, I think now people have learned. If you have to help somebody you would help your kin or one of your old friends, people who you know very well I mean".

Viorel, a Romanian migrant with an engineering degree who has been working in London as a builder for four years, expressed a strong feeling of anger towards the Romanian community in London. In his opinion, there is no communication at all between long-term Romanian residents and recent arrivals, who

often work in low paid jobs in the secondary and tertiary sectors:

Romanian community ... well do you mean the cultural centre? Yes, but that is for the old migrants, those Romanians who arrived here when there was still communism in Romania. Well, they are different; they don't want to mix with us. When you meet one of them, they look at you as you are ... well they look down on you. You see, I have a university degree as well, but I was not lucky enough to find a job in my field. This doesn't mean I'm ashamed of the work I do. No! It is an honest job, it is a good job ... but you see, for them, for those [settled] Romanians, if your hands look like this (shows hands) ... well, you are a builder, you are just one of those illegal migrants who is spoiling the image Romanians have in London! This is how it is, this is the Romanian community!

Similar thoughts were expressed by other interviewees. Their words suggested that there is no sense of community among Romanians in London:

Look at the streets of London. If you move around you can see the Chinese area, the Indian area, the Turkish area, even the Polish area, but can you see any Romanian area? No, there is no such place! We are spread around the city; it looks like we don't want to stay close to each other, like we want to hide from each other. I don't blame anybody for this, I do the same myself. The only people I go with are family, or two very close friends, who I know from Romania, and who I actually consider family. This is the Romanian community for me here in London.

This idea of family as 'community' came out in a number of interviews, where family and family ties were considered the only contacts in London. These limited contacts helped them to migrate and then settle, as well as contributing to their sense of 'home' in London. Some of the interviewees felt that because some people can be unpredictable, it was better to help and trust

those you already know well rather than take a chance on a stranger, even if they are also Romanian. Viorel's comments echoed these sentiments, however from a different angle. Perhaps, the disengagement that newer Romanian migrants experience from older migrants is similar to the feelings of mistrust others expressed, even between newer migrants.

## Getting to Grips with the UK Immigration Policy and the Labour Market

In January 2007, Romania and Bulgaria (A2 accession countries) became the two new states to join the European Union. Citizens of the two countries are now free to travel anywhere in the EU, but limitations in the form of access to the labour market, have been put in place by other EU member states with the exception of Finland and Sweden. This decision - perceived by the nationals and governments of the two countries as hostile and discriminatory- can be seen as contributing to the creation of a 'second level of EU citizenship'. Many Romanian newspapers, along with representatives of the Romanian communities throughout the EU countries, have denounced this treatment as creating 'second class Europeans'. The Accession treaty allows EU countries to maintain control of access to their labour market for up to seven years. The UK reviewed this policy in October 2007; the controls have been maintained.

Romanian nationals wanting to work in Britain still need to obtain a work authorisation document before starting employment. As stated by the Home Office: "Those qualifying for such a document will generally be those skilled workers who meet the criteria for the issue of a work permit under the existing work permit arrangements,"<sup>42</sup> and "lower skilled workers coming to undertake seasonal agricultural work and employment in the food processing sector."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Home Office (2006)

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> In most cases a Romanian citizen wanting an accession worker card needs a company for whom she/he would work to seek approval of the work arrangement under the work permit system. If the company receives a letter of approval, the migrant worker can apply for an accession worker card that will be issued for that specific job

<sup>45</sup> Slack (2006)

<sup>46</sup> Lea (2006)

This latter category is subject to a quota.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, under EU law, Romanian nationals have the right of establishment which allows them to be self-employed. They also have the right to migrate and reside in any Member State as full-time students, and therefore, as any other EEA (European Economic Area) national exercising a treaty right, Romanian students have the authorisation to work for up to 20 hours a week. In addition, Romanians who have worked on a continuous basis for twelve months have the right to reside as workers under EU law.

Although evidence illustrates that previous accession migration has been by and large positive for the country's economy, in 2007 the British government opted for restrictive measures. This reversal is said to be based on the alleged requirement to assess the needs of the market before making further decisions.

