

Following the refugee relocation scheme: Ideological interpretations of interstate shared responsibility in Romania

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Abstract

The number of irregular migrant entries within the European Union (EU) increased by 546% in 2015. Sea arrivals totaled 1,015,078 in 2015, 362,753 in 2016, and 172,301 in 2017. No policy has adequately addressed this humanitarian crisis, partially because of the deep ideological divisions within the EU regarding the implementation of the 2015 refugee relocation scheme. This paper uses interview data (n = 14) to explore how Romanian policymakers and elected representatives interpret the idea of interstate shared responsibility in relation to the EU's relocation system for internally redistributing refugees and to examine what version of interstate solidarity is considered politically desirable. It starts from the premise that member states' reluctance to adopting the relocation scheme was associated with contradictory ideological interpretations of the idea of shared responsibility, as well as dissimilar perceptions of what it means to fairly share accountability with respect to EU-wide migration matters.

Following the refugee relocation scheme: Ideological interpretations of interstate shared responsibility in Romania¹

Raluca Bejan

Introduction

Arrivals of people in need of international protection in the Mediterranean region reached record levels in 2015. Refugee entries totaled 1,015,078 in 2015, 362,753 in 2016, and 172,301 in 2017 (UNHCR, 2018), representing an increase of 546% since 2014 (CJEU, 2017). The front-line states of Italy and Greece have struggled to provide timely processing of asylum claims and adequate protection, reception and integration support for claimants. To assist these states in managing the increased numbers of entries, the European Commission adopted two procedural decisions intended to transfer 120,000 people from the ‘burdened’ front-line nations to the least affected member states (European Commission, 2015a). The first decision was drafted on 15 September 2015 and envisioned the relocation of 40,000 people in need of international protection from Italy and Greece. A second decision was adopted on 22 September 2015 after the opening of the western Balkan route, adding a new goal of 120,000 people to be relocated: 15,600 from Italy, 50,400 from Greece, and 54,000 from Hungary (European Commission, 2015a; 2015c). The relocations were to be distributed over the next two years on a mandatory basis (CJEU, 2017), through the use of an equalizing formula based on four national indicators: GDP (40%), population size (40%), unemployment rate (10%), and past numbers of asylum applications (10%) (European Commission, 2015b). Beneficiaries had to be asylum claimants, hence people previously registered in the EU asylum database (European Parliament, 2015). It is important to note that relocation is different from resettlement. Resettlement refers to the transfer to an EU state of non-EU/stateless persons in need of international protection, whereas relocation refers to the transfer of persons *already* in Europe to another member state (European Commission, 2017a).

¹ A version of this paper was presented at the ‘Unpacking the Challenges & Possibilities for Migration Governance’ conference (University of Cambridge, 17-19 October 2019). This article has gone several review processes, and was last updated on July 26, 2020.

Table 1. Relocations Carried out by Member States and Associated Countries between October 2015-October 2017

Member State	Relocated from Italy	Relocated from Greece	Total	Legal commitment
Austria	15	0	15	1,953
Belgium	361	698	1,059	3,812
Bulgaria	0	50	50	1,302
Croatia	18	60	78	968
Cyprus	47	96	143	320
Czech Republic	0	12	12	2,691
Estonia	0	141	141	329
Finland	779	1,201	1,980	2,078
France	377	4,322	4,699	19,714
Germany	3,972	5,197	9,169	27,536
Hungary	0	0		1,294
Ireland	0	646	646	600
Latvia	27	294	321	481
Liechtenstein	0	10	10	
Lithuania	29	355	384	671
Luxembourg	211	271	482	557
Malta	67	101	168	131
Netherlands	842	1,709	2,551	5,947
Norway	816	693	1,509	
Poland	0	0		6,182
Portugal	315	1,192	1,507	2,951
Romania	45	683	728	4,180
Slovakia	0	16	16	902
Slovenia	60	172	232	567
Spain	205	1,096	1,301	9,323
Sweden	1,202	1,619	2,851	3,766
Switzerland	877	574	1,421	
TOTAL	10,265	21,238	31,503	98,255

*Source: European Commission, 2017.²

The relocation decisions stirred up a political brawl. Different interpretations of what solidarity means, what shared responsibility entails, and what constitutes a fair share of responsibility, led

² Since the relocation scheme was not continued after 2017, the author could not find recent, official statistics on relocation. The European Commission seem to only keep updated records of resettlement cases. The numbers of relocations are only counted for the duration of the scheme, between October 2015 and October 2017.

to political friction among member states. Spain and Germany initially contested the quota agreements while Belgium, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and the UK favoured resettlement efforts (Bărbulescu, 2016; Vanheule, Van Selm and Boswell, 2011). Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic, and the Slovak Republic voted against relocation, and Finland abstained. The states rejecting the decisions advanced various arguments on the matter. The Czech Republic pointed to the lack of consensus among member states. Slovakia invoked the need for voluntary participation in the relocation scheme. Romania denounced the mechanism for merely addressing the symptoms of the problem while disregarding the structural causes that produced it.

Hungary rejected the 'front-line state' classification and declined the beneficiary status assigned by the EU (Bejan, 2017a; 2018). By December 2015, the matter had ended up in court, with Hungary and Slovakia launching two separate claims at the CJEU (C- 647/15 and C-643/15) contesting the validity of the decisions. In July 2017, these claims were dismissed by the CJEU (CJEU, 2017). Romania agreed to eventually sign on to the relocation scheme. By December 2017, it had received 728 refugees (see Table 1): 45 from Italy and 683 from Greece (European Commission, 2017).

These internal conflicts revived dormant East-West political divides³. In opposing the EU mandatory quota system, Eastern Europe was criticized for failing to deal with the refugee crisis and was accused of avoiding responsibility for refugees' relocation (Bejan, 2016). Western Europe succumbed to clichés that branded the eastern post-socialist countries as racist and xenophobic (Bejan, 2017b), even if no empirical research sustains the hypothesis that the East is more culturally intolerant than the West. Little consideration was given to the factors that might contribute to reservations, such as the structural differences within the EU and the unequal decision-making power among member states.

