FROM MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS TO INTEGRATION: CONTRASTING PIONEER AND RECENT MOLDOVAN MIGRANTS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: Using an exploratory research, this paper aims to gain in depth information on Moldovan migrants in Romania across different generations. It focuses on changes in migrants' aspirations over time and how historical context influences coping strategies. The study compares behavior and experiences of earlier Post-Socialist migrants (pioneer migrants) with recent young migrants in Iasi and Bucharest. Results indicate evolving aspirations and reduced integration barriers, with recent migrants benefiting from technological progress and easier access to Romanian citizenship, facilitating faster integration.

Key words: international migration, aspirations, integration strategies, Moldova, Romania, post-soviet countries, comparative analysis.

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Introduction

Scientific research looking into how the historical context shaped narratives and aspirations of migration in Eastern Europe has generally focused on the Socialist vs. Post-Socialist experiences (Burrell, 2008; Mayblin et al., 2016; Śliwa and Taylor, 2011), yet little attention has been given to the different generations of migrants in Post-Socialism

Romania is a net emigration country and it is widely recognized that over the past few decades the country has experienced significant outflows, with many Romanians leaving the country in search of better economic opportunities and improved living conditions (Dorobanțu-Dina, 2021). Immigration to Romania is less observed and studied.

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Being a former communist country for almost five decades, the country had closed borders and immigration was strictly controlled. In this context, Romania attracted about 21800 migrants from outside the EU in 2018, while the stock of non-EU residents was 54500 in the same year (Roman et al., 2020).

Republic of Moldova and Romania share a common historical background, a common language (Romanian), and a cultural heritage. After World War II, Eastern Moldova was incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. During this time, Eastern Moldova experienced Soviet influence and was subjected to a distinct political trajectory compared to Romania. Moldovan migrants were restricted from coming to Romania during the communist regime, as they were citizens of the USSR, even if they had Romanian ethnicity. The migration from Moldova to Romania increased after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Moldovans being currently the most important and visible group of migrants in Romania. According to the National Institute of Statistics Romania (2022), the share of Moldovan immigrants in the total immigrants by country of provenience is 22.9% in 2018, increasing at 23.15% in 2019 and only 14.12 in 2020. The Moldovans were the second large group of immigrants in 2018, surclassed by Spanish, the first in 2019 and only the fourth in pandemic context in 2020. Romania is the main destination for Moldovan students.

Migration has got far-reaching social implications in the Republic of Moldova, as usually happens in countries in transition (Hachi et al., 2021). The migration patterns of Moldovans are divided between East (Russia) and West (EU/Romania). Economic situation and family network play a major role in choosing their destination. Young people choose to attend Romanian universities based on proximity and their relatives' location. Most of the cases, the small Moldovans' entrepreneurs in Romania search for partners or employees in their origin country (Stoleriu et al.2011).

This article is the outcome of the research project "*EMpowerment through liquid Integration of Migrant Youth in vulnerable conditions (MIMY)*" funded by the EU under grant agreement number 870700, which ran between February 2020 and January 2023. The objective of the paper is to depict the differences and dynamics in integration patterns between various generations of Moldovan migrants living in Romania. We are interested in particular in how the migrants' aspirations change in time, and if the historical context leads to different coping strategies. In line with the aspirations-capabilities framework developed by De Haas (2021), we analyze how migrants' ambitions and capabilities evolved across the three decades.

Using a qualitative approach, our research aims to cover this gap by comparing Moldovan behavior and experiences of earlier Post-Socialist migrants (early 1990s, immediately after the fall of the Iron Curtain) with those of recent migrants at the two aforementioned local sites, Iasi and Bucharest. We employ focus groups to gain in-depth understanding of the aspirations and behaviors of the two groups of Moldovan migrants in Romania, as well as to identify common themes in their responses.

1. Migrants' aspirations and integration across generations: a literature review

It is widely acknowledged that the coping interventions of individuals are influenced by the context under which they develop (Frydenberg, 2014; Mattlin et al., 1990; Pearlin and Schooler, 1978). For migrants, a situational determinant of coping strategies of utmost importance is the historical context in which migration occurs, with its complexity of social, political, economic, cultural circumstances etc. Understanding the historical context is crucial for providing effective support to migrants according to the specifics of the particular generations of migration.

