

# A REASSESSMENT OF THE MIGRATION ISSUE IN THE EU: A CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH FOCUS ON ROMANIA<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract: The study aims to analyse demographic, economic, and social aspects and identify the impact of migration in EU Member States, especially in Romania. It focuses on finding methods for more efficient migration management and faster, higher-level immigrant integration. These efforts aim to benefit both the native population and migrants. The study is innovative due to its interdisciplinary methodology. It couples economic and social research from fields such as macroeconomics and sociology with an analysis of migration policies. Main findings reveal that migration helps mitigate demographic decline and supports economic development by increasing labour force employment. The immigrants' integration is positively influenced by best practices, such as Sweden's labour market model, which combines strong collective bargaining mechanisms, high union membership, and coordinated wage-setting processes, as well as relatively flexible employment protection legislation. The research conclusions and policy recommendations aim to transform the challenge of migration into an opportunity that stimulates sustainable economic and social development and addresses labour market deficits in Romania.*

*Keywords: Migration, European Union, Romania, Nordic model, labour market, impact*

*JEL Classification: J21, J23, J28, F22, 015*

## 1. Introduction

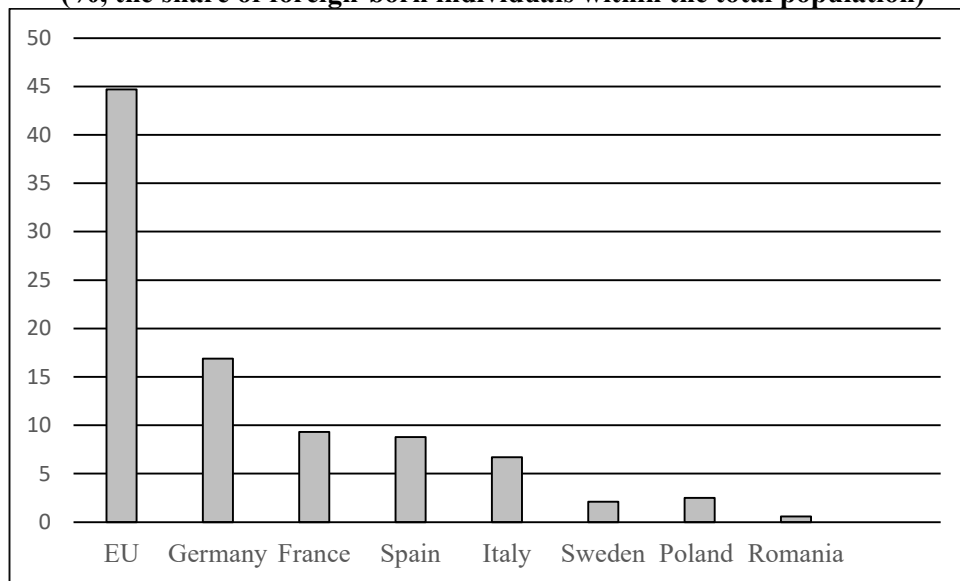
According to Eurostat (2025), as of 1 January 2024, out of the 449.3 million people living in the European Union (EU), 44.7 million people (9.9% of the total EU population) were born outside the EU. About 17.9 million people (4.0%) were born in another EU country, and 29.0 million people (6.4%) were non-EU citizens.

In absolute terms, the largest numbers of foreign-born individuals living in EU countries were found in Germany (16.9 million), France (9.3 million), Spain (8.8 million), and Italy (6.7 million). Foreign-born individuals in these four EU countries collectively represented 44.7% of the total number of foreign-born individuals living in the EU (Chart 1). The highest relative share of foreign-born individuals within the total population was in Luxembourg (51.0% of the resident population), followed by Malta (30.8%), Cyprus (26.9%), Ireland (22.6%), Austria (22.1%), Sweden (20.6%), and Germany (20.2%). By contrast, foreign-born individuals represented less than 5% of the population in Poland (2.6% of its resident population on 1 January 2024), Romania (3.1%), Bulgaria (3.3%), and Slovakia (3.9%).