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) called for the extension of the relocation agreement past its 2017 end date (UNHCR, 2017) but the European Commission did not prolong it. The question of relocation fell out of the public eye throughout most of 2018 and 2019, as sea arrivals diminished significantly after the signing of the EU-Turkey statement in 2016; most of the irregular migrants crossing to Greece were now being returned to Turkey. It was brought back to public attention in September 2019, when Germany, France, Italy, and Malta called for the implementation of a system to automatically distribute migrants across the EU (Rankin and Tondo, 2019) and the newly elected right-wing Greek prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, requested at the UN General Assembly in New York the implementation of a burden-sharing mechanism to send the migrants away from Greece (Kokkindis, 2019). Implicit and explicit remarks about how the failure to actively participate in the relocation mechanism was due to the

³ The East-West distinction is loosely overlaid on the former Cold War axis. Within the context of this paper, out of the EU Member States, the Northern nations of Finland, Sweden, Denmark, as well as the Western countries of Austria, Italy, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Malta, Netherlands and Portugal, are considered part of the 'West'. The Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, the Central European nations of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, as well as the Southeastern nations of Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Slovenia, are considered part of the 'East'.

'xenophobic agendas' of the Eastern and Central European countries were again central in these official requests (BBC, 2019; Kokkindis, 2019).

Scholarly research on relocation is scarce. Most literature engages in analytical dialogues on responsibility-sharing mechanisms, on various distribution scenarios, or on the norms of fairness that ground these schemes. There is no empirical data on ideological interpretations of intra-EU solidarity efforts, as they pertain specifically to the transfer of people in need of international protection. This paper presents empirical findings collected through fourteen interviews with policymakers and elected representatives in Romania on the topic of relocation. It critically examines public ideological interpretations of the principles of solidarity and the fair sharing of responsibility in relation to matters of asylum and migration management.

Conceptual background

The relocation scheme was drafted on the basis of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), according to the principle of *solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility* stated in Article 80 and outlined by Article 78 (3), which states: "In the event of one or more Member States being confronted by an emergency situation characterized by a sudden inflow of nationals of third countries, the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, may adopt provisional measures for the benefit of the Member States concerned" (Official Journal of the European Union, 2012). Implicit here is the idea that member states are expected to show solidarity in emergency situations and that solidarity efforts ought to be equally shared by all EU states. This study starts from the premise that interstate conflict originated from contradictory ideological interpretations of the idea of shared responsibility, as well as dissimilar perceptions of what it means to fairly share accountability with respect to EU-wide migration matters.

Crossing the confined parameters of the nation state and grounded in ideas of supranational responsibility, the ethical impetus of equally allocating entitlements within the EU and of equitably balancing the asymmetrical relationships among member states – in other words, equally and equitably sharing responsibility for Union-wide problems – is implemented across various EU policy fields. Supranational cooperation, based on mutual trust and redistributive commitments, has been posited through what Habermas called the "We perspective" (Habermas, 2015, p.10), demonstrated through the principle of shared responsibility and implemented in domains ranging from agriculture, fisheries, transport, greenhouse gas emissions, criminal law, policing, and border control, to immigration, asylum, and safeguarding of fundamental rights (Barnard, 2010; Bigo, Carrera and Guild, 2008; Küçük, 2016; Marklund and Samakovlis, 2007). The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) exemplifies well the idea of supranational responsibility sharing. Besides establishing a EU-wide policy on asylum and immigration (Küçük, 2016; Thielemann, Williams and Boswell, 2010), the CEAS is intended to reduce the inequalities in the distribution of asylum costs through the European Refugee Fund (ERF), the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (EIF), the External Borders Fund (EBF), and the European Return Fund (ERF) (Thielemann, Williams and Boswell, 2010).

Prior to 2015, there was little written on relocation, as the EU had not yet implemented a Union-wide strategy for transferring migrants rescued at sea. The only project in the region, the pilot on Intra-EU Relocation from Malta (EUREMA), was partially implemented between 2009 and 2013, but it showed little uptake, as member states participated on a voluntary basis (Law Clinic Malta, 2015; Moraga and Rapoport, 2015). Scholarly discussion of responsibility sharing gained traction after 2015, when the EU proved unable to effectively manage the increased rate of migrant entries.

Despite the many possible interpretations of the ideas of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility (Nagy, 2017), most discussions on the subject matter started from the premise that responsibility should be divided *equally* among member states rather than *proportionally*. For example, Mathias Czaika (2005) recommended a refugee burden index that equally weighs indicators reflective of economic, demographic, social, and political dimensions to determine a state's capacity to accept asylum claimants, including GDP per capita for economic capacity, population density for demographics, ethnic composition for socio-political acceptance, and governmental efficiency for institutional performance.

Thielemann, Williams and Boswell (2010) created three differentially scaled formulas, based on GDP per capita, population, territorial size, and population density, to identify an index for the overall capacity of different states to absorb migrants. These formulas yielded different scenarios according to the relative weighting of the indicators. For instance, when GDP was heavily weighted, Northern and Western European states were ranked higher than the Central and Eastern European countries in terms of their absorption capacity: Sweden, Finland, France, Ireland and the UK were at the top while Estonia, Romania, Bulgaria and Malta were at the bottom of the scale.

Some proposed, alongside quantitative indicators such as the actual numbers of asylum seekers and the costs associated with the asylum process, qualitative measures related to the reception conditions and the integration programmes in the host state as well as the refugees' preferences for relocation (Carlsen, 2017; Thielemann, Williams and Boswell, 2010). Others examined hypothetical distributive scenarios by ranking the member states from applicant-poorest to applicant-richest and juxtaposed these numbers to national absorption capacities, calculated by GDP and population measures (Bovens, Chatkupt and Smead, 2011). Moraga and Rapoport (2014) developed a Tradable Refugee Quotas (TRQs) system that would consider the preferences of refugees as well as those of member states in terms of selecting their desired refugees.

In none of these cases did the authors discuss the normative interpretations of what constitutes a fair mechanism for sharing responsibility. Overall, the scholarly literature on responsibility sharing examines the chosen indicators in the current relocation scheme and the weight allocated to these indicators. There is little scholarly engagement with juxtaposing absorption-capacity measures to ideological interpretations of responsibility in guiding Union-wide distributive efforts. Some have argued for the introduction of additional measures (Carlsen 2017; Bejan, 2017) while others have used the same indicators but changed their weighting scale

(Thielemann, Williams and Boswell, 2010). Recent papers, however, have argued against the equal distribution of such quotas. In proposing the concept of *differing egalitarianism* to account for the economic, social, cultural, and political differences among member states, Bejan (2016; 2017b; 2018) recommended additional measures for determining the economic performance of a state, including the Genuine Progress Indicator, the Genuine Savings Indicator, and the GDP Purchasing Power Parity. This would adjust the economic measures to have greater weight for wealthier states and lower weight for economically disadvantaged states. Bejan (2017b; 2018) additionally proposed replacing the incentive indicator with socio-political measures, such as national integration schemes, political economy regimes, and the willingness of member states to host refugees.

