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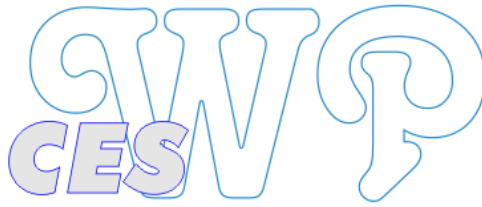
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### Table of contents

---

<b>The role of gender in the European Union's path to earmarked parental leave</b>	112
<i>Line Altenow Høvik SØBY</i>	
<b>Comparison of decolonization history: a sample of Ottoman Empire</b>	145
<i>Yunus Emre GENÇ</i>	
<b>A review of the impact of labor migration and structural changes on the global crisis</b>	158
<i>Olga NOSOVA</i>	
<b>Factors influencing employee' technology adoption in HR</b>	181
<i>Irina IONEL (BUTNARU), Doina BALAHUR</i>	
<b>Students' attitude towards international mobility programmes</b>	200
<i>Răzvan-Ionuț DRUGĂ</i>	
<b>Highlighting the relationship between smart city and quality of life. An analysis of the municipality of Iasi, Romania</b>	219
<i>Ioana BEJENARU, Bogdan Constantin IBĂNESCU, Corneliu IAȚU</i>	

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# The role of gender in the European Union's path to earmarked parental leave

Line Altenow Høvik SØBY\*

## Abstract

*Until ratified in 2019, non-transferable paternity leave was debated in the European Parliament (EP) for nearly 20 years. Despite evidence showing its benefits in reducing the gender pay gap and improving family life, many politicians opposed. This paper tests this assumption using process tracing and Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) to analyze key events from 2000 to 2019 within the EP. A key theoretical contribution is the adaptation of ACF for EU-studies by introducing a new parameter: Internal normative developments. This enhancement allows for a deeper understanding of cultural and societal influences within advocacy coalitions. Findings reveal minimal disagreement within the European Parliament on paternity leave, although increased support as gender balance improved. From the analysis it was evident, that conflict emerged between EU institutions rather than within Parliament. This study highlights the importance of incorporating normative developments into ACF, enriching the analysis of policy dynamics in the European context.*

*Keywords:* European Union, Advocacy coalition framework, process tracing, EU studies, parental leave

## Introduction

On July 12, 2019, a new directive, 2019/1158, was adopted in the European Union (EU), mandating that member states should reserve paternity leave for men from August 2, 2022 (EU, 2019/1158). Despite this being a directive, European governments of both liberal, conservative and socialist affiliations declared that they would not implement this EU law. However, many of the member states' members of the European Parliament (EP) had *advocated for* earmarked paternity leave for men for several years. They had formed a political coalition in the EP that crossed their differences – even in cases despite their national governments' view on parental leave.

This paper seeks to investigate these coalitions within the EP, using the theory Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), which focuses on political coalitions and their internal and external dynamics. In brief, ACF theorizes on the constellation of coalitions in political systems, such as the

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\* Line Altenow Høvik SØBY is graduate student, Department of Social Sciences and Business, Roskilde University, Roskilde, Denmark, e-mail: lmhs@ruc.dk.

cooperation of political groups of differing ideologies in the EP, cooperating on certain single matters of policy which they collectively advocate for. These constellations are called advocacy coalitions (AC), and they are the focal point of the analysis using ACF (Cairney, 2020, p. 173). According to ACF, ACs are characterized by a certain number shared beliefs, values and experience processes of learning. ACs are analyzed using five parameters: policy-oriented learning, shocks, compromise, relatively stable parameters and external events, which all affect the development and constellation of ACs (Sabatier, 1998, p. 118; Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 24; Cairney, 2020, p. 171).

ACF is usually applied to the analysis of national policy processes, however this is surprising given that clear political coalitions also form in the EU institutions. To research these internal coalitions, this paper will attempt to apply ACF to analyze the political coalitions within the EP that influenced the process leading to the adoption of the directive on non-transferable parental leave in the EU, with the hope to contribute to the growing collection of research on ACF in the EU institutions. One of the developers of ACF, Paul Sabatier (1998) argued already in the 1980's that the theory would be beneficial to analyze the policy processes of the EU. However, it is not until recent years, that scholars such as Erik Von Malmborg (2021) and Maren Kreutler (2015) has applied ACF to the EU-institutions, albeit with a focus on the coalitions formed between environmental and energy non-governmental organizations and EU-entities. Sotirov and Winkel (2016) links ACF and Cultural Theory to explain the biases, which the agents in coalitions experience across national divides, however also focusing of partners external of the EU institutions.