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**Chart 1: Foreign-born individuals living in different EU Member States, 1 January 2024  
(%, the share of foreign-born individuals within the total population)**



Source: Eurostat (2025)

## 2. Research Methodology

The article presents *comparative research* across EU Member States using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data come from EUROSTAT, STATISTA, the Romanian National Agency of Employment (AJOFM), and the Bucharest Municipal Employment Agency (AMOFM). The employment rate of the foreign-born population is a key indicator to assess the economic impact of immigrant integration in the EU labour market. The analysis uses national data from the Prime Minister's Office to assess immigrant labour market integration in Romania. Qualitative research involves reviewing publications and articles by migration experts on the social and economic impacts of migration. It is based on an *interdisciplinary methodology* that uses different fields such as economics (statistical data analysis), demography, and migration policies, which gives an added value to the study.

## 3. Literature review on migration impact

The results of the economic impact of migration analysis by Privara et al. (2023) show that:

- Both immigration and emigration have a significant influence on unemployment and annual average wage growth.
- The education and skills of immigrants play a central role in the host country's labour market development.
- The presence of highly qualified immigrants has a significant positive impact on the recipient country's labour market.
- The immigration of low-skilled immigrants, like most asylum seekers, has a slight negative impact on the host country's labour market.
- The emigration of educated and skilled citizens will lead to "brain drain", which has a negative impact on the origin country's economy.

According to Vanselow et al. (2016), the negative impact of immigration on the labour market is generally minimal. This is due to several factors. The immigrants' skills often complement those of native-born, who typically hold higher positions on the occupational ladder. Also, the native-born workforce tends to be more flexible than that of immigrants. Furthermore, adjustment processes—including shifts in industrial structure, advances in production technologies, and capital flows—can reduce migration's negative effects on labour market (Dumitrescu, 2019).

Ruhs & Vargas-Silva (2017) highlight that immigration and changes in employment rates are insufficient to counteract labour force decline in Europe. They argue that labour shortages—already visible in many

countries—are set to persist and intensify, especially given the European Green Deal and technological advances. The authors note high migrant employment in domestic services, despite high unemployment and low employment rates among women in countries like Greece, Italy, and Spain. Migrants from southern EU states typically fill seasonal, short-term, or social care roles (Dumitrescu, 2018).

According to Anderson et al. (2021), many of the “essential workers” during the COVID-19 pandemic were immigrants, playing an important role in the continued functioning of basic services, especially health services, social care, and food supply chains. Existing studies highlight how the employment of immigrant workers in essential services is shaped by employer interests, sectoral policies, and national institutions. According to the same authors, the “*labour shortages*” typically refer to demand for labour exceeding supply at prevailing wages and employment conditions.”

OECD experts (2016) underline that labour market institutions are essential for immigrants’ labour market integration, because their employment tends to be much more cyclical than that of the native-born. OECD (2016) recommends for the immigrants’ efficient integration, methods such as *decent working conditions, ensuring adequate salaries and decent working time arrangements, a safe work environment, fair treatment, and fair access to social security schemes, as well as respect for fundamental principles and rights at work and relevant international labour standards*. The collaboration at all levels (bilateral, regional, and multilateral) between governments, social partners and other stakeholders is an essential pillar for ensuring decent working conditions and the protection of migrant workers (OECD, 2016).

One of the best practice examples is the Swedish model of immigrant economic integration. Rauhut (2025) underlines that the causes of migration are multifaceted and complex and, in his analysis, focuses on Sweden’s *immigrant labour integration model*. “Sweden’s labour market model combines strong collective bargaining mechanisms, high union membership, and coordinated wage-setting processes with relatively flexible employment protection legislation (Anxo & Karlsson, 2019a; Rauhut, 2025).” The absence of statutory minimum wages in most sectors, with wage levels determined instead through collective bargaining between employers and trade unions, is a characteristic that influences how EU migrants integrate into the Swedish labour market (Rauhut, 2025).

Rauhut (2025) underlines that “supply-side analysis reveals that EU migration to Sweden has been predominantly driven by economic factors, with wage differentials and employment opportunities serving as primary pull factors, complemented by Sweden’s reputation for good working conditions and social welfare system.” He appreciates that “migration flows have been characterised by significant circular and temporary migration patterns, challenging assumptions about permanent settlement and integration trajectories.”