Furthermore, Romanians - and to some extent Bulgarian nationals - are less favourably perceived and represented by the media in the UK than A-8 nationals, as the following lines from an established British tabloid show:

45,000 criminals bound for Britain. [...] Unlike the eight countries which joined in 2004, Romania and Bulgaria have serious problems with organised crime.<sup>45</sup>

Publicly held beliefs about Romania's endemic problems of organised crime and corruption add to fears of having jobs stolen and local wages undercut by the new migrants. Sections of the British print media have contributed to the fomentation of these attitudes, as the above and the following extracts show:

Now up to 140,000 Romanians and Bulgarians are preparing to head here from January 1. They will be given the right to travel to, and work in, the other 25 EU countries - in the face of warnings that Brits are losing their jobs to cheaper foreigners driving down wages.<sup>46</sup>

Hundreds of Romanians are poised to jet into Britain for as little as £4 after their country joins the EU on January 1. Cheap airline Wizz Air is expected to bring thousands on one-way tickets on a new route launched specially to cash in on the end of border controls. The mass

influx into Luton Airport is fuelling fears that unregistered workers will simply vanish and that towns will be hit by crime waves.<sup>47</sup>

This policy reversal - liberal in 2004 to more restrictive in 2007 - can be considered to reflect the restrictive and ambiguous policy of managed migration adopted by the British government in the early 1990s.<sup>48</sup> This system aims at controlling and managing numbers and composition of the inflow of migrants, while at the same time catering to the needs of a competitive labour market which pushes for a smoother process of entry for migrant workers indispensable to both the private and public sectors.<sup>49</sup>

Informal migration and the development of an irregular labour market are two major implications of this policy. Blanchflower et al. suggest that “the favourable macroeconomic climate (low unemployment) and high standard of living in the UK (GDP per capita) are reasons why immigrants from the A8 countries may have been attracted to the UK, and why immigrants from Bulgaria and Romania may be attracted in the future.”<sup>50</sup> Within this context, the London economy - particularly the informal sector - has served as a very strong pull factor. Several typologies of informal work such as cash-in-hand jobs, tax free payments, or extra hours in addition to full time work, can be seen as an opportunity for earning.

### Accessing the Formal/ Informal Labour Market

A recent survey<sup>51</sup> conducted in Romania revealed that a significant proportion of people leaving the country to work in western Europe are prepared to accept employment below their qualifications, as well as a salary below the national average. As a consequence, many Romanians end up in the informal labour market, even following Romania’s accession to the EU. For example, Maria has not been able to find work in line with her training. She trained as a midwife in Romania and worked in a city

hospital for a number of years. In London, she found a job in the private domestic sector and for the past five years she has been working as a babysitter and housekeeper for an English couple:

It was a good job, I can not complain but of course this was not what I was trained for. The fact is that it is very difficult when you arrive here to do the job you were doing at home. And then, if you don’t have documents...well, as you can understand, it is even worse. I hope that next year things will change and maybe I could start working as a midwife again, but ... I know it is not going to be easy.

Maria was hoping that her status would change once Romania entered the EU, allowing her to finally work in her field. However, her fears turned out to be justified as EU enlargement did not lead to secure employment and legal status for many Romanian migrants. Many Romanians falling outside of the categories of highly-skilled, students, dependants of highly-skilled people, or UK residents, have continued to work irregularly. So despite engagement, Maria’s situation has not changed; she is still working in the same house and finds it difficult to have her qualifications recognised in the UK.

In some cases, a job may indeed depend on the irregular immigration status of the employee. Like Maria, Tudor’s job status in the catering sector did not change despite enlargement. Having worked in Spain and Italy for two years, Tudor now lives with his wife and their son in London. He works for a small family run business with three regular employees and two irregular, a Romanian and a Colombian:

When Romania entered in Europe ... well, what to say, nothing changed too much. Yes, now I can walk on the street, I’m not illegal now, but here, where I work I’m illegal in the same way I was before. The first day I came to work in January, my boss told me, in case you want to be employed regularly from now on - he knew I had that right since January (laughing) - in case you want to be employed regularly from now on, well I can’t do this for you, you know

47 O’Shea (2006)

48 Boswell (2003)

49 Floya et al. (2007)

50 Blanchflower et al. (2007: 6)

51 Daedalus Consultino - Marketing and Research Company (2006)

this, don't you? ... so, what could I do, I didn't want to lose my job.

This experience illustrates the continuous adjustment and renegotiation strategies which many Romanians in London must adopt in order to settle and gain access to the local labour market. This type of situation may have dramatic results - especially when the decision to migrate was infused with dreams, hopes and expectations - unless people manage to maintain a positive attitude towards navigating this new reality. In spite of deskilling, harsh working environments and often poor living conditions, many interviewees would refer to themselves not as victims, but- and primarily - as individuals who have responsibilities and who are ready to work hard in order to achieve what is needed for themselves or their families. Maria's acceptance of her work as a maid and babysitter despite her qualifications is precisely an example of the dedication many Romanians must show, and the sacrifices they must make, in order to support their families. She explained:

I have been working for this family almost since the beginning. They never cared about me being an irregular migrant at the time ... In that house I clean, I launder, I do the ironing, I prepare the kids to go to school, I stay with them when they come back from school ... I mean, I'm a cleaner, I'm a babysitter ... I'm a general maid plus a babysitter. This is not easy, especially when you think that all the studying you have done before coming here, your qualifications I mean, isn't of any use for all this...