In this study we rely on the aspirations-capabilities framework developed by De Haas (2021), in which migration is seen as a function of ambitions and capabilities. Migration decisions are strongly influenced by perceived geographical opportunity structures, which refer to the availability of resources and opportunities in specific locations (Czaika and De Haas, 2012, 2014; Flahaux and De Haas, 2016). These structures are a result of both individual agency (such as interests, aspirations or ideals of migrants) and structural factors (such as economic and political conditions of the sending or receiving countries) (Bernard et al., 2023; Gotehus, 2021; Schlimbach et al., 2019). Migration decisions within specific sets of perceived geographical opportunity structures are also made with specific aspirations of meeting personal goals (Parreáas, 2001). Investigations of the aspirations-capabilities framework can thus lead to a more meaningful understanding of agency and structure in migration processes.

Coping strategies have been demonstrated to have a mediating role on the aspirations of individuals (Oh and Yang, 2022). It is also understood that different generations have different aspirations, which are shaped by the historical context experienced by each generation in particular (Twenge et al., 2012).

While studying Lithuanian migration to the USA, Čiubrinskas (2020) identifies that transgenerational differences in coping strategies existed between the migration wave triggered by World War II and the one triggered by the fall of the Eastern Bloc. Using an environmental stance, Westheimer et al. (2019) draw parallels between major historical events like the Syrian War and the subsequent refugee crisis and social shocks that impact resilience and coping mechanisms. The research suggests that these shocks play a significant role in shaping individual and community responses to adversity, and can ultimately affect long-term outcomes for those impacted.

An important research finding to the transgenerational coping strategies of migrants is that first generation (or earlier generations) migrants lack social and cultural contacts that might help their integration (King et al., 2014; Kogan, 2011). Ten Kate et al. (2020) find out that first generation migrants engage less in social activities in the receiving country and, thus, their satisfaction with social relationships is lower, pushing them towards more loneliness. As a result of experiencing poorer social support (Bilecen and Vacca, 2021), first generation migrants adjust their aspirations downwards, tending to limit them. Instead, first generation migrants tend to focus on the retention of relationships and networks with their home country (Amit, 2010). The

social capital of migrants within the host country tends to develop over time, validating the network hypothesis (Palloni et al., 2001), with later generations benefiting from networks established by earlier generations. Research by Fiske (1995) shows that early generations emphasize social survival as their primary motivation of belonging. In time, members of early generations will direct their attention to collectivism. Building collectivism helps early generation migrants to tend towards becoming a settled population. Early settlements of migrants allow the development of a collectivist culture, based on which future generations of migrants can set higher aspirations (Gong et al., 2021). Transmitting collectivism to future generations will aid the latter's cohesion and cooperation values by emphasizing group attributes such as harmony, duty or interdependence (Brewer and Chen, 2007). It has been suggested that moral duties towards a specific group, such as a generation of migrants, could inspire individuals to develop aspirations (Qu, 2022). The desire to improve not only the personal life, but also aspirations of making a positive impact on the lives of those in the group can drive individuals to pursue their goals with greater determination and purpose. This can create a sense of purpose beyond individual self-interest, benefiting both the individual and the group as a whole.

The transgenerational coping strategies and aspirations of migrants may therefore vary, with earlier generations often experiencing more difficulty in adapting to their new environment and, thereupon, having lower aspirations. This can be attributed to the higher challenges that early generations of migrants have in adjusting to a new culture, language, and social norms, as well as to more discrimination that early generations have to endure. Pottie et al. (2015) and Stevens et al. (2020) demonstrate that first-generation migrants are more likely to be exposed to bullying victimization and discrimination than later generations. Also, early generations of migrants may have held onto traditional values and may struggle to integrate into their new home, while more recent generations may fully embrace the opportunities and freedoms of their new country, especially when they receive guidance and education from the older generations about local values and norms. For example, Nygård (2017) identifies that children of migrant families are more optimistic, tend to pursue higher levels of education and to aspire for better skilled professions, thanks to the socio-cultural heritage developed in the receiving country by their families and then passed onto them. Thus, as generations progress, the coping strategies and aspirations of migrants can evolve in response to their changing circumstances, with later generation migrants disposing of more interpersonal and social resources (Kuo, 2014).