Unlike many EU-15 Member States, Sweden chose not to impose transitional restrictions on workers from the New Member States during the 2004 EU enlargement, immediately granting full labour market access (Rauhut, 2004). Subsequent enlargements, with Bulgaria and Romania joining in 2007 and Croatia in 2013, led to significant increases in labour migration from these countries to Sweden (Andersson Joona et al., 2014; Rauhut, 2025). This migration has occurred within a context of relatively open labour markets, strong welfare systems, and coordinated wage-setting mechanisms that distinguish Sweden from many other EU destinations (Rauhut, 2025).

This review of specialized literature on the economic impact of immigration on the EU labour market, focusing on Sweden as a best practice example, demonstrates a significant gap between other Member States and Romania. To clarify our main argument, we will add a quantitative analysis of EU and Member State immigration data, that will strengthen the comparative framework for assessing integration outcomes for immigrant workers.

#### **4. A cross-country comparative analysis of the immigration demographic impact in Europe**

According to Statista (2025a), in *Germany*, the main immigrants by country of origin were 1,097,882 Ukrainians, 204,637 Romanians, 107,060 Turks, 81,108 Poles, 71,835 Syrians, and 68,321 Bulgarians in 2023. In the same year, the German federal government's costs for refugees and asylum seekers totalled around 29.7 billion euros. The largest cost item was social transfer payments following asylum procedures at 11.8 billion euros in 2023. The amount is expected to increase to around 13.3 billion euros in 2025, and to decrease to 13.1 billion euros in 2026 (Statista, 2025b).

Statista (2025c) shows that in *France*, there were approximately 8.9 million foreign-born people in 2023. The majority of immigrants arriving in France were from Africa and Europe. Since the mid-2000s, the percentage of immigrants looking for a job has gradually increased. The immigrant population remains more affected by

unemployment. In 2023, more than 11.2 percent of immigrants were jobless, compared to 6.4 percent of the French native-born population (Statista, 2025c).<sup>1</sup>

In 2024, the population of *Spain* was 48.6 million people, including 6.6 million people with a non-Spanish nationality (Statista, 2025d). Around 460,000 *foreign residents* in Spain stated that they migrated to the country for employment or self-employment. Many migrants look for employment opportunities, despite Spain's rather high unemployment rate. Regarding the composition of migrant residents, more Romanians live in Spain than in any other EU country, and Moroccan residents account for the largest community of African origin (Statista, 2025d).

In *Italy*, almost 130,000 non-EU citizens legally immigrated for family-related reasons by obtaining a residence permit in 2023. The second most common motive behind migrating to Italy was applying for asylum, as more than 106,000 residence permits were issued for humanitarian reasons. Moreover, around 39,000 non-EU citizens were granted a permit to work (Statista, 2025e).

In *Poland*, there were more inflows than outflows, resulting in a net migration of nearly a thousand people in 2024. The net international migration after Poland's accession to the EU increased from a negative figure of - 9.4% in 2004 to a positive one of + 9.3% 2024, based on the decreasing trend of emigration rate from 18.9% in 2004 to 10.2% in 2024, and increasing trend of the immigration rate from 9.5% in 2004 to 19.5% in 2025 (Statista, 2025f).

According to Statista (2025h), over the past 20 years, *Sweden had the highest positive net migration of the five Nordic countries*, except for 2011 and 2022, when Denmark and Norway had the highest net migration of the five Nordic countries. The foreign-born population in Sweden has risen significantly over the past three decades, from 9% to 20% of the population in 2022. In Sweden, the immigrant employment rate was 74.9%, comparing with the Swedish native-born employment rate of 86.1%, and *immigrant unemployment rate was 14.2%, comparatively, the Swedish native-born employment rate of 4.9% in 2023*.

By comparison, in the *United Kingdom (UK)*, in 2023, approximately 1.2 million people immigrated, with 532,000 persons emigrating, resulting in a net migration of 685,000 people (Statista, 2025i). Between 2020-2021, approximately 696,000 Polish nationals were living in the United Kingdom, the most numerous non-British populations. Indian and Irish were the joint second-largest nationalities at approximately 370,000 people, followed by Italians and Romanians, each with 342,000 people, Portuguese, 268,000 people, Spanish, 206,000 people, Pakistanis, 181,000 people, Nigerians, 178,000 people, and Americans, 166,000 people. In the fourth quarter of 2024, approximately 81.9 percent of people born in the EU but living in the UK were employed, compared with 74.7 percent for UK nationals and 74.4 percent for people outside the EU and UK (Statista, 2025i).