However, Maria valued her work, noting that her employer's family was very appreciative of her, and with the work she is able to provide more for her family than she was in Romania. Although not working in her field, in London she had enough money to do all the things she has always desired to do but could not while in Romania, such as going to the seaside:

The first time I went to the sea was here in Britain. I went there with my husband and some friends of ours. It was beautiful! I was jumping with my feet in

the water like a kid, I was feeling like a kid! It was beautiful! So ... you see, I couldn't afford to do this in Romania, here, with the job I have, I can do it. The money I have gives me the possibility to go, even if for few days, to the seaside. It gives me the possibility to travel.

The often low-paid, difficult and sometimes exploitative work still afforded them opportunities they did not have in Romania. Investment in their home country such as building houses, or opening small businesses, was another way of justifying - towards themselves and the home community - taking on work they would never accept doing back home. In an interview with Petra's mother in Romania, she described what they could do with the money sent over by her daughter and her husband:

They work hard down there, I know this, but they also earn. The apartment we are renting was built with the money Petra and Vasile sent every month. It took us a little to build it because part of the money was for the kid too. But in the end we managed, and here it is. It's a beautiful house; everybody can see how nice it is!

As discussed, despite Romania's accession to the EU, many Romanian migrants continue to work in the informal labour market. This is mostly a result of Romanian qualifications not being recognised, but additionally, the restrictive measures the UK has adopted that details the kind of work in which Romanians are allowed to participate. Thus Romanians are left taking up work which is low paid, under harsh conditions and unsatisfying. Despite these working conditions the interviewees were committed to their work because they viewed it as a way to continue to support their families and build their future lives once back in Romania. Ultimately, many have surrendered to the exploitative nature of work in the informal sector because it is a step up from their past experiences in Romania.

## Conclusion

Overall, research on post-1990 migration from Eastern Europe is scarce and incomplete; worse still is the state of the literature on Romanian migrants' experiences of migration to and settlement in Britain. This may partly be a result of the novelty of the phenomenon, but also because it presents a challenging agenda; one which involves grappling with the complexity and multi-dimensional character of the new patterns of migration within Europe (indefinite temporary migration, transnational migration, secondary migration, skilled vs. unskilled migrants dichotomy, etc.). This lack of knowledge calls for more qualitative sociological investigation which allows for a better understanding of the lived experiences of these migrants in order to understand the characteristics, mechanisms and dynamics of this transnational phenomenon.

The Romanian community in London is one of several emerging migrant communities in the city. Although Romanians have been finding their way to Britain since the 1960s and 1970s, the last ten years have seen an unprecedented growth of the community. However, because contact between long term Romanian residents and new migrants is limited, many interviewees were of the opinion that cohesion within the Romanian community in London is problematic. Throughout interviews and conversations, research participants expressed a profound feeling of distrust, in spite of many voicing concerns about intra-community relations and the need to strengthen cohesion and solidarity. A number of Romanian organisations have been founded in the last four or five years, but they struggle to get recognised by most Romanians living and working in London, who do not see these organisations as responding to their needs.

Even if the organisations were able to attract the interest of newer Romanian migrants, long working hours and irregular immigration status - both characteristic of the lived experience of Romanian migrants working in low-paid jobs - are an impediment to participation in intra-community relations. Thus, limited social interaction because of lack of time, impacts on notions of community cohesion between

Romanians and other ethnic groups - including host communities - and more importantly, within the Romanian community itself. However, interviews conducted with families who, after January 2007, brought their children from Romania to London indicated an increased incentive to have contact with the local community. Often, women described their children as bridges between themselves and social activity, such as schools, medical centres, sport clubs, as well as British families or families of different nationalities living in their area.

In spite of the statistical limitations of the small sample size, the material presented here will hopefully provide a point of departure for further studies on Romanian migrants in London. Furthermore, some of the issues emerging from the interviews may offer useful insights for further policy consideration concerning integration of new migrants. Deskilling and irregularity were among the main issues outlined by the interviewees themselves. In contrast to previous migration waves, an increasing number of these migrants entered Britain without full administrative permission, facilitated by the large informal and unregulated sectors of the European economies which "do not formally want them despite needing them."<sup>52</sup> These two issues, deskilling and irregularity, were among the main problems faced by Romanian migrants before January 2007. Unfortunately, as interviews revealed, many members of the Romanian community continue to find themselves facing the same dilemmas even after Romania's accession to the EU.

