

The impact of emigration on the family and the remaining children in Romania – case study: Italy

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ABSTRACT: The increase in Romanians' emigration corresponds to the penury of labor force some European developed countries are facing with, especially in the household field, tourism economy and agriculture. Perceived as a possibility of improving life conditions, Romanian migration is equally a phenomenon which prevails by the brutality of changes whose negative effects are expressed by the costs which the family has to pay for. The aim of our research is to highlight the spectacular increase of Romanian emigration to Italy and especially of female emigration and its impact on the family and children left in the country. Despite the permanent contact provided by technology development, children's and teenagers' vulnerability left behind in Romania regarding psycho-emotional disorders has known an alarming increase, especially when they are being confronted with the challenge of dealing with their mother's leave or both parents', separation and family "dissolution".

KEY WORDS: Romanians' emigration, family, children, vulnerability.

1. Introduction

The political changes in Romania that marked the beginning of the 90s, by opening the borders after almost half a century of restrictions on the free movement of people, gave Romanians the opportunity to go abroad, in the hope of a better life. In the new political and socio-economic conditions, Romanians have opted for temporary migration for work, a phenomenon whose spectacular growth in the last three decades has been strongly supported by the progress made in the field of transport and telecommunications, by the relatively low costs and speed of information transmission.

In the first stage of the post-December period, the Romanian migration focused on the support of compatriots and coagulated around a nucleus, formed by close family relations, in order to later extend to extended family, neighbors, friends and acquaintances.

For the pioneers of Romanian emigration, the decision to emigrate was taken without knowing the working and living conditions in the country they were heading to. In most cases, they did not know the language of the destination country, but relied in their travels on the migratory channels and niches created by Romanians who were already working in those countries.

At this stage of probing, the migration experience of Romanians considerably enriched, although the framework of migration was clandestine or based on political asylum applications, strategies by which Romanians managed to escape the controls imposed by European migration policy (Sechet and Vasilcu, 2011). The channels of illegal emigration were known, organized within the tourism companies or within some enterprises that operated at the limit of legality and resorted, in many cases, to modern forms of exploitation of migrants (Wihtol de Wenden, 1995). The restrictive migration policy promoted by most European countries developed in the early 1990s, but especially by Germany and France, had as main objective the control of illegal immigration. This determined the reorientation of Romanian migrants to European countries in the Mediterranean basin. As a result of the social changes in these countries, the need for labor, Romanians became, in the mid-2000s, the main community of immigrants in Italy and Spain. The direction of migratory flows to these countries and the success of the migratory experience was due, in large part, to the collective practices used by Romanian migrants, but also to the massive regularizations in Italy and Spain.

Italy is by far Romanians' main destination; these ones are at present the most important community of immigrants in Italy (1.19 million people, on 1st January 2018). Migration flows have increased significantly all along almost three decades as a result of local population's permissive attitude in regard to the immigrants who did not compete against them for precarious and temporary places of employment. An important role was definitely played by the massive regulations since 1997, 2003 and 2006, bills which provided legal immigrants with the possibility of getting a non-limited residence permit and right to family reunion. The highest concentrations of Romanians are registered in Lazio (Fig. 1), a region that totals 19.60% of the total number of Romanians in Italy and over 34% of all foreign residents in this region. It is followed by three large concentrations in northern Italy, corresponding to the regions of Lombardy, Piedmont and Veneto (Table 1).

The gender distribution of Romanian immigrants in Italy is also interesting: in all regions of this country the number of women exceeds that of men, the ratio between the two sexes being clearly in favor of women in Sardinia (2.1), Marche (1.9), Valle d'Aosta, Umbria and Puglia (1.7).

Migration research allows us to conclude that women are more likely to choose to emigrate due to the existence of a complex of factors (Campani, 1995; Bissiliat, 2000; Schmoll, 2005; Séchet and Vasilcu, 2012). Without ignoring the fact that we are talking about feminized occupations (housekeeping, care for the elderly), the results obtained based on the analysis of statistical data converge with those that indicated that regardless of skill level, female migration is a significant component of international migration (Kofman, 1999; Green, 2002; Zontini, 2002; Potot, 2003; Catarino and Morokvasic, 2005; Nedelcu, 2005; Percot, 2005; Lutz, 2010; Morokvasic, 2010).