From the comparative country analysis results that one of the main purposes of migrating to EU Member States and UK is due to economic reasons. The analysis shows a growing trend of the number of economic immigrants, especially immigrants interested in employment. Regarding the unemployment rate, in the analyzed countries, the unemployment rates among immigrants are much higher than among those native-born with two native-born parents. A significant example is Sweden, where the disparity between immigrants' unemployment rates and native-born with two native-born parents is over 10 percentage points.

## **5. The economic impact of the immigrant's labour market integration by activity sectors in the European Union**

The labour market integration, as defined by the European Commission, refers to *achieving participation levels similar to EU target*<sup>2</sup>, assessed through indicators like employment rates.

In 2024, 75.8% (197.6 million people) of the EU's 20 to 64-year-olds were employed, the highest share recorded since the start of the time series in 2009 (Eurostat, 2024a). The employment rate was up 0.5 percentage points (pp) compared with 2023 and 1.2 pp compared with 2022. Among the EU countries, the highest employment rates were recorded in the Netherlands (83.5%), Malta (83.0%) and Czechia (82.3%). The lowest rates were recorded in Italy (67.1%), Greece (69.3%) and *Romania (69.5%). Romania does not have a single, publicly stated national employment rate target, but its current rate is tracked against benchmarks, most notably the EU's 78% goal for the 20–64 age group by 2030*.

Regarding the integration of immigrants, in EU, around 12.1 million non-EU citizens were employed in the EU labour market, out of 197.6 million people aged from 20 to 64, corresponding to 6% of the total in 2024.

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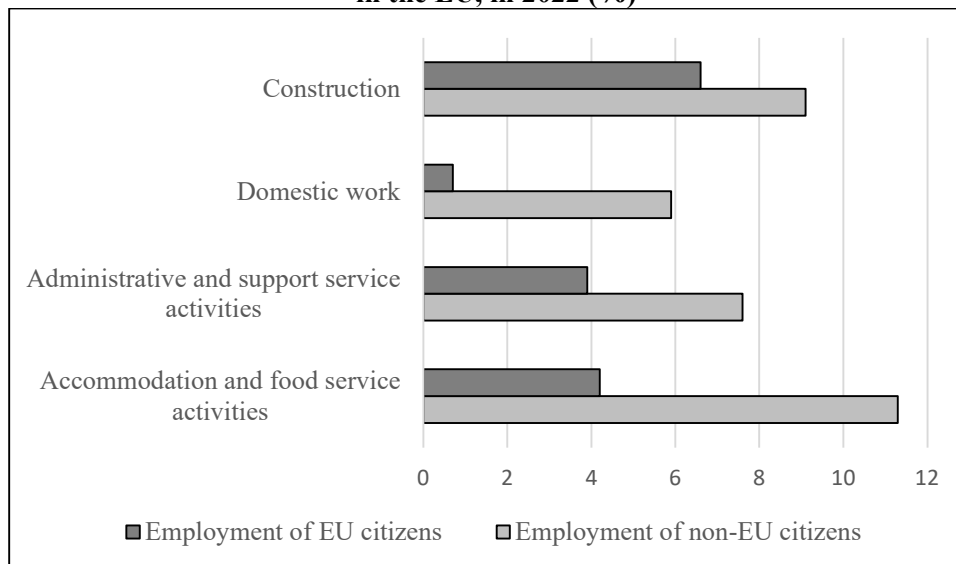
<sup>1</sup> Denmark, Finland, and Sweden are Nordic countries that are members of the EU. Norway and Iceland are not EU members, although they are closely integrated with the EU through other agreements like the European Economic Area (EEA).

<sup>2</sup> The overall employment rate target for the European Union is 78% by 2030.

The employment rate of the working-age population was higher for immigrants from EU native-born (77.3%) than for non-EU native-born (64.3%) in 2024 (Eurostat, 2025b).