The selection of particular indicators and their relative weight do not simply replicate mathematical equations, but also reflect political thinking. They depend on how elected representatives and those tasked with drafting distributive mechanisms determine what is considered a fair system for sharing responsibility. Consideration then, needs to be paid to the structural, unequitable differences existent within the Union and amongst the member states. If the Eastern states regard themselves as unequal decision-making players at the EU table, they might show reluctance in equally sharing responsibility for relocation. And if Western Europe constitutes the primary preference for asylum seekers, the already-adopted relocation scheme implicitly disburdens many of the wealthier countries. It is from within such context that the paper explores the ideological factors that contextualize the implementation of responsibility sharing distributive schemes in Romania, one of the countries that initially opposed relocation. Scholarly analyses explored Visegrád countries' response to the EU relocation measure (Nagy, 2017), however, there is no empirical research that examined the political reasons grounding Romania's position on the subject matter.

Migration Governance in Romania

Migration governance refers to the state planning and the management of migration policies within a specific national context (IOM, 2015). The Migration Governance Framework (MiGOF) developed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2015, defines three principles that encompass a well-managed system of migration management within a state: 1) adherence to international standards and the fulfilment of migrants' rights (i.e., compliance with international law); 2) adoption of evidence-based policy responses, starting from the collection, analysis and use of credible data sources; and 3) reliance on strong community partnerships, including migrants and their families, diasporas, employers, unions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to broaden the understanding of migration, and to develop comprehensive management approaches.

After the fall of Communism, Romania has conventionally been a 'sending' rather than a 'receiving' country in terms of migration. Close to ten million Romanians are living abroad (Romania Journal, 2019), adding up to one in five workers or approximately 20 percent of the national workforce (Eurotopics, 2018). Romania represents the second country globally, after Syria, with the largest proportion of its citizens migrating for work; it produces the highest numbers of migrants among states without armed conflicts and civil wars (Bechir, 2016). This in

turn has led the Romanian state to turn a blind eye to strengthening its internal migration governance structure for managing incoming entrants. While most liberal Western European states have implemented multilayered migration management approaches at the national, supranational (i.e., international and regional) and subnational (i.e. federal, provincial, and municipal) levels (Natter and Bejan, 2015), in Romania institutional capacity is fairly centralized. Migration processes tend to impact an interlocking system of accessing and delivering public services within a society (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016); in Romania, however, migration policies tend to be implemented top-down and to fall under the administrative control of the Minister of the Interior (MAI). The General Inspectorate for Immigration (IGI), The Romanian Office for Immigration (with its territorial offices), and the Romanian Border Police, as well as the residential regional centres for asylum seekers in Bucharest and the adjacent cities of Şomcuta Mare, Rădăuți, Galați, Timișoara and Giurgiu, all fall under the jurisdiction of the IGI, and thus of the MAI. There is no specific Minister of (Im)migration for example, and the integration programmes are coordinated by the IGI in collaboration with local NGOs (Bejan, Iorga-Curpan and Amza, 2017): National Romanian Council for Refugees (CNRR), the Romanian Forum for Refugees and Migrants – ARCA, the Organization of Refugee Women from Romania, UNHCR Romania, and Salvați Copii (i.e., Save the Children).

In relation to the first principle identified by the IOM, the legal framework and policy structure that outlines the settlement of refugees in Romania includes the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1951 (UNHCR, 1966) and the 122 National Asylum Law adopted in 2006 (Parliament of Romania 2006). The Geneva Convention specifically deals with refugees' statute, by specifying the terms of granting asylum and the applicants' fundamental rights (Draghici, Iancu and Dascălu, 2010). Romania signed the Convention in 1991. The National Asylum Law 122 details the asylum procedures. It was adopted on May 4 2006 (Parliament of Romania, 2006). Asylum claims can be initiated either in Romania or at the border, by expressing, verbally or on writing, one's will and need. The petition for refugee status is filed with the MAI. Claims are generally processed by the IGI. Additional offices designated to receive asylum applications include: the Romanian Office for Immigration (and its territorial offices), the Romanian Border Police; the Romanian Police and structures within the National Administration for Penitentiaries within the Ministry of Justice (Parliament of Romania, 2006). An amount of 540 RON per month (equivalent to 120 Euros) and subsidized housing are provided for a period of six months for each refugee yet conditioned on the participation in state supported integration programs (Trifu, 2016).

In relation to the second principle outlined by the IOM, there is a lack of public data on how asylum recipients are received and integrated in Romania. Data collection is difficult to conduct without an integrative platform coordinated by the state, that would also involve the local NGOs, processing centers and national community organizations (Bejan, Iorga-Curpan and Amza, 2017). Yet with the IGI being centralized under the MAI, the community partners and the state seem to operate in silos.

In relation to the third principle outlined by the IOM, an integrated framework of service provision among NGOs (e.g., the National Romanian Council for Refugees, the Romanian Forum for

Refugees and Migrants, and UNHCR Romania) is also missing. In short, Romania lacks a comprehensive vision on how migration policy connects to other service areas that facilitate integration and reduce migrants' levels of social exclusion, by assisting them with a variety of basic needs, from language acquisition, employment, and housing to health care and family matters. Refugees' rights to adequate assistance are legislatively outlined, however, since many services (i.e., language and educational training) are provided by the civil society and not by the state (Ilias, 2016) and since data on the outcomes of integration are oftentimes missing or are publicly unavailable, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding the level of integration for the refugees relocated within Romania. It is important to keep in mind that Romania, as a former communist state, did not have a third sector until the 1989 revolution. It lacks the ideological culture of a strong welfare state that subsidizes, as it is the case with the longstanding Western liberal democracies, civil society to take over state responsibility, in this case, to assist with the provision of integrative services for refugees.

Research on the adoption and implementation of the relocation scheme in Romania is inexistent. Most interpretations on the country's political position taken in 2015, would be anecdotal and based on truncated stories generated by media accounts. On that note, former right-wing president Traian Băsescu, referred to the Cologne 2015-2016 New Year's Eve attacks in Germany as a "proof that the Romanian government should join its Eastern European neighbors in opposing a quota system" (The Local, 2016). Current president Klaus Iohannis stated his own disagreement with the proposed mandatory quotas, yet he later indicated that the proposed number under the plan is manageable for the country (Chiriac, 2016). His arguments were framed around the limited reception capacities existent in Romania. He stated that the country could only commit to house 1,785 people (Chirac, 2015) out of the legally assigned commitment of 4180 people in need of international protection (European Commission, 2017).