Rodan and Huijsmans (2021) also prove that later generations of migrants tend to have higher aspirations thanks to the collectivist values transmitted intergenerationally. Hence, as time passes, migrants are inclined to express their aspirations in a more visceral and heartfelt way. Later generation migrants are enabled to develop more sophisticated coping strategies thanks to the social and cultural capital that earlier generations of migrants have started to construct in the host country. Second generation migrants articulate their aspirations in a more embodied and emotional manner, aiming to become, as Rodan and Huijsmans put it, 'more than just a migrant'. This idiom hides the fact that the newer generations of migrants have greater chances to manage their transnationality in an

adequate way and to become, in fact, or to perceive themselves as citizens of the host society. Thus, for second generation migrants, holds more value and can be easier materialized than for first generation migrants, which tend to focus on instinct, individualism and survival. Also, aspirations of early generations tend to be more simplistic, as opposed to those of later generations, with a higher degree of complexity.

Rodan and Huijsmans (2021) also show that the historical context in which migration takes place is constitutive of migrant subjectivities and their associated aspirations. The general discourse of each generation of migrants is shaped by the time and circumstances in which they migrate. The historical context is vital for how they perceive their migration, as each generation of migrants will have its own narrative shaped by historical factors that affect their demographic, socio-economic, cultural and political experiences. Another important finding of the authors is that the historical context of migration is not only generative of aspirations, but also driven by aspirations. Generations of migrants embark on the resettlement journey with some particular desire of being and becoming during their stay in the host country and, as such, create a generational discourse that is representative for their cohort and is also a pivotal component of how that generation perceives and makes sense of its migration.

Čiubrinskas (2020) highlights how migrants leverage their various social and cultural connections, developed from diverse political and historical factors, to navigate the hurdles of migration. Ultimately, creating an environment that supports the successful integration of migrants requires ongoing effort to identify and address changing conditions that can impact the relationship between migrants and the local community.

Bech et al. (2017) emphasize that socio-historical contexts lead to the emergence of normativity in migrational contexts. The authors point out that integrational patterns and aspirations are not merely ideological, but that they change in time. The authors have selected Sweden as an example to prove this idea, whereas the Scandinavian universal welfare state model has continuously developed since the 1960s, shaping the aspirations of various generations of migrants at different moments in time.

For Eastern European countries, Śliwa and Taylor (2011) differentiate between socialist and post-socialist experiences of migration and their associated aspirations. The authors claim that disjunctures between the two periods occur due to a changed socio-political context, as well as due to the changed attitudes towards migration. Post-socialism paved the way for new and higher aspirations motivated by the transition to a free market economy (Annist, 2022; Stenning, 2005).

In line with these research results, our paper fills the gap by considering the case of two generations of young Moldovan migrants in Romania, in two different historical contexts.

2. Methodology

The exploratory study employed qualitative research methods, specifically focus groups with Moldovan migrants residing in Romania. As many of them are located close to

the eastern Romanian border, the city of Iasi has been selected for one of our case studies, alongside Bucharest, the capital city of the country.

The advantage of a focus group is that it allows researchers to gather data and in depth insights from a diverse group of participants in a relatively short amount of time. Additionally, focus groups can provide an opportunity for participants to interact with one another and generate new ideas and insights that may not have been possible through individual interviews. By bringing together small groups of people, we facilitated a discussion around the specific topics: migrational aspirations, barriers and facilitators at home and at destination, integration strategies for the new-comers.

Data collection took place between January 2020 and November 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the mobility restrictions, the research team had to conduct the focus groups online, via Zoom.

In the case of older Moldovan migrants, the potential participants were identified using a snowball strategy. As the elderly migrants are less organized in professional or ethnic associations, we started by identifying two independent participants for each location and they employed other participants. The first contact was made in most of the cases through WhatsApp, and further on the email contacts were exchanged. In the case of recent migrants, the participants were identified through two different methods: first, through students who were following a distance learning program, and second, through youth and students' organizations of Moldovans in Romania. These were identified in the two locations using social media accounts and the contacts established in the MIMY project. In the end, four focus groups were conducted, in Romanian language. The ethical approvals were obtained and the participants signed the informed consent regarding the MIMY project activities, the purpose of the research and the use of the data. No problems were encountered in the communication with the participants and the organization of the focus groups. The focus groups were dominated by a friendly atmosphere and good communication in the group. Table 1 presents the four FGs.