In the line of Sotirov and Winkel, this paper will also contribute with research on the cultural developments within ACs, but without including an additional theory. I will do so by adding the parameter for analysis, *internal normative changes* to ACF, thus revising one of the hypotheses ACF regarding policy developments. I believe, ACF can stand in its own as a way of analyzing EU-policy processes by adding a facet of normative and cultural changes within the ACs. Including this parameter in the form of the development of gender balance within the political groups in the EP – compared to the developments in the legislative process towards adaptation – will allow us to see, if cultural and normative changes such as gender balance can affect policy processes within the EP.

Given the causal-mechanism assumptions made in ACF (van der Heijden *et al.*, 2021, p. 167), this paper utilizes ideational case-centered process tracing, which is an abductive longitudinal methodology featuring qualitative document analysis of the individual causal links in official documents. The research design of combining ACF with process tracing is as well a new approach to using ACF. Among the scholars to use ACF in conjunction with process tracing are aforementioned Erik Von Malmborg (2021) as well as Derek Beach and Rasmus Bruun Pedersen (Teixeira and Gabriel, 2022, p. 4). I choose to follow in their footsteps, since particularly the ideational process

tracing is able to trace the development of ideas (such as political initiative and policies) in official documents, such as legislative texts from the EP.

The above considerations and questions have led to the following research question:

*What characterizes the process towards the adoption of the EU directive on earmarked paternity leave in the European Parliament, and can this contribute to making the Advocacy Coalition Framework more suitable for the study of the European Union?*

## **1. Advocacy coalition framework**

Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) is a theory that seeks to explain how groups of actors can influence policy processes (Cairney, 2020, p. 170). This is particularly investigated through three dimensions of coalition development: Belief systems, policy-oriented learning, and policy change (Sabatier, 1988, p. 130). Originally, ACF only examined national policy processes (Cairney, 2020, p. 1972), but since 2011, it has been developed to encompass the influence of interest groups on supranational and intergovernmental politics (Sabatier, 1998, p. 119). Both the three dimensions, core concepts, development, and how this paper aims to extend the theory will be discussed in the following sections.

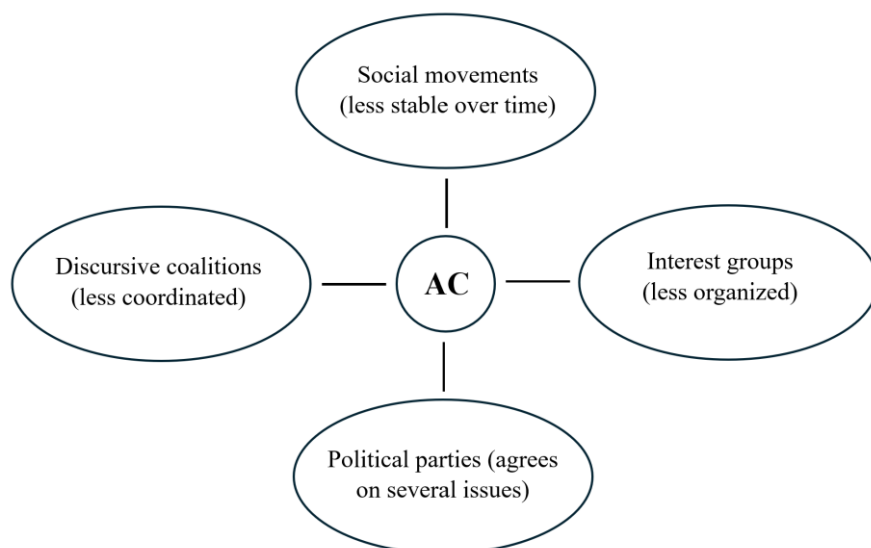
As the name “Advocacy Coalition Framework” suggests, the theory investigates which coalitions of actors influence the development and implementation of a given policy they favor (Cairney, 2020, p. 173). These can be coalitions of parties in parliament, as well as interest groups lobbying for their causes, trade unions forming partnerships, or even businesses promoting their own interests (Cairney, 2020, p. 172). An Advocacy Coalition (AC) arises in the intersection between highly structured institutions—such as interest groups—and less organized groups, such as discursive coalitions (e.g., Black Lives Matter). Furthermore, an AC has a narrower political focus than political parties but a more flexible and compromise-seeking political objective than social movements (e.g., the #MeToo-movement) (Sabatier, 1998, p. 111). This is illustrated in Figure 1, where the differences between each group and an AC are indicated in parentheses.