The refugee crisis is a recent phenomenon and did not affect Romania as much as other Balkan states. As a result, there is little attention from the academic community on this particular country, which may also be whitewashed by the relatively small number of refugees that have been relocated since 2015 and by the fact that Romania continues to be high on the list as a country of emigration rather than immigration. Indeed, the entire Eastern Bloc region within Europe was not confronted with a high number of entries if compared to Italy and Greece, for example. Yet, over 700 people have been relocated to Romania. Romania has a vote in the EU wide asylum schemes and, although it is geographically located within the Eastern side of the Union, it is nonetheless part of the Union. There is little to no scholarly knowledge on the 'refugees' topic in Romania, let alone on how elected representatives have interpreted the distributive mechanism of the relocation scheme. This study brings a major contribution to the limited yet important field of study on EU relocation.

Method

Research design and sampling

Semi-structured interviews (n = 14) on the topic of EU relocation were conducted with Romanian policymakers, legislators, and elected officials. The sample included nine political

representatives and five public servants. The interviews took place in Romania between May and July 2019, in Bucharest and Galați.

Participants were recruited starting from a list that contained the names of public servants, legislators, and Members of Parliament featured on Romanian governmental and legislative websites. Selection criteria included politicians who worked in the Parliamentary Committee for Union Affairs or the European Union Parliament, between 2015 and 2019, bureaucrats affiliated with IGI and/or MAI, and elected representatives from regional city and county councils. Recruitment took place via email, by phone, and in person. Snowball sampling was also employed: the contact list was continually expanded over the duration of the study, following referrals from community contacts and research participants.

Questions inquired about the participants' political views on shared responsibility within the EU and in relation to Union-wide migration management. Interviews were conducted in person and the conversations were carried out in Romanian. They involved a written consent process and were audio-recorded. Recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into English.

No personal/identifying information was collected. This research followed the appropriate data safeguarding measures as outlined under Article 11 of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) adopted by the EU in 2011 and abided by the consent guidelines delineated under Article 7 of the GDPR. The study received Research Ethics Approval from St. Thomas University (New Brunswick, Canada) in April 2019.

Generally speaking, political parties' approaches to migration can be accessible in their programmes and public speeches. However, in Romania, such party documents seem to rarely contain relocation-related references that go beyond the summary-type information merely detailing the numbers of commitments to be made by the Romanian state. As this research aimed to understand the ideological groundings of what constitutes, and should constitute, ideologically speaking, a fair distributive scheme of burden-sharing as it relates to the transfer of people in need of international protection into the EU, it was important to discursively analyze the political rhetoric on the matter, the very same rhetoric that rarely seems to transpire in official party documents.

Sample characteristics

All members of the Romanian Parliament were affiliated with the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the major party in Romania and the one holding the majority of parliamentary seats.

The public service employees interviewed were mainly bureaucrats and ministerial advisors, most of them affiliated with IGI's Directorate for Asylum and Integration or the Department for Integration and Relocation, and thus with the MAI. IGI employs several hundred people in the field of migration. Its main responsibilities fall under a wide administrative umbrella in addressing anything from integration provisions to issues of border control and asylum-related procedures. Most public service employees had worked for IGI for a long time (with up to twenty years of experience).

The age of the participants ranged from 33 to 65. The sample included ten men and four women. The majority were ethnic Romanians; only one person was of mixed Roma and Romanian origin.

A limitation of the study is that members of the PSD represented half of the sample. From a heterodox leftist perspective, the PSD might be classified as a centrist party, but from a traditionally framed ideological point of view, PSD is seen as the major political party on the mainstream left. If the study had included participants who were members of the centre-right National Liberal Party (PNL) or the right-wing Save Romania Union, its results might have been different and much more pronounced anti-migrant/anti-refugee sentiments might have been found.

Data analysis

This project used discourse analysis (Gee, 2014). Transcripts were manually coded. Theoretical codes were generated as the analysis progressed and categorically grouped at semantic levels. Themes/subthemes and codes/sub-codes were interpreted to explore the ideological rhetoric used by Romanian officials to justify political positions regarding the transfer of persons in need of international protection and the subsequent implementation of distributive mechanisms pertaining to the relocation of refugees within the EU.

Insights from the field

The relocation scheme: Inefficient

The relocation scheme was generally seen as inefficient in measuring the capacity of member states to absorb asylum seekers. Out of the current indicators, participants considered the GDP measure to matter the most in determining what is a fair share of relocation commitments. The population of a member state was considered irrelevant in the equation, as was the unemployment rate. Comments indicated that joblessness is difficult to measure in Romania: it was suggested that since many people work under the table and do not pay taxes, they are not included in official unemployment/employment statistics. Participants seemed to have a positive opinion regarding the number of earlier applications for asylum in a member state; this indicator was seen to accurately capture a state's experience in receiving asylum seekers.

However, the interviewees identified the need for a substitute relocation scheme, one that would (1) include alternative qualitative indicators better fitted to capture national particularities and a state's capacity for integration, (2) consider refugees' preferences in selecting their host country, and (3) assign a greater weight to the economic capacity of member states.

Some suggested the inclusion of family ties and the principle of the 'best interests of the child' as qualitative criteria for assessing the relocation pledges. Additional country-specific indicators they mentioned included a state's system of service provision, its administrative structure for managing migration, and the 'fit' between asylum claimants and the host society:

Qualitative indicators could have made the relocation process more efficient, so that relocated people could even see a future in the countries where they were

ultimately led to live. [...] I am referring to ... hmhm ... to the living conditions, to the quality of work, to family perspectives ... religious diversity and tolerance, as indicators that can lead to a more effective integration process for refugees.
(former Member of the European Parliament)

In relation to the national administrative structure for managing migration, Romania was seen as a state that lacks the solid refugee integration schemes that have been present for decades in the West, and one that has limited experience in the field of asylum:

Think about the migration structure in Romania. ... We are few ... There ... only in Berlin there are ... how many ... several hundred people who work in this structure. We only have a few hundred, and this at the national level. (bureaucrat, Bucharest)

Some referenced insufficient state support (i.e., accommodation, meals, pocket money), the low number of refugee reception centres and the limited numbers of beds within these centres, as exemplifying Romania's low capacity for reception. For instance, in 2015, all reception centres in Romania seem to have been running at 100 percent capacity, and so the staff had to improvise by using adjacent spaces such as playgrounds to provide accommodation. The number of reception centres was seen as serving as an adequate measure of a state's absorption capacity:

Some of them can receive one hundred people and others can receive two hundred or four hundred. The number of beds ... and the space [are important] because you have to receive them in decent conditions ... decent bathrooms, water, heat. ... Everything that's needed. (public servant, Galați)

Support for integration and for building absorption capacity was expected from the EU:

I accept that we have to have a certain solidarity ... but these quotas were imposed by whom? ... France and Germany ... and nobody is going to convince me otherwise. If you want solidarity, like I said ... help me! You want me to take two thousand ... seven thousand, then help me create the conditions necessary to keep those people here. I'll also invest some of my own money ... but help me out so I can ensure proper conditions. (county politician, Galați)

Some mentioned that a state's capacity for integration should also be dependent on compatibility among all parties involved, by accepting those better suited to Romanian society in terms of cultural values or religion, while others stated their preference for accepting refugees with high education and human capital:

What kind of a contribution does a doctor have and what kind of contribution does someone with grade two have? Yes, the difference is huge, the speed of the inclusion process, the costs for the inclusion process, and the results after the inclusion process. It's fundamental! (Member of the Romanian Parliament)

In these instances, the integration process would translate into relocating subjects that will generally benefit Romanian society:

They are welcome and they will be able to integrate into society both in Galați and in Romania. But without major imbalances between the need of the country, city, the area, and what you are given to take care of ... yes? Finding a job and entering a production form, to justify your presence, as well as the state aid. (local politician, Galați)

Most participants were in favour of taking the preferences of refugees into account and resisted the idea of forcing them to reside in a country they did not choose. Since those requesting asylum are already on European soil, the same freedom of movement that applies to European citizens should apply equally to them. Some stated that it is contrary to the idea of European humanitarianism that a person fleeing to escape persecution and a lack of freedom of movement will experience a similar lack of freedom to move within Europe:

If we decide to receive them, they should be able to go wherever they want ... Why would I force somebody to come and stay in Romania if they don't want to? Yes? Do I keep them locked up even though they have an open schedule? And then we'll end up with them at the western border because they don't want to stay in Romania ... They will accept it for a while, but in their head, they will still want to go. (county politician, Galați)

It is as if you bought a ticket for a city break but the captain or stewardess says to you: 'Listen, we thought about it and is better to... we leave only five in Barcelona and for the rest, we'll take you to... I do not know, in Krakow, because we thought so.' It is certainly frustrating, because each person comes with some expectations or a plan made at home. (local politician, Galați)

Participants felt that a greater weight should be assigned to economic factors. States perceived as having higher financial capacity, such as Sweden and Norway, were seen as better positioned to absorb migrants and to contribute to their integration into society:

It's far easier for a country that has... which is more powerful economically speaking, to absorb these immigrants and to integrate them into the workforce, compared to a country which has its own citizens who are leaving their home country – as in the case of Romania, to go to work in Italy or France or Germany. It's simply the reality we are facing at the level of the EU. (former Member of the European Parliament)

A proportional system was seen as more beneficial than one that equalizes responsibility sharing within the EU. In this case, the expression of solidarity would be about financially supporting a state confronted with a high influx of entries in order to better develop its system of managing migrant flows:

Whoever takes 100 percent of the migrants, let's say, if someone takes 100 percent of the migrants, they should take 100 percent of the funds to integrate them. Whoever takes 30 percent of migrants ... but not to be told: you take 20 percent of migrants and 20 percent of the funds, and go ahead, fix it. I would rather say the money should follow the people. Exactly like in the Romanian education system. A school that has more students receives more money... per capita. But nobody says take 10 RON [i.e., Romanian currency] for this school and come on, you children go there, there are 10 RON waiting for you. No! (Member of Parliament)

A few interviewees stated that the principle of solidarity should not be applied solely within the confines of 'Europe' and exclusively between EU member states. Participants argued that the refugee problem is not entirely generated by Europe, but is a problem that Europe alone has to solve:

Well, in the end, the Americans also bombed Syria. ... This is also an American problem ... Russian-American but paid for by Europe. (Member of Parliament)

Overall, the relocation scheme was regarded as a temporary solution, one that addresses the issue in the short term but cannot provide a sustainable solution in the long term:

At some point, in five years, we will have another major crisis. Maybe from another area, of another kind. And we'll say, 'Alas, what a big problem!' How easy it was with ... the immigrants then! Well, what can you do with this kind of people with such low IQs and so hypocritical, so short-sighted? The EU, I think, often, on sensitive topics, is half-fixing, as Romanians say, sewing with white thread some pants torn in the bottom. (Member of Parliament)

Participants felt that Romania, as an EU member state, has not just rights within the Union but also obligations. Participating in relocation was seen as the natural way to respect such obligations:

I mean, when it comes to responsibilities we force the more developed countries to bear more; when it comes to rights we, the states damaged by communism, ask for more rights. It's not fair this way either. (Member of Parliament)

In relation to the ambivalent position taken by Romania vis-à-vis the adoption of the relocation scheme – Romania initially voted against the mechanism, but it ultimately agreed to participate – most interviewees stated that the Romanian state was not opposed to relocation per se but to the mandatory nature of the quotas.

Refugee's Refusal to Relocate in Romania

Participants felt that Romania has demonstrated and continues to demonstrate its readiness to relocate refugees. Interviewees noted that Romania participates in EU-wide shared responsibility efforts, though within its capacity. The relatively low number of transfers was

attributed to a lack of responsibility on the part of the hosting member state or was placed on the migrants themselves, seen as unwilling to relocate to the East. One participant mentioned the difficulties in transferring people from Italy, where applicants often disappear after being registered for relocation in order to reach other member states. The general perception was that most refugees preferred other destinations within Europe and did not want to settle in Romania:

We don't even have one rejected application so to speak. ... None were rejected. The ones who wanted to come ... came. The problem was in terms of them opting for it. If one thousand of them had wanted to come, then one thousand would have come. Or two thousand or three thousand. But I told you, they all pick other countries. And they refuse to, when asked about Romania... to provide their consent. (public servant, Galați)

We transferred a total of 728 people ... because that's how many Greece and Italy sent us. If they had sent us 1500 ... we would have taken 1500. Romania took all that it was given. ... That's how much the two states could give. ... There were foreigners that refused ... generally speaking, they were refusing the Eastern countries. Almost all of them wanted the Western European states. (bureaucrat, Bucharest)