The timing of fieldwork for this research allowed for interesting evidence on the issue of irregularity. Conducting interviews in the period before and immediately after Romania's accession to the EU gave the possibility to observe impacts of EU enlargement - and consequent changes in migrants' legal status - on Romanian migrants working in London. Thus, interviews for this study provided evidence for the policy paradox highlighted in a recent IPPR report;<sup>53</sup> although the UK immigration authorities want to present themselves as restrictive and hostile towards irregular migration and employment, Romanian (and Bulgarian) nationals who are free to travel in any EU Member State find the informal labour market relatively open and accessible. As demonstrated by the experience of EU-15 countries, which

<sup>52</sup> Anthias (2000)

<sup>53</sup> IPPR (2006)

placed restrictions for E-8 citizens in 2004, restricting access to the labour-market to EU citizens who can move freely can promote irregular migration. In other words, Romanians - and Bulgarians - who are free to travel to London may start working irregularly. They can be subcontracted to get around the restrictions, work in the informal economy, find employment as supposed self-employed workers, and so on.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, migration towards Western Europe often includes large numbers of educated Eastern Europeans who experience downward social and economic mobility instead of improvement. This issue, which emerged time and again in discussions with Romanians interviewed for this study, has significant implications for integration policies for new migrants. Recent qualitative investigations<sup>55</sup> among different groups of migrants throughout Europe have shown a common mismatching between migrants' qualifications and their low-paid jobs, as well as common experiences of deskilling. Nonetheless, the distinction between 'skilled' and 'unskilled' migrants - the latter referring particularly to migrants employed in the low-paid jobs of the secondary and tertiary sectors - still persists. This distinction is becoming the core divide in the development of the managed migration policies which most of the EU nation-states, including the UK, are adopting. A major implication of this approach is the creation, at both policy and public debate levels, of a split between 'wanted' and 'unwanted' migrants. So called 'highly-skilled' professionals receive little or no criticism while those migrants who fill the low-income jobs not attractive to the native population are seen as a threat to the stability and 'social cohesion' of the destination country.

While finalising this report, some relevant events for the transnational Romanian community as a whole have taken place in Italy.<sup>56</sup> Although still unfolding at the time of writing, these events are bound to have a severe impact on the lives of Romanian migrants and their families living and working in the European Union; a political and social landscape where, despite Romania's accession in January 2007,

they still struggle for equal treatment and basic human rights. The British government's stance towards A2 nationals has contributed to the creation of a 'second level of EU citizenship.' The measures taken by the Italian government at the start of November 2007 are certainly contributing to these developments.

A rapid summary of the Italian events seems an appropriate conclusion for this report. Although the main concern has been the Romanian migrant community in London, experiences within the broader EU frame - of which London and its people are undoubtedly part - has a profound effect on Romanian migrants in London.

On October 31, following the murder of an Italian woman allegedly perpetrated by a Romanian citizen of Romani ethnic origins, the Italian government adopted an emergency decree for the immediate expulsion of citizens of European Union countries who represent a threat to public security. Furthermore, as the risk for public security was deemed *imperative*, the decision was immediately implemented with a series of deportations. Those expelled can be denied the right to return to Italy for up to three years; prohibited re-entry is punishable by up to three years in prison.

Although the decree covers citizens of any EU member state, the political debate and official action following the day of the crime have focused exclusively on Romanian citizens, and in particular Romanian Roma. It is painfully obvious that "Romanians are the real target of this expulsion decree, not EU nationals in general."<sup>57</sup> Through these measures, the Italian authorities are penalising an entire community for the alleged crimes of one or few of its members, and singling it out for expulsion.

Discrimination against Romani people is not a new phenomenon in Italy. But the new decree is not only intensifying these discriminatory attitudes against a particular population, which happens to be the largest European minority in Italy; it is also a significant step towards a toughening of immigration policy which has been called for across much of western Europe, and which is inevitably creating a strong divide within the EU between wanted and un-wanted EU citizens. The risk involved is that this will undermine one of the cornerstones of the European Union: the free movement of people across the Union.

<sup>54</sup>Ippr (2006)

<sup>55</sup>Erdemir and Vasta (2007); Padilla (2007)

<sup>56</sup>For further information on these events, see Popham (2007).

<sup>57</sup>Judith Sunderland, quoted in Human Rights Watch (2007)

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Since 1968, the date of Runnymede's foundation, we have worked to establish and maintain a positive image of what it means to live affirmatively within a society that is both multi-ethnic and culturally diverse. Runnymede continues to speak with a thoughtful and independent public voice on these issues today.



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