The two groups are comparable in the sense that all migrants arrived in Romania as young individuals, having less than 29 years at arrival and they migrated alone. However, the different historical conditions and environments in the 90's compared to 30 years later, are reflected in different integration processes. The interview guides were similar for both groups, covering topics related to: motivation, aspiration at arrival, barriers and difficulties in the host country, vulnerabilities. Finally, participants were suggested to provide short recommendations for newcomers, in order to ease their integration paths.

Given the fact that the report presents the results of four FGs on the same topic, we consider that classical content analysis (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009) is an appropriate method for our case and it was employed in our analysis. We identified the codes manually, using the transcript of the FG in Romanian language. In the second stage, we compared the FGs and looked at the common codes.

Table 1. The Focus groups composition

Code of the Focus Group	Description
1. FG1_O	Early migrants from the Republic of Moldova; Bucharest; 3 participants; age range: 48-49 years; Migration route: education; Conducted online via Zoom.
2. FG2_O	Early migrants from the Republic of Moldova; Iasi; 3 participants; age range: 47 – 51 years; Migration route: education; Conducted online via Zoom.
3. FG1_R	Young recent migrants; Iași; 5 participants; age range 19 – 24 years; Migration route: education, work; Conducted online via Zoom.
4. FG2_R	Young recent migrants; Bucharest; 6 participants; age range 19 – 24 years; Migration route: education, work. Conducted online via Zoom.

3. Results

3.1. Aspirations at time of arrival

Most of the participants in FG1_O and FG2_O came to Romania during the first migration generation from Moldova, in the 90's, as scholarship holders of the Romanian state. Some came to high school, at an early age (15 years, FG2_O_Participant 3) or to university (FG1_O_Participant 1, FG2_O_Participant 3) or doctoral studies (FG2_O_Participant 1). They witnessed Romania's transformation across the last three decades, as they went through the difficulties of a country in transition along with the difficulties of adapting to a new destination.

Aspirations for migration were related to various reasons and had the stamp of youth desires for adventure, personal development and better life. One respondent aspired to know and experience Romanian culture, which was perceived as the national culture, but without knowing this clearly. Before the fall of the Iron Curtain, not much was known in Moldova about the realities of Romania, and citizens were cultivated a Moldovan identity, instead of the Romanian one: "*As a child, I was one-day astonished hearing on the radio the Romanian public channel, in a foreign language, that I was able to perfectly understand*" [FG2_O_Participant 1]. Her aspirations were followed across her migration period, as she immersed herself into Romanian culture.

In another case, the older migrant aspired to experience new challenges and had a genuine desire for adventure: "*I needed a challenge, as I wanted to study foreign languages and I was just rejected at the admission to a Moldovan university, that was only financing 16 places in 1991*" [FG1_O_Participant 1]. Looking for a new challenge as a path for personal development open the door to migration decision.

Another participant had the desire to study in a western European country "*I was asked if I wanted to study in Europe, and I accepted, knowing that Romania is towards the west*" [FG1_O_Participant 3]. [all of them laugh]. Aspiring for a better education, in a

western environment is associated with the difficulties faced by Moldova in early 90's, when the country was facing severe economic problems. In such circumstances, "*many people aspired for having a better job and a better future*" [FG2_O_Participant 2].

Interestingly, the recent migrants' aspirations are more pragmatic, being also related also to their local destination. The recent migrants indicated that Bucharest, the capital city, is seen as a more sophisticated place, suitable for educated people and for young with high expectations. "*The Moldovans who come to Bucharest are from the upper layer of the society. [Bucharest] is not for all Moldovans. Whoever comes to Bucharest is of a higher level and is usually interested in getting involved [in activities pertaining to the community of Moldovans]*" [FG2_R_Participant 3].

Another participant wanted to live in a large economic city. "*I desire to live in a large city, so choose Bucharest, as it is a capital city. The economy is strong over here. We come here for the opportunities offered by Bucharest. In Bucharest you have the most opportunities (compared to other cities in Romania, e.d.). All decisions are made from Bucharest*" [FG2_R_ Participant 2].

3.2. Barriers in building their lives in the local area

Several common topics related to the barriers faced during the early migration stage were mentioned.

Lack of family support, at an early age, was mentioned as an important difficulty in the case of the older migrants, as family ties were sporadic. There was no possibility of telephonic contact, there were no public telephone posts in the Moldovan home village: "*In the first year I waited for one whole week with an appointment to talk on the phone with my parents.*" [FG1_O_Participant 3]. All participants agreed that the situation is completely different for today's young people who have multiple means of communication with their families. They acknowledged the huge impact of technological progress in communications which changes the migration context for the new generations.