Most participants ascribed this reluctance to the refugees' expectations. In short, migrants were unrealistically anticipating a Western European standard of living at the periphery of Europe:

I can't come to Romania and expect to live like in Paris. No, if I come to Romania, I have to live the same way as a Romanian. With as little as this state might be able to offer you. (public servant, Bucharest)

Others attributed the refusal of refugees to be relocated to Romania to the different standards of living within EU:

There are huge discrepancies. ... If Romania offers four hundred euros, and Denmark offers two thousand, of course all of them will go to Denmark. Yes? That's a big difference. (public servant, Galați)

All of them dream about Germany. There is this mirage... Yes... The Nordic countries ... It's the mirage of the states that have higher standards of living, where migrants believe they could be happier, have more opportunities... (former foreign diplomat, MAI employee, Bucharest)

The Romanian state was perceived as unable to provide adequate support for its own citizens, and the conversations circled around an 'us versus them' rhetoric. Refugees were considered to be in competition for state resources with Romanian nationals, who were seen as more deserving. It was emphasized that the state's primary obligation was to care for its own people, and refugees were of secondary concern:

Refugees coming to Romania ... are much better assisted than many of the Romanian citizens. [...] For example, in Romania, there are still very small pensions, of ... 30 lei, 50 lei, I don't know. Or at least they were set at those amounts not that long time ago ... and ... a refugee gets 540 RON a month. Plus, other services that are free, plus non-governmental organizations that come and support them in the process. (public servant, Bucharest)

Border control: Part of solidarity sharing

Participants referred to Romania's involvement in border controls as evidence of responsibility sharing within EU migration management. The positive role of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, was frequently mentioned with a certain pride in Romania's investment in 'burden sharing':

There is this responsibility of border control. It's like in a house, no? I'm in solidarity with everyone who resides on my street, but the door of my house only opens to that neighbour I know and who I think is ok to enter. (bureaucrat, Bucharest)

Romania is among the first states to contribute to the security of the external borders through Frontex, and we support the improvement of this mechanism. [...] Our country has invested a lot in the protection of the external borders... almost two thousand kilometres of external border of the EU that we guarantee from our own resources ... and this is a positive thing, so we see an efficient use of the comparative advantages that ... each state has, and Romania is willing to participate further. (former Member of the European Parliament)

Collaboration with border control agencies was also seen as beneficial in terms of accurately classifying migrants within specific taxonomies, thus differentiating between those in need of 'real' international protection and economic migrants:

It is important to separate the people who are in need of international protection from those who are not part of this category because, unfortunately, among these people there were also nationals of third countries who, let's say ... do not qualify ... uhmmm ... to be beneficiaries of international protection. (bureaucrat, Bucharest)

Very few interviewees acknowledged the misuse of border controls in oppressing migrants. The general reaction seems to have been about the state needing to screen its entrants and to avoid the hyper-mediatized 'terrorism' threats:

Border protection ... is important because no one knows who is crossing the border. If you simply open them ... it is absurd... We don't know anything about who was a human trafficker, who was trafficked, who was an economic migrant, who was a political migrant. There has to be some control over the phenomenon. (Member of Parliament)

This wave of immigrants also coincided with the [terrorist] attacks which took place in Paris, in Brussels ... and obviously when these waves of immigrants entered the EU territory, there was no clear account of their provenance. They were not identified, yeah ... there was no clear identification ... not even of the state they are from [...] and there was also the issue of security. Because practically, any of these immigrants could have been a potential aggressor, or they could have been the next person to plan a mass attack. (former Member of the European Parliament)

Only one participant stated that border controls contradict the idea of humanitarianism:

They defend a border because they have a land border, but they're defending it through a rather unorthodox mechanism for Europe. Well if we defended them, then these foreign citizens would not have the chance to arrive on European territory. They would remain in Turkey. (public servant, Galați)

Romania: 'open' and 'tolerant'

None of the participants reported xenophobic or racist incidents towards the migrant population in Romania. Overall, Romania was seen as an open and tolerant society with much lower levels of racism and Islamophobia compared to Western Europe:

The feedback that we have from the migrants is that Romania is, in fact, a tolerant country. The public perception for people, for the Romanian citizen and the migrant, who mingle in society ... with normal people, is that Romania doesn't have any problems.... I mean I've been working in this field for a lot of years. We didn't have any xenophobic reactions [...]. You will see that it is totally positive ... compared to Bulgaria, even Serbia. (bureaucrat, Bucharest)

I think that Romania is a country with a very low level (infim) of Islamophobia compared to uhm ... to the 'civilized' Europe. Romania did not have ethnic conflicts or religious, we had no large demonstrations uhm ... neither pro, nor against Muslims in Romania. (Member of Parliament)

On the one hand, this tolerant aspect was attributed to the multicultural dynamics of Romania from the time of the Ottoman Empire and the presence of several minority groups in the country, and to the relationships fostered by the former communist regime with the Arab world:

I think that no state can give to another state lessons, moral lessons. Romania is the only state ... in the EU, and I think there are only three states in the world, which automatically offer representation in the Romanian Parliament for national minorities ... for different ethnic groups. We have [minority] representation, we have structures, intercultural departments and this has been effective without difficulties. (former Member of European Parliament)

The Muslim community is a community with a pretty good image in Romania, there are many doctors, for example... uhm... or the Arab community more precisely... uhm... it is a community that we can look at historically, a community formed since the '80s with the study benefits given by Ceaușescu's regime ... So for Romanians, uhm... Arabs, Muslims, the Middle East does not mean something very exotic and new and uhm... negative, there is no negative alterity on this side. (Member of Parliament)

On the other hand, this tolerance was attributed to the low numbers of refugees that have entered the country:

Romania, compared to other countries in the East, for example, who initially voted against the scheme, let's say ... uhm ... Hungary... It does not compare! Because Hungary has had tens of thousands of migrants at least passing through it... Romania didn't have that. Hungary had scenes like the umm... that Budapest station with tens of thousands of people there, Romania did not have that. (Member of Parliament)

Opinions indicated, however, that Romanian society would be prone to racism if more migrants were to arrive:

I'm not saying that Romania is a country that is super friendly with migrants or something like that. ... I'm saying something else, I'm saying that in Romania the subject does not exist. You can't have uhm ... anti- migrant feelings without migrants. What do seven hundred people mean? The picture is like this: we don't see them. We don't meet them on the street, they don't exist. (Member of Parliament)