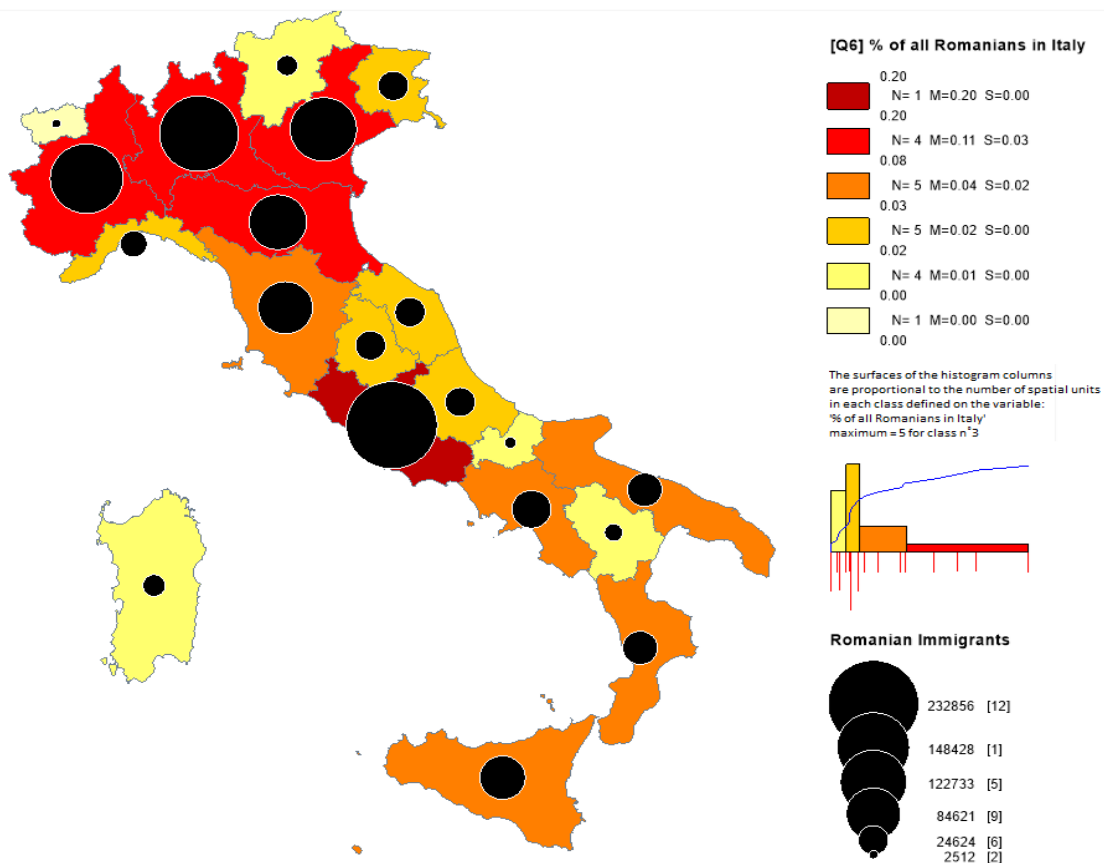


Figure 1 Distribution of Romanian immigrants by regions (Source: ISTAT, 2018).

Table 1 Distribution of Romanian Immigrants in Lazio (Source: ISTAT, 2018).

Province	Romanians				%	%
	Men	Women	Total	%		
Roma	82651	101257	183908	79.0%	33.03%	+1.5%
Latina	9587	10644	20231	8.7%	38.43%	+2.9%
Viterbo	6459	7712	14171	6.1%	45.48%	-0.2%
Frosinone	4157	5108	9265	4.0%	36.64%	-0.1%
Rieti	2281	3000	5281	2.3%	38.85%	-0.8%
Total Region	105135	127721	232856	100%	34.30%	+1.4%