If we extend the analysis to *immigrant employment by economic activity*, in 2022, non-EU citizens were *over-represented* in different economic sectors such as construction or domestic work (Chart 2).

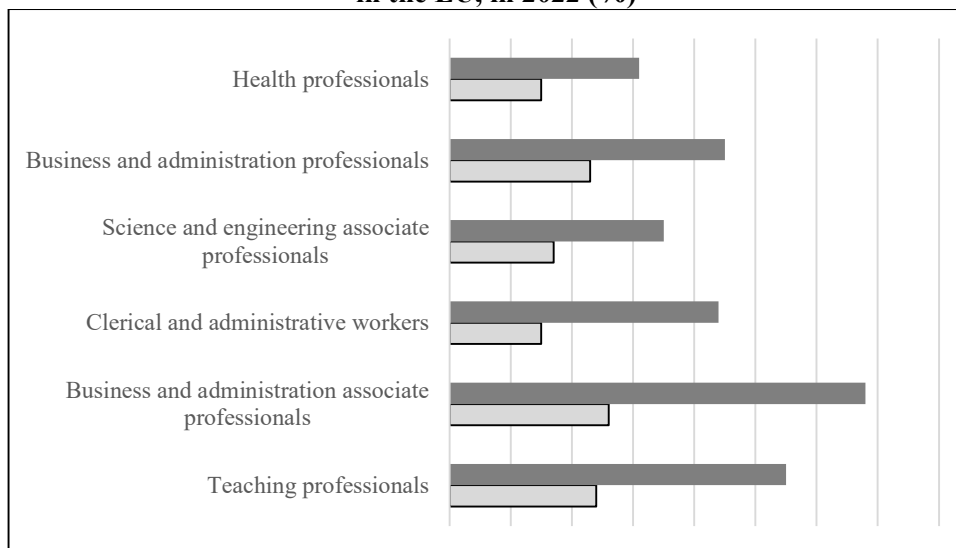
**Chart 2: Over-represented employment of non-EU citizens in different economic sectors in the EU, in 2022 (%)**



Source: European Commission (2025a)

Non-EU citizens were *under-represented* in other economic sectors, including education, science, and health (Chart 3).

**Chart 3: Under-represented employment of non-EU citizens in different economic sectors in the EU, in 2022 (%)**



Source: European Commission (2025a)

In order to stimulate the social inclusion of immigrants, the European Commission (2025b) has promoted the 2021-2027 Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion. Its goals in the area of employment and skills include:

- Cooperation is strengthened at the EU, national, and local levels among key labour market actors and the migrants;
- Migrant entrepreneurs, including social entrepreneurs, receive more support through easier access to financing, training, and advice;

- More immigrant women participate in the labour market;
- The assessment of migrants' skills is more effective and faster; upskilling and reskilling are continuously supported, including through validation procedures for non-formal and informal learning;
- More migrants participate in high-quality Vocational Education and Training (VET).

The pillars of the Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 are:

- **European Pillar of Social Rights:** The action plan supports the implementation of social rights and principles.
- **Coordination and Partnerships:** Strong cooperation is encouraged between the EU, national, regional, and local authorities, social partners (like trade unions and employer organizations), and civil society.
- **Funding:** The Commission provides funding to support the efforts of social partners in addressing labour and skills shortages. While Member States are primarily responsible for implementing social policy (such as integration and inclusion), the EU has supported integration actions through dedicated funding through the Asylum, Migration and Integration fund, the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, Erasmus+, and other funds.

## 6. Immigrant labour market integration in Romania

Romania is facing high emigration (with over 4 million Romanians living abroad) and a labour shortage. Therefore, legal immigration is seen as a solution to compensate for this labour market supply deficit. Romania continues to face a major labour shortage, especially in economic sectors such as construction, trade, and the hospitality industry. In 2025, a quota of 100,000 newly admitted non-EU foreign workers was established on the Romanian labour market, according to Government Decision No. 10 of 2025. This quota, published on January 16, 2025, aims to cover the labour shortage in the country and support economic growth, in the context of the personnel crisis and negative demographic trends. It is important to note that this quota refers to foreign workers from outside the European Union, excluding citizens of the Republic of Moldova. Currently, from 10 countries, legal immigrants who have received work permits come mainly from Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Egypt. According to some representatives of employers' associations, the real need for labour force in Romania would be 200,000 -250,000 work permits annually.