The institutions and movements in the figure are not mutually exclusive; an AC can have traits from all four fields but is characterized by lying somewhere between them in terms of structure, organization, and value-sharing (Sabatier, 1988, p. 136). While this view of a coalition may appear diffuse, one of ACF’s founders, Paul A. Sabatier, emphasizes that the key characteristic of an AC is that it is a group of actors sharing specific belief systems and seeking to promote these over time: “[Advocacy Coalitions] share a particular belief system—i.e., a set of basic values, causal



assumptions, and problem perceptions—and who show a non-trivial degree of coordinated activity over time" (Sabatier, 1988, p. 139).

**Figure 1. The theoretical placement of advocacy coalitions**



Source: Own illustration adapted from Sabatier, 1998

Sabatier also stresses that the key difference between discursive coalitions and social movements, compared to ACs, is that ACs do not necessarily cooperate on specific short-term issues but share core and policy beliefs. It is important to examine ACs over long periods – at least a decade – because the values within an AC can change through processes such as policy-oriented learning, despite a shared value base (2011, p. 103). This will be explained in the following sections.

First, the role of values should be reviewed. ACF is based on the concept of bounded rationality and therefore does not assume that individuals are entirely rational and can act without influence from beliefs in policy actions – In ACF described as *belief systems* (Cairney, 2020, p. 174). However, actors are rational in the sense that they use information and prior experiences to strategize and achieve their goals (Cairney, 2020, p. 175). The actors in an AC, as mentioned, are shaped by a set of belief systems, which are combinations of how actors believe the world should be and what means are necessary to achieve this world (Cairney, 2020, p. 175). There are three fundamental belief systems that every actor possesses, which influence the coalitions they form:

1. **Deep core beliefs:** These are an actor's fundamental worldview and philosophy of life. This belief system is not just related to policy change but influences all actions of an actor.
2. **Policy beliefs:** These are an actor's basic political worldview and value set, which greatly impact their behavior in policy change.

3. **Secondary aspects:** These are the means by which an actor seeks to realize its policy beliefs, such as how a policy should be implemented and financed. Secondary aspects do not have the same holistic nature as deep core and policy beliefs (Sabatier, 1998, p. 104; 111).

It is especially the deep core and policy beliefs that ensure coherence and stability in an AC. Christopher M. Weible and Hank C. Jenkins-Smith (2016, pp. 28-30) reevaluated the hypotheses proposed by Sabatier in 1993, developing 12 new hypotheses for ACF to operate on. They found that actors in ACs show greater consensus on policy beliefs than on secondary aspects. That is, despite shared policy beliefs on, for example, earmarked paternity leave, actors are not necessarily in agreement about the means required to achieve that goal (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 28). However, Weible and Jenkins-Smith (2016) also found that actors in an AC are more likely to compromise on their secondary aspects than on their policy beliefs. According to Patrycja Rozbicka (2013, pp. 845-846), this may result from actors being more receptive to new information – and thus learning and development – within a coalition where they share certain core beliefs and policy beliefs.

When agents within an AC change their belief due to learning new information, it is called *policy-oriented learning*. The term has its origins in behavioral political science and fundamentally addresses how actors change their attitudes as a result of acquiring (and accepting) new information (Sabatier, 1998, p. 104). In an ideal-type policy process, advocacy coalitions and their members alter their positions when they receive new information about the issue they advocate for – even if this information contradicts their original stance. However, according to Sabatier (2011, p. 105), this is not the case in the real world. In reality, actors are more likely to resist learning if the new information does not align with their policy beliefs. While information sharing and learning within an AC are often successful, challenges arise when it comes to sharing information and learning across coalitions – that is, between competing parties on an issue (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 29). Nevertheless, there are certain conditions that can counteract these challenges. These include:

1. If the conflict has not "escalated", and good communication remains between the competing coalitions.
2. If the issue is prestigious enough for many professional actors (such as high-profile politicians) to participate in the debate, and the forum for the debate is characterized by institutional and professional norms.
3. If the information promoting learning primarily consists of quantitative data and research from recognized scholars.
4. If this learning takes place between ACs operating within natural subsystems (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 29).