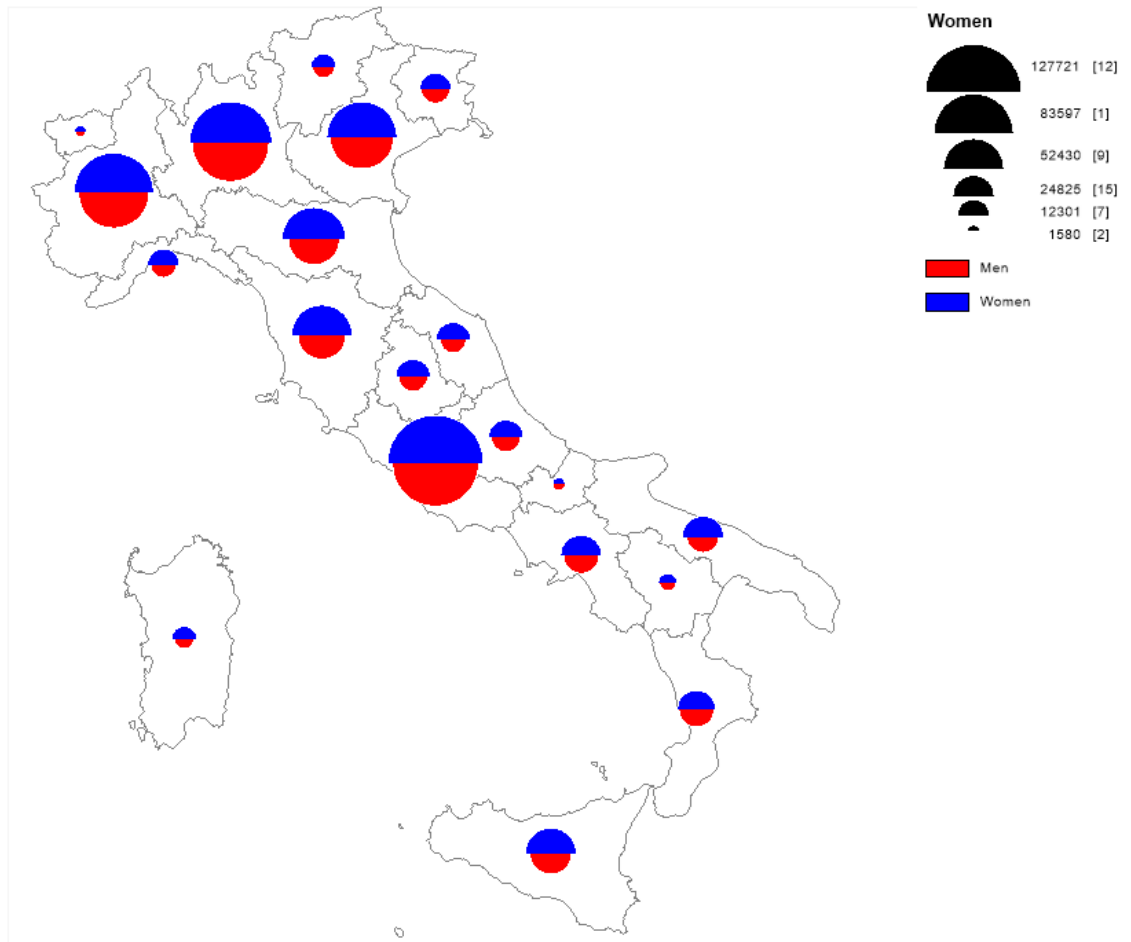


Figure 2 Distribution of Romanian Immigrants by Sex (Source: ISTAT, 2018).

If male migration predominated in the early 1990s, after Romania's integration into the European Union, the labor market at European level was for many women an extremely attractive alternative and, in most cases, the only way to solve the problems generated by lack of financial resources, unemployment and poverty (Fig. 2). In many families, it was the woman who made the decision to emigrate, even though it was initially part of a family strategy (Stalker, 1995). The initiating role of migration implicitly reflects a redistribution of roles at the family level, the ability to make important decisions for the future of his family (Harrison, 1998; Simon, 2008; Guillaume, 2009).

2. Methods

Our methodological approach is based on data obtained from the Italian National Statistical Institute (ISTAT), on data obtained from the Ministry of National Education on children whose parents have emigrated and on data from the Directorate of Child Protection Suceava.

The statistical data were correlated and mapped using the Philcarto software. These data are supplemented by the partial results of an ongoing survey on immigrants from Italy and on

families remaining in Romania. This article presents the partial results of a research that focuses on the impact of international migration on children left in the country, the relationships between children, parents and the people in their care.

The questionnaire was developed in the Sphinx Lexica software, and the statistical analysis and processing will be performed in the Sphinx Lexica, SPSS and AMOS softwares.

3. Results

Over the last years, a new family model has emerged in Romania – cross national family (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Ambrosini et al., 2010). According to the data provided by the Ministry of National Education on 1st of January 2018, there were registered in Romania 159038 children who had at least one parent left to work abroad. A dramatic situation is encountered in the families where both parents have emigrated, their children being left behind in the care of grandparents, relatives, neighbors or even alone.

We find a really worrying situation in the counties in northeastern and southwestern Romania, regions that are characterized by a high degree of impoverishment, determined by the massive economic restructuring after 1990.

Lack of investment and lack of jobs. The northeastern region is characterized by the fact that in Romania, the largest number of children whose parents emigrated corresponds to the counties in northeastern and southwestern Romania, counties in which the number of children whose parents emigrated exceeded 11000.

Although the large number of children whose parents emigrated does not refer only to Romanian parents who emigrated to Italy, the presentation of this situation at national level as a negative consequence of emigration is suggestive, taking into account the characteristics of Romanian migration to this country numerically, as well as from the perspective of feminizing migratory flows.

A worrying situation is that of children in which both parents have emigrated or of children from single-parent families. The highest number of children living without parents was at the level of 2018 of 3165 in Bacău county and between 2000 and 3000 in the counties of Iași, Dolj, Suceava, Olt and Neamț.