Additionally, the integration of migrants in Romania involves support programs for beneficiaries of international protection, third-country nationals, and those with temporary protection, aiming at their socio-economic inclusion. These programs aim to facilitate access to services through integrated centres, strengthen links with the private sector to integrate into the labour market, and encourage dialogue between migrants and the local community through information campaigns and socio-cultural activities.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, from February 24, 2022, to April 30, 2025, a total of 11,507,497 Ukrainian citizens entered the territory of Romania, of which: 4,526 people applied for asylum, 199 people obtained a form of international protection, and 252,407 people benefited from temporary protection. The statistical data on flows of Ukrainian refugees show that Romania was a significant transit country.

Ukrainian citizens can receive work permits under temporary protection status. The medium and long-term integration of Ukrainian citizens into Romanian society is closely linked to facilitating access to the Romanian labour market. (Table 1).

**Table 1: Main indicators regarding the integration of Ukrainian citizens into the Romanian labour market**

Indicators	24.02.2022-30.04.2025
Number of Ukrainian citizens registered with the Employment Agencies to be employed	24,433
Number of economic operators that have declared jobs available for Ukrainian citizens	743

Number of jobs filled through AJOFM/AMOFM	3,321
Number of active employment contracts registered	6,104

Source: Prime Minister's Office (2025), based on AJOFM/AMOFM data

If we look from the point of view of *territorial distribution*, the most active employment contracts of Ukrainian refugees were registered in Bucharest (2,523), Constanța (310), Maramureș (305), Cluj (302), Timiș (300), Ilfov (267), Brașov (260), Suceava (189), Bihor (183), Galați (182), Iași (180), Arad (179), Sibiu (155), Bistrița-Năsăud (104), in the period 24.02.2022-30.04.2025 (Prime Minister's Office, 2025). According with the same source, the *main sectors of activity with the highest number of registered employment contracts* were: manufacturing (995), construction (883), trade (870), hotels and restaurants (707), information and communications technology (609), administrative and other support service activities (506), transport and storage (369), other service activities (282), and professional, scientific, and technical activities (261).

The low number of active employment contracts indicates that Romania serves as a temporary, not final, destination for Ukrainian refugees. While Romania is initially attractive due to easy access, refugees often move on, seeking countries with better jobs, higher wages, more social benefits, or improved educational opportunities for their children. High rents and the reduction or cancellation of housing aid in Romania further encourage this relocation. Ultimately, the primary factors shaping refugees' choices are economic prospects and social support in host countries.

## 7. Main findings and discussion

Migrant integration is a complex, multidimensional, two-way process. The immigrants have to adapt to a host society, while the host society also adapts to accommodate them. The economic integration focuses on migrants gaining access to the labour market, recognising their skills, and participating in the economy.

We may look to the Nordic countries as one of the best examples of integrating migrants into planning reforms for providing insights into effective practices in Romania. In the Nordic countries the social work, health, and community services sectors account for a relatively high percentage of total employment. State agencies or large firms recruit immigrants, and employment in these fields remains concentrated among certain nationalities.

Based on Rauhut's writing (2025), we synthesise the essence of the Swedish model of immigrant integration:

- “The EU labour migration to Sweden has been shaped by distinctive institutional arrangements, sectoral dynamics, and policy responses that distinguish it from other European destinations.

- The demand for EU labour in Sweden has been highly concentrated in specific sectors, particularly construction, agriculture, and certain manufacturing industries, reflecting both structural labour shortages and Swedish workers' preferences for different types of employment. This sectoral concentration has created distinct regional patterns, with metropolitan areas and southern Sweden attracting most EU migrants while northern regions remain largely unaffected despite experiencing labour shortages in other industries.

- Supply-side analysis reveals that the EU migration to Sweden has been predominantly driven by economic factors, with wage differentials and employment opportunities serving as primary pull factors, complemented by Sweden's reputation for good working conditions and social welfare system.