Some pointed to the lack of extremist parties in the Romanian Parliament as evidence of a tolerant society, especially as compared to Western European states:

Let's be serious, in Romania nobody is shouting, 'Juden, Juden' in stadiums, like they shout at Ajax's matches in the Netherlands. Romania has no extremist parties in Parliament. Um... Le Pen is a shame to France. We don't have anything like that. Um... Vox from Spain, it's, um... a failure, a state failure in Spain. We don't have anything like that. (Member of Parliament)

Others mentioned that populists in Western Europe are using the figure of the migrant as a scapegoat for their society's own ills while others stated that both Eastern and Western Europe are equally xenophobic:

Eastern Europeans aren't more xenophobic or more racists than the rest. Maybe their feelings are more pronounced by the long period of totalitarianism, when they didn't have democratic practices, didn't travel as much, and were not exposed to different cultures. Umm... but as a whole, I think the same attitudes can be found

in the more developed Western societies. (former foreign diplomat, MAI employee, Bucharest)

Romania is a very multicultural country, where a lot of people of various ethnicities live. ... We have Romanians, Hungarians, Tatars, Ukrainians, Roma people, Turks; we have a very heterogeneous country with respect to ethnic provenance. I don't think we are a racist country, quite the opposite – a very open country. At the same time, when people of Roma ethnicity, who were not only coming from Romania, but also from Bulgaria, Albania, Ukraine, and other European states, when they got to the EU in countries like France, Germany, they were... there were some very aggressive reactions against them. Yeah? (former Member of European Parliament)

Despite the rhetoric of tolerance, participants did express prejudiced ideas that otherized migrants as different from the typical European subject:

They have a lot of restrictions in terms of behaviour ... the way women are treated in their countries versus how they're treated within our countries ... how we behave as a civilization versus how they behave as a civilization ... because there are big differences, the way I see it... (bureaucrat, Galați)

Last year I talked to representatives of the business environment in Italy, where one could say immigrants did find work, especially in services, in tourism. ... They are not exactly model employees; their social and workforce integration is not exactly easy (former Member of European Parliament)

Overall, the 'refugee' topic was perceived as politically marginal and insufficiently significant to divide the public into ideological camps:

This kind of debate did not stir up emotions in Romania, did not lead to street protests, to citizen petitions... It did not have a mainstream scope. Sure, there were, maybe, emotions in the far-right area or in the far-left area, but no... they were not very visible, nor relevant to society... (Member of Parliament)

A few participants referred to the possibility of Romania being confronted with a wave of refugee entries in the future, if the numbers were to increase in Western Europe. If Western Europe proves unable to handle the issue, people will move to the East. It was emphasized that a working responsibility sharing mechanism would also help Romania in the future, if it were to be confronted with a massive influx of people.

Participants additionally talked about the problematic terminology used to describe the refugee crisis and about the ill-defined use of the term 'quotas' in administering the issue:

A formula must be found, let's say, by mutual agreement, that does not just translate into a mathematical formula, because, let's not forget that these people are not numbers but they are people, they are human beings. (bureaucrat, Romania)

Analysis of results and discussion

The migration management structure in Romania is heavily centralized and operated under the auspices of law enforcement through the MAI. Most European states have governmental branches specifically focused on human mobility. A consequence of administering an entire public function through the police force is that any official policy will tend to criminalize migration rather than protect migrants. Unsurprisingly, Frontex and the border control operations were seen by participants as part of responsibility sharing efforts. Despite the rhetoric framing Romania's political position as different from that of other states in the region, the insistence of participants on the importance of border control differs little from, for example, Hungary's outlook on the matter. The preoccupation with distinguishing economic migrants from 'legitimate' refugees is similarly problematic: people should not be deprived of the right to seek a better life simply because they left on economic grounds.

Added to the mix is the inaccurate information shared by the participants in terms of the actual details of the relocation scheme. The views of the participants showed a certain level of confusion in relation to official policies. For example, several interviewees did not distinguish between relocation and resettlement. References were made to the yearly quotas from Jordan and Libya in showing that Romania was committed, under Ordinance HG 196/2008, to relocation, but such transfers will be classified as resettlement rather than relocation. Others cited inaccurate numbers on the actual relocation commitments and incorrect amounts allotted for refugees' monthly allowances. Some were unaware of the selected indicators within the scheme. For instance, one public servant stated that only two indicators were part of the scheme, with GDP weighted at 50 percent and population weighted at 50 percent. Others provided vague statements in relation to the relocation process. One participant, for example, kept saying that Greece and Italy did not have the 'capacity' to transfer people to other member states, without being able to explain what were the operational issues that impeded the actual transfers. It is hardly desirable that bureaucrats working in the field are confused about the amount of the monthly allowance for refugees, or the indicators selected within the scheme.

Sharing responsibility seems to be a widely accepted guiding principle within Romanian political discourse, but stakeholders argued that Romania is relatively restricted when it comes to supporting EU-wide solidarity on the matter. As a poor society with a weak state that is barely capable of assisting its citizens or offering adequate financial assistance to its senior citizens, Romania is viewed as having limited capacity when it comes to migration management. Its refugee centres lack resources, accommodation spaces are limited, and few resources are provided for asylum seekers.

The relocation scheme was seen as ineffective, as it fails to capture state-specific factors, such as the low standard of living in Romania and the country's weak migration management structure. The aversion to the mandatory aspect of the relocation scheme could be reflective of a subversive position vis-à-vis the EU as a whole. Romania is a weak member at the EU table, and one that is frequently told what to do rather than being asked about its political preferences.

Rejecting the mandatory requirement of the quotas might be interpreted as a way of getting some leverage at the negotiation table.

A lack of consensus on the political intentions motivating the adopted relocation measures surfaced throughout the conversations. For instance, many interpreted the measure of past numbers of applications by asylum seekers as indicative of a state's experience on the subject matter, although the EU Commission might have selected it as a measure in order to indirectly reward states that are adequately contributing to the scheme.

Country preferences do matter for refugees' chances of integrating in their host societies (Jones and Teytelboym, 2018). Taking refugees' choices into account is commendable, but it is unclear from this study's data whether this would be a benevolent gesture or one that masks the Romanian state's unwillingness to accept the relocation quotas. Romania is not a desired destination country for asylum seekers landing in the EU. If their preferences were to be considered, Romania would most likely not have to relocate many claimants within its territory. Stating that the preferences of refugees should matter as a stand-alone indicator can thus be taken two ways: as a concern shared by the migrants themselves, or as a roundabout excuse to justify not contributing to responsibility-sharing schemes. Regardless, the fact that participants, especially those working in the IGI system, referred to the refugee's refusal to select Romania as an option for restarting their lives suggests that decision makers should take the wishes of refugees into account when designing such redistributive schemes. Forcing a refugee to settle in undesired countries will most likely result in poor outcomes for that person's integration in the host society.