Adaptation was more difficult than expected also due to the lack of information at the point of origin: they did not know exactly where the Romanian cities in which they applied for and received scholarships were situated, so many migrants ended up in cities far away from the Moldovan borders. Additional difficulties were also created by the poor long distance road and rail infrastructure in the early 1990s Romania. Consequently, they reveal a new common theme, of multiple phases, as some of them pursued *several stages of emigration.* A participant was assigned to a city on the western Romanian border with Serbia, and later she moved to Iasi, another participant stayed in Cluj, then in Bucharest, while other arrived in Iasi, and then he moved to Bucharest. Participants agreed that they felt most vulnerable in the first years after arrival, mainly due to lack of family and of possibilities to stay constantly in contact with those at home.

Migrants also faced difficulties due to the prolonged and challenging recognition process for their studies. This hindered their prospects in accessing opportunities: *"The process of the equivalence of studies in the Republic of Moldova lasted for two years,*

during which time he could not find a job suitable for the training I followed" [FG2_Participant 1]. Administrative barriers, related for instance to receiving a driving license [FG1_O_Participant 2] or difficulties during a divorce [FG1_O_Participant 3] were also emphasized, but mainly related to administrative procedures rather than ethnicity.

No barriers were mentioned by the older migrants related to access to the labor market, where the competences of Moldovan migrants were recognized and appreciated. Moreover, in one case, an advantage of being a migrant was reported: "*coming from Moldova and also being a Russian language speaker helped me find a good job at a Russian company in Bucharest"* [FG2_O_Participant 2].

Three decades later, the recent young migrants still face some similar integration difficulties as the older ones, related to education or administrative papers. One common challenge is related to high bureaucracy that was encountered by themselves or by their colleagues in various circumstances, when interacting with education administrative or with public authorities: *„A girl from Ukraine [who came to study in Iasi], nobody in the faculty knew how to deal with her. She had all her paperwork written in Ukrainian, this had to be translated, but nobody knew how (...). You'd expect some guidance and information from people who should know, who should be competent, specialized regarding the whole admission process (...) and they didn't know what to do with her, where to send her." [FG2_R_ Participant 3].* As young migrants have higher expectations, the high bureaucracy seem to create frustration. Another common barrier is related to the lack of information, specifically associated this time to the education system: *"I have the impression that information which should reach foreign students is somehow ignored or left aside and they do not reach the students in due time"* [FG1_R_ Participant 1].

The recent migrants have high aspirations from accessing the labor market. However, these are not supported by the concrete context, as their access to the jobs seems to be jeopardized due to the high bureaucracy: *"Our greatest challenge is to find employment. Without Romanian citizenship, it is difficult to get employed. There is much paperwork to be done, which puts off the employers."* [FG2_R_ Participant 2].

Housing has also been mentioned as a barrier to integration, which has both ethnic-biased and gendered-biased backgrounds: "*Romanian landlords are very skeptical towards girls from the Republic of Moldova. As a Bessarabian girl, it's hard to find rent. Many owners have the impression that Moldovans want to rent the apartment to do video chat*". Interviewees believe that such preconceptions are mostly a result of a lack of information that the local population has about Bessarabians, which ultimately determines a negative attitude towards them: "*The lack of information determines the negative attitude towards the Bessarabians. My [Romanian] colleagues had a distorted impression of us, they asked me if we had computers and internet in the Republic of Moldova*" [*FG2_R_* Participant 2].

3.3. Facilitators and coping strategies for a softer integration

Several facilitators that aided for a softer and more rapid integration could be identified. Social support was largely received from within the school environment or from

the family of the spouse, while the acquisition of Romanian citizenship was seen by many as probably the most important factor of integration.

During the early stages, the school environment played a crucial role in providing support to the Moldovan community. Teachers and colleagues extended their substantial assistance and established important ties with Romanian colleagues, as the Moldovan community was only beginning to emerge: *"I was at the beginning more of a curiosity (for the locals), as my colleagues had not met any person from the Republic of Moldova before"* [FG2_O_Participant 1].

Migrants agree that the acquisition of Romanian citizenship was by far the most important factor for integration, as they have the same rights as the Romanian citizens.