According to ACF, all policy processes and all ACs occur within subsystems, which are case-specific systems within a larger political system where ACs compete to have their policies adopted and implemented (Cairney, 2020, p. 174). The ACs emerge within policy subsystems, where the aforementioned belief systems and policy-oriented learning contribute to coalition formation, the process of policy change, and the conflicts that arise during policy negotiations between coalitions. A policy process takes place in subsystems, and thus, the subsystem and the development of policy within it are the primary focus of ACF-analysis (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 17). Policy change and the opportunities for AC formation are also influenced by several other factors, including parameters, events, short- and long-term opportunities for coalition structures, and, finally, the nature and structure of the subsystem itself (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 18). The relationship between these factors, belief systems, and learning opportunities is explained in the following sections.

The subsystem is not the entire political system, such as the nation state of Denmark or the EU as a whole, but rather a part of it. For instance, it could be the EP or a Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or even a policy field such as earmarked paternity leave (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 20). A subsystem is not necessarily independent from either the state or other subsystems, and subsystems may merge or split depending on whether actors accept policy-oriented learning and experience changes in their policy beliefs (Cairney, 2020, p. 174). However, other factors can also alter the structure of subsystems (and their ACs). These include the following parameters:

#### Relatively stable parameters

These are institutions and norms that form the framework for policy negotiations and AC formation. They are the factors least likely to change over time (Cairney, 2020, p. 174). An example of a relatively stable parameter might be the EU's institutional structure, such as the separation of powers and rules for majority decisions in different bodies (EP, European Commission, the Council, etc.). Relatively stable parameters create the opportunity for long-term AC collaborations by maintaining the framework within which coalitions arise (Cairney, 2020, p. 174). However, relatively stable parameters can also change due to external events and shocks.

#### External events

These are events that occur outside the subsystem and can lead to changes within the subsystem and in the structure of ACs within it (Sabatier, 1998, p. 118; Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 24). Such events may include changes in socioeconomic conditions, shifts in public opinion, or the consequences of policies from other subsystems (Sabatier, 1998, p. 119). These are not sudden

changes but rather transient and less stable than the relatively stable parameters, which change less frequently.

### Shocks

Shocks are sudden changes either within or external to ACs. A shock particularly influences the reactions of the opposing coalition and how they use it against the other AC (Cairney, 2002, p. 171). Examples might include the retirement or death of key individuals, a catastrophe (whether natural or economic), or a sudden change in the institutional structure of a public system (Sabatier, 1998, p. 105).

### Compromise

Long-term coalitions often gain significant expertise and recognition in the relevant policy area. When several powerful and equally strong ACs face each other, a deadlock may occur where no coalition can gain the upper hand in negotiations, causing the process to stall (Sabatier, 1998, p. 119). This can be resolved by seeking compromise, which can be achieved in two ways: 1) through a mediator, an external actor who intervenes to mediate between the parties until a compromise is reached, or 2) in a multiparty parliamentary system, where broad consensus across parties is often necessary to develop and implement policies (Cairney, 2020, p. 171).

### Policy-oriented learning

As described in the previous section, an AC can change as a result of policy-oriented learning. This can also affect the structure of a subsystem, as it may lead to changes in coalition structures or even the dissolution of coalitions (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 24).