Parents' absence influences both children's physical and psychical health (insomnia, food disorders). Having in view the specificity of childhood and teenager hood as decisive periods in every individual's evolution it is obvious that the lack of fondness may have a negative impact on the mental health of the future grown-up. A study made in 2010 in all schools in the County of Iași on a sample of 3742 secondary school pupils whose parents are left to work abroad points out a very interesting and worrying situation: the more the affection level between children and those taking care of them decreases, the higher the level of psycho-emotional disorders is. (Burlea, 2010). Most children whose parents emigrated are facing problems of attention, loss of interest in school and task achievement, absenteeism, reduction of school performances and even school abandonment. Disorders of adaptation are quite frequent among the emigrants' children. In the absence of their parents' fondness these children start to get associated with persons or groups that have a negative influence on their physical and mental development, leading them to indiscipline and delinquency.

As regards psychological disorders the same study shows that problems of communication have been registered such as: lie, unjustified approbation, verbal aggression, fear of thrusting the others etc) for more than 50% of the respondents, followed by aggressive behavior and in the end affective-emotional disorders (shyness or anxiety state, isolation, depression, neurosis).

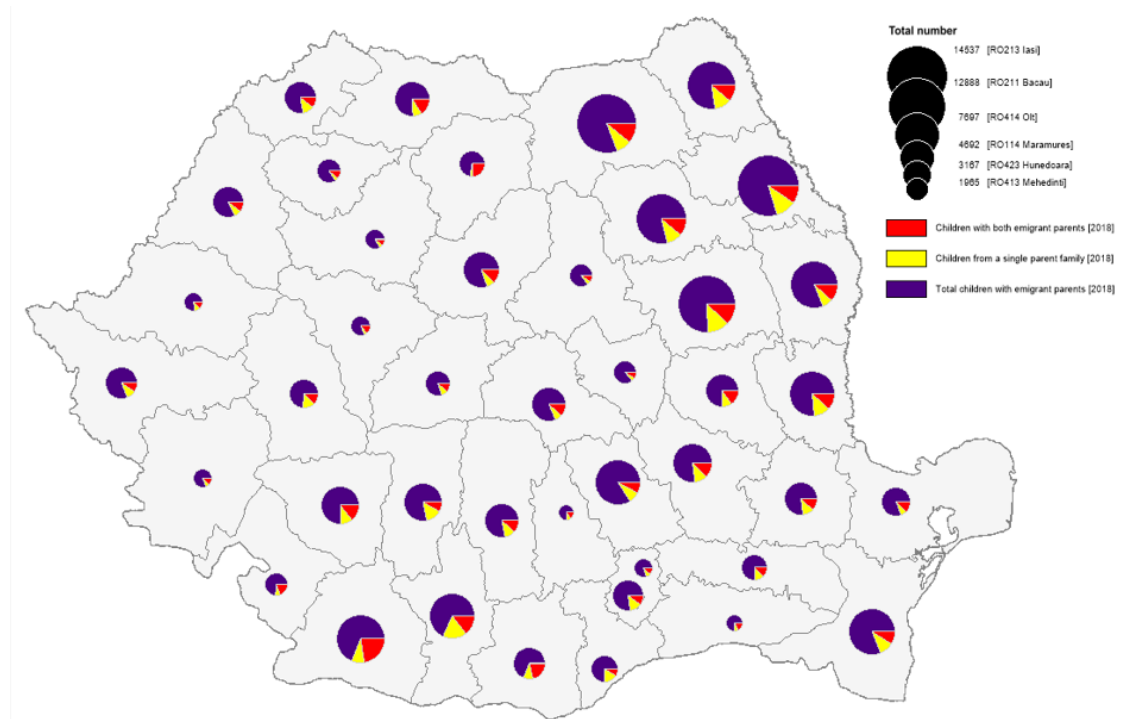


Figure 3 Distribution of children whose parents have emigrated (Source: Ministry of Education, 2018).

4. Conclusions

Deprived of parents' fondness, Romanian immigrants' children feel a strong feeling of marginalization leading them most of the times to anxiety disorders. Although for most children whose parents emigrated the living conditions have improved from the economic point of view, emotional costs caused by the absence of one or both parents may lead to major negative long term effects. In the absence of stability provided by family, aggressiveness and delinquency may occur easily, causing major integration problems at adult age.

These children live in a new universe where they feel alone, abandoned, in a difficult situation and which is actually the source of a great psychic sufferance. For them, their parents' leave means the fall down of the whole family universe where equilibrium, safety and trust are being replaced by feelings of abandon, loneliness, insecurity and often hatred against their own parents. There is a painful cleavage between the two worlds: on one side Romania where these children live and enjoy some prosperity, expensively paid by parents' lack of fondness and on the other side there is the parents' world, that of labor and sacrifice.

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