Most participants felt that the Romanian state provides satisfactory integration services. Responsibility for integration was largely placed on the migrants themselves, and failure to 'integrate' was connected with the newcomers' presumed unrealistic expectations. The comment made by one public servant that Romania is not Paris, and hence asylum claimants should lower their expectations, is particularly telling. Most public rhetoric coming from the majority ethnicity, especially in Western democratic states, frames the integration of migrants in direct relation to their place of origin (seen as inferior) and in juxtaposition to the host country (seen as superior). In the UK or Canada, for example, the main idea would be that migrants need to adapt their expectations to match the British or Canadian setting (Alba & Foner, 2015; Bejan, 2011). In Romania, however, since the standard of living is seen as low, the main adaptive issue is framed around the need for migrants to give up the expectation of having a Western European standard of living in order to adapt to Romanian society. This reasoning lays bare the inferior position of Romania relative to the states of Western Europe. In other words, the integration of refugees is not judged on a national-immigrant dynamic, where the host society is assigned a superior position in comparison with the country of origin (implying that migrants should be hyper-appreciative of their settlement in the West) but rather through a dialectic in which the East gets comparatively assessed and assigned a subaltern position vis-à-vis the West. The integration of refugees is no longer a bilateral process but one that takes the East-West dichotomy as the frame of its inclusionary and exclusionary poles. This comparative process symbolically positions Romania in a negative light and leads to an individualizing

responsibility for the exclusion of migrants from the fabric of society: it is all their fault for having Western expectations, and that is why they fail to integrate. The blame game takes on different connotations on the East-West dialectical coordinates. In Western Europe, the blame for the failure of migrants to integrate falls on their foreignness, their particular attachment to ethnic attributes, and their minority status. In Romania, this seems to fall not on any specific aspects that make migrants foreign but on their misplaced expectations which equate the periphery of Europe with the more developed states in the West of the continent.

In relation to the presumption that circulates in the Western media, that the racist and xenophobic fabric of the former Eastern Bloc countries explains why they failed to actively participate in the relocation scheme, a couple of points need to be contested.

First, there is an ideological danger in treating the reaction in the Eastern European countries as homogeneous. Just as Europe is hierarchically differentiated, Eastern Europe is similarly shaped by tiered levels of heterogeneity. It is necessary to understand the historical division of Europe into Western, Central, and Eastern, as well as South-Eastern (Balkan) (Todorova, 2005). The broadly defined category of “Eastern Europe” is difficult to pin down due to a lack of consensus on what constitutes it. The attempts of Central Europe, after the fall of the Soviet bloc, to dissociate itself from Eastern Europe as a more civilized space of rationalism, humanism, tolerance, and democracy translated into the introduction of the idea of “Central Europe” as a stand-alone concept within European institutionalism (Todorova, 1997). The most economically developed parts of the region now claim a distinct place on the map as Central European nations. Once the Central European states secured EU membership, there was a further solidification of the symbolic division of Europe into two new regions, East-Central and South-East Europe. This division represents not simply a geographical boundary but also a symbolic frontier differentiating those deemed more European from their lesser counterparts. For that matter, there are many axes of societal, political, electoral, ethnic, and religious differentiation between Central and Eastern Europe and among the Eastern European states. Taking the eastern part of Europe as a homogeneous, racist, xenophobic, and barbaric political space shows evidence of lazy theoretical thinking in relation to historical and contemporary geopolitical processes that have positioned and continue to reposition the periphery of Europe as the uncivilized part of the continent.

Second, South-Eastern Europe in particular has a more heterogeneous ethnic composition compared to the central and western parts of the continent. In Western Europe, ethnic heterogeneity is closely related to embracing an active politics of multiculturalism, whereas in the periphery of the continent this is an inheritance left over from the Ottoman regime. There is no intention here to claim that tolerance is an inherent trait of Romanian society, but rather to argue that the qualitative results of this study do not support the idea that Romania is more ‘racist’ than other European countries. Migrants in Romania are indeed perceived to be different from national citizens and somehow inferior to them. However, it would be a stretch to infer that this happens any more in the East than in the West.

Conclusions

It is difficult to draw generalizable conclusions on a data set of fourteen interviews. This study, however, provides rich qualitative insights into the political and bureaucratic mindset of those tasked with the implementation of the relocation scheme in one of the EU member states. The paper started from the presumption that, while the current system for transferring asylum seekers across the 28 EU member states might equally transfer responsibility, equal and equitable sharing are not one and the same.

The insights from the field showed that, the reluctance to transfer people into the country could be easily connected with the fact that Romania does not see itself as a strong state, fully equipped with adequate reception and integration conditions to welcome those in need of international protection. The mediatized arguments from 2015 and 2019 when discussions on relocation resurfaced, that xenophobia and racism were the main reasons to explain the Eastern Bloc states' position vis-à-vis the relocation scheme, do not seem to particularly hold in the case of Romania. Added to the conclusion is also the finding that refugees' preferences oftentimes disfavoured Romania as a choice for relocation. The real issue is the precarious economic condition of the country. As one of the poorest member states, and one with limited migration governance structure, Romania does not have the reception and integration capacity at the same level of older liberal democracies, which possess strong systems of welfare provision and more developed policies of immigrant integration. Refugees, in turn, rarely want to settle in places incapable of offering them meaningful opportunities to participate in the labour market. The issue, at its core, is one of inequality. Member states are unequal, hence responsibility should be unequally distributed within the EU, to factor in for differences and to achieve equitable, responsibility-sharing results.

Overall, findings from this study will shed light upon public perceptions of responsibility sharing in Romania in relation to the EU relocation scheme. The results constitute valuable data for policymakers and EU bureaucrats engaged in designing future responsibility sharing mechanisms for relocating refugees. An understanding of the ideological considerations of what constitutes, and should constitute a fair distributive scheme of responsibility sharing within the EU will most likely lead to fewer interstate political frictions and to more fruitful cooperation among member states. The recent influx of people on the shores of the Mediterranean might grow into a repeated occurrence. A workable relocation system would better support resettlement of asylum seekers and indirectly assist them with service provision, care arrangements, and accessing citizenship regimes within the host countries.

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