A gendered approach to the facilitation of integration can be observed when discussing the role played by family creation. Moldovan women who married Romanian men and formed families in Romania, benefitted from an extended social network derived from the relatives of the spouse, which helped their rapid integration: "*My husband's family taught me a lot about Romanian history, about the differences between the Romanian regions"* [FG2_O_Participant 3]

In the case of the recent migrants, the facilitators are also related to education, but in a more pragmatic way. Some of them are students, while others aspire to become students. The opportunities and resources were related to receiving a scholarship: *"We are slightly more advantaged at ASE (n.r., Bucharest Univesity of Economic Studies), I am unsure about other universities, but we don't have to pay fees next year if we have any unpassed examens, and we are still eligible for a scholarship for all three years even if we don't qualify for the budget program."* [FG2_R_Participant 2]. In the same context, the access to tax-free studies was mentioned, as Romania has integration policies that support a number of Moldovan students specifically to follow any Romanian universities without paying any taxes. Also, diploma recognition was discussed and this aspect is more contextual, as all of them mention that they chose to study in Romania because their study diplomas from Moldova are recognized.

Unlike the pioneer migrants, the recent ones tries to benefit from the existing, well developed community of Moldovans in Romania: *"the associations of Moldovans provide some extra information, but not much of it"* [FG2_O_Participant 1].

Even within the receiving country, opportunities differ depending on regions. The capital city of Bucharest is perceived by Moldovan migrants as offering better opportunities than, for example, the north-east of the country, which includes two of the cities close to the border with the Republic of Moldova, that migrants often chose as destinations: Suceava and Iasi: "*It is clear that opportunities in Bucharest are way higher than in Suceava*" (young migrant male participant who resided in Suceava for three years, then moved to Bucharest). Even so, such higher opportunities are at risk of being lost if citizenship cannot be acquired: "*Without citizenship, we lose lots of opportunities that Bucharest has to offer*" (young migrant male participant from Bucharest). Therefore, they have the chance to choose their final destination, driven by the best opportunities this may offer.

All the participants in the four focus groups were actively preoccupied about their integration and were willing to reflect on how they managed this process. In the case of the older migrants, the integration process is considered to be closed; some of them managed to move their parents and parts of the Moldovan family to Romania as well [FG1_O_Participant 1, FG2_O_Participant 2, FG2_Participant 3].

However, integration was not a smooth, linear process. As stated by one older participant, "*Integration was an act assumed, proposed and constantly pursued. It involved a lot of individual effort. (…) I made an effort to learn the Romanian literary language, using dictionaries and Romanian language courses*" [FG1_O_Participant 1]

In the case of the young generation, integration is perceived as an utmost need. Even if at the beginning, they preferred to have activities with other students from the country of origin, they are aware that a constant effort is needed for being accepted by the local community. This started just from their arrival to Romania, when "*I set out to integrate from the beginning, I didn't want to be perceived as different from the others*" [FG2_R_Participant 5]

4. Discussions

Our study shows that the historical context has an impact on migrant's aspirations and integration strategies for the respondents of the focus group. Using the input of young migrants from the same destination country (Moldova) living in the same origin country (Romania), who, however, arrived to Romania three decades later than the first migrants, we identify differences, as well as communalities in the aspirations of the two generational cohorts. In the early 1990s, just after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the young Moldovans' aspirations were more general and they were related to escaping the post-soviet country's turbulence and difficulties. Some of them were triggered by a genuine interest in learning more about Romanian culture, which was restricted before. In the case of recent migrants, the aspirations are more specific and pragmatic, being related to pursuing an education and/or finding a job. In some cases, they would use Romania as a trampoline for going to other European countries. Therefore, the recent young migrants seem to be much more flexible in their decision to live abroad and ready to change places for education or work (Dabasi-Halász, 2018).

It also seems that their aspirations are of different nature, and the recent migrants are more determined to succeed – in line with previous results (Kuo, 2014; Rodan and Huijsmans, 2021). Unlike the migration pioneers, the recent Moldovan migrants have access to more and better resources and to a large, already developed migrant network (King et al., 2014); these make easier the adaptation and integration. The results confirm the aspirations-capabilities framework (De Haas, 2021), as the newer generation has better capabilities and its aspirations are higher. In line with Dokadia and Palo (2022), our results highlight that each generation possesses distinct aspirations that are influenced by the specific historical context encountered by that particular generation. Moreover, aspirations

of the recent migrants seem to be driven by the location, as those who are living in an inspiring capital city are encouraged to aim for more.