- The fiscal impact analysis indicates that while the EU migration generates immediate costs through social service provision and integration support, these are generally offset by tax contributions and economic activity over time (European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2021; Christl et al., 2022b). Healthcare, education, and housing represent the most significant expenditure categories, with regional variations reflecting different labour market conditions and service delivery models.

- Sweden's institutional framework has provided considerable resilience against potential negative effects of EU labour migration (Anxo and Karlsson, 2019). The collective bargaining system, strong labour market institutions, and comprehensive welfare state have generally maintained wage levels and working conditions while facilitating labour market integration. However, the growth of subcontracting arrangements and temporary work agencies has created regulatory gaps that challenge the effectiveness of traditional Swedish labour market institutions (Thörnqvist, 2013; Albin and Eklund, 2020).

- The regional dimension of impacts cannot be understated, with metropolitan areas demonstrating greater capacity to absorb EU migration positively, while smaller communities and specific sectors have experienced more pronounced adjustments. This geographic variation highlights the importance of place-based policy responses rather than uniform national approaches.”

In Romania, the integration process of migrants, in general, and Ukrainian refugees in particular, involves a mix of policies, respectively: social policies (granting financial aid for food and accommodation, medical insurance) coupled with employment policies and support measures for integration into the labour market, such as work permits and access to public employment services (ANOFM – Agenția Națională pentru Ocuparea Forței de Muncă, National Agency for Employment). In Romania, the legal immigration is based mainly on multilevel governance and institutional collaboration between central and local authorities. The role of the private sector is poorly represented, limited to NGOs' activities, which are mainly funded from abroad.

In Romania, as in other Central and Eastern European Member States, successful integration is a cornerstone of effective migration and asylum policies, stimulating economic growth, sustainable development, and ensuring fiscal consolidation by increasing employment.

## 8. Conclusion

Migration plays a significant role in *compensating for the EU's demographic deficit* by contributing to its workforce, but it's a complex issue with varying economic and social impacts. While *migration can offset labour shortages and support an aging population*, it is not a singular solution, and its overall sustainability depends on various factors like the skills of migrants, integration policies, and the broader economic context. It can *maintain the size of the workforce and labour supply*, which is crucial for sustainable economic growth and for supporting social security systems like pensions and healthcare. By bringing in new workers, migration can prevent or *reduce labour shortages*, which have become a threat to the *EU's economic competitiveness and ability to fund public services*.

*The impact of immigration on the labour market depends critically on the skills of immigrants, the skills of existing native-born workers, and the characteristics of the Romanian labour market.* As a special case study, Ukrainian refugee flows include many women and those with higher education, meaning that the most affected segments of the labour market will be different from those affected by previous refugee flows, and policy responses need to consider the skills and demands of this new flow. However, the number of active employment contracts registered is small. There is a short-term impact that can create imbalances and a long-term impact, in which case labour demand can adjust to the increase and diversify the labour supply.

*A negative impact on employment or wages for the resident population, driven by the flows of immigrant workers or refugees, seems highly unlikely, especially given the acute labour shortages in Romania.* Romania had one of the lowest employment rates (69.5%) from the EU in 2024. Romania is a significant country of emigration, with over 4 million Romanians living abroad, making it one of the top 20 countries globally for emigration. However, it is advisable for policymakers to monitor developments to identify potential problems at the local level or for specific occupations or regions with a high concentration of immigrants. *The 2021-2027 EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion* recommends better management of migration flows based on strong cooperation between the EU, national, regional, and local authorities, social partners (like trade unions and employer organizations), and civil society. That means better communication between government bodies and service providers, and for involving civil society, businesses, and local communities in the integration of migrants.

In conclusion, migration—both immigration and large-scale emigration—strongly impacts the Romanian labour market. These complex challenges require social policy protection and coordinated responses from political and private-sector actors. *Policy recommendations include a more active migration management and immigrant integration. This needs careful planning, international cooperation, and a broad approach that covers governance, labour, education, and social inclusion. Key methods are establishing legal migration pathways and ensuring safe, legal processes.* Policies for post-arrival support, such as language training, skill recognition, healthcare, and migrants' housing, also matter. From the Swedish integration model, we learn the value of aligning integration policies with sectors like education, employment, and healthcare.

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