As the aspirations adjusted in time, the barriers also changed during the three decades, and it seems that respondents that recent migrated has significantly less and lower difficulties compared to respondents from previous generations. Also, later generation migrants seem to adjust and to develop better strategies for crossing such barriers, capitalizing on the economic growth and technological progress in the destination context. The pioneer migrants were more affected by the lack of family contact, while nowadays the respondents may be instantly connected with family and peers who remained in the country of origin. Recent generation migrants benefit from the development of IT&C technologies; transnationalistic opportunities are enhanced by social media and better phone connections and internet facilities. Technological advances in IT&C and internet capabilities make the lack of family support more bearable and also facilitate the access to information in the host county. (King et al., 2014)

The barriers to education as an integration factor changed over time. All the participants mentioned the recognition of studies in the home country and administrative barriers. The respondents that migrated early in '90s mentioned that the access to the labor market was not restricted, while the youth mentioned restricted access to the labor market without having Romanian citizenship. This may be related to the higher expectations youth may have, and also to a more complex and competitive labor market and economy recently developed at destination.

One relevant integration factor mentioned by the two groups was related to acquiring Romanian citizenship. In the case of the older migrants, this process was significantly more difficult and the participants (both males and females) were supported by their Romanian families, after marrying Romanians. In other cases, they should have first found Romanian roots and then applied for citizenship.

In the case of the recent migrants, the access to citizenship is much easier, as reported by Cimpoeru et al. (2023). The Citizenship Law (1991/2010) outlines the specific requirements that international citizens have to meet in order to acquire citizenship. Moldovans are entitled to regain Romanian citizenship based on relatives (such as parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents) who were born in the Kingdom of Romania prior to June 28, 1940, the date of the Soviet occupation of the historical region of Bessarabia and Northern Bukowina. The management of process simplified in time. The acquisition of citizenship was a clear sign of being integrated in the Romanian culture and society for the older migrants, while for the recent one it was mainly the route to an EU passport and a gate for receiving equal rights to Romanians in terms of education.

The integration is differently defined by the older generations versus the new one. The first group considered integration finalized when they received Romanian citizenship and in some cases, they managed to move parts of their Moldovan family to Romania as well. For the younger respondents, integration is seen more as an individual, personal process. Speaking the Romanian language correctly is perceived as a facilitator of integration.

One idea that emerged from the analysis is that integration requires effort, ambition and willingness, and each person has to pay such effort individually (*"you, the migrant, are the one who went there, no one invited you"* [FG1_O_Participant 1]). However, as also shown in the paper, integration is not only a matter of individual agency, but also of structural functionalism through the barriers or opportunities existing at wider societal level (i.e., incentives such as scholarships offered by the Romanian state).

Conclusions

The objective of this paper was to depict the differences and dynamics in integration patterns of Moldovan respondents that migrated in different periods in Romania. We analyzed in particular how the respondents' aspirations change in time, and if the historical context leads to different coping strategies, by comparing the responses of Moldovan migrating earlier (early 1990s, immediately after the fall of the Iron Curtain) with recent migrants in two local sites, Iasi and Bucharest. The results show that aspirations evolved across the three decades, from more general ones, related to adventure, personal development and cultural experiences, to more specific, such as pursuing an education and finding a job. At the same time, integration barriers overcome by the pioneer migrants, related to the lack of family support, administrative papers, access to education, diminished significantly, but not disappeared. The new migrants benefit from the technological and economic progress at destination, are more informed and better connected and have better tools for developing new integration strategies. Moreover, smoother access to Romanian citizenship paved the way to a faster integration, being the most important facilitator of integration.

The study is not free of limitations as it employs qualitative methods, resulting in limited generalizability. Due to the small sample sizes often used in qualitative research, findings may not easily apply to larger populations or contexts. Therefore, it is important not to consider our results as having the potential to be generalized for other immigrants from Moldova, such as labor migrants or older migrants pursuing family reunification. Our results provide information regarding specific aspects and topics, with an emphasis on in-depth understanding rather than statistical representation.

Taking everything into account, the historical context and the dynamics in destination countries are related to changes and adjustments in young migrants' aspirations and in their integration journeys. The new migrants seem to be more flexible and more prone to a circular migration, or to searching new opportunities in other European countries. Therefore, our results can be useful for policy makers in the fields of education and labor or for migration practitioners, in developing strategies and managing migration flows between the two countries.

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