## **1.1. ACF in the European Union**

It is only in the most recent years, that ACF has been scarcely used to analyze coalitions within EU institutions, for example in Fredrik Von Malmborg (2021) and Maren Kreutler (2015). The authors do, like in this paper, apply a combination of ACF and process tracing to examine the adoption of policies in the EU. However, there have been few studies that examine the formation of, and influence from, coalitions that emerge within EU institutions, whereas aforementioned Kreutler (2015) is amongst them. However, Sabatier (2011) encourages further exploration of ACs within EU

institutions, arguing that this has significant implications for which directives are adopted in the EU. Changes in policies within the EU can lead to significant shifts in core beliefs among member states:

*[...] the ACF should apply well to the increasingly complex set of relationships evolving within the European Union, as European institutions—most notably the European Commission, the Court of Justice, the Council of Ministers, and also the European Parliament—are increasingly displacing national institutions as the principal locations of policy change (Sabatier, 1998, p. 121).*

Building on an analysis of the process leading to the adoption of the directive on earmarked parental leave in the EU, this project seeks to revise several ACF hypotheses and contribute to the development of a branch of the theory focused on international EU policy. Sabatier (2011) encourages researchers studying the EU from an ACF perspective to attempt to expand the theory to encompass precisely this: "The real task of European researchers is to develop falsifiable hypotheses based upon the ACF or other theories [...] and then to test them on a variety of cases" (Sabatier, 1998: 121).

This paper will test ACF on a case – the earmarked parental leave directive in the EU – and its development within the EP, inspired by Malmberg's (2021) study of the adoption of climate policies in the EU. In doing so, the application of ACF to EU policy will be extended to more cases, as Sabatier (2011, p. 121) suggested. Furthermore, the project will attempt to expand ACF to make the theory more suitable for analyzing transnational politics by incorporating the cultural and/or normative background that shapes the development of coalitions and actors' actions within the EP. The aim is to add this aspect to Weible and Jenkins-Smith's revised hypotheses on policy change:

#### *Hypothesis 1*

Significant perturbations external to the subsystem, a significant perturbation internal to the subsystem, policy-oriented learning, negotiated agreement, or some combinations thereof are a necessary, but not sufficient, source of change in the policy core attributes of a governmental program.

#### *Hypothesis 2*

The policy core attributes of a government program in a specific jurisdiction will not be significantly revised as long as the subsystem advocacy coalition that instated the program remains in power within that jurisdiction – except when the change is imposed by a hierarchically superior jurisdiction (Weible and Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 29).

## 2. Process tracing

While ACF can make assumptions about which coalitions are responsible for a government's shift in position, process tracing provides an empirical justification for this hypothesis. This combination of theory and methodology allows for a detailed examination of the development of attitudes towards earmarked parental leave in the EU. The following section outlines the different types of process tracing, the type this project will employ, and how these choices contribute to answering the paper's research question.

In brief, process tracing is a method used to identify the activities (causal links) in a presumed causal relationship between the independent variable (X) and the dependent variable (Y), where the latter refers to the EP's adoption of the earmarked parental leave directive (Beach, 2014, p. 27). A significant difference between process tracing and other causal analyses is that process tracing can follow the development of ideas, rather than only focusing on a "black-and-white" progression, such as changes in the structural development of an organization. Process tracing allows for the tracking of an idea (e.g., a policy) over time and describes how both structural and normative contexts may have influenced its development (Jacobs, 2015, p. 41).

A key element of this approach is that each causal link is not only identified but also described, so that the effect of changes in the causal chain is incorporated (Beach, 2014, p. 32-35). Some of the fathers of process tracing, Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, define the method as follows:

*...the use of histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other sources to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesizes or implies in a case is in fact evident in the sequence and values of the intervening variables in that case"*  
(Bennett and Checkel, 2015, p. 6).

Process tracing can provide empirical justification for assumptions made by other theories, which may lack a well-defined methodology to substantiate those assumptions (Beach, 2014, p. 24). The method investigates case-specific causal mechanisms (M) that connect a presumed X-Y relationship and identifies "fingerprints" that explain developments in, and relationships between X and Y offering "a very strong inference that X is causally related to Y, because we gain detailed knowledge of the empirical process that binds the two together in a mechanism" (Beach, 2014, p. 24-25).

Causal mechanisms need not provide a complete explanation for the connection between X and Y, but they must demonstrate that the mechanism contributes to explaining how X leads to Y (Beach, 2014). Additionally, it is important to delineate why a hypothesis about a particular X leading to Y is being tested, as there may often be multiple X variables that can lead to Y (Bennett and Checkel, 2015, p. 10).

There are three primary types of process tracing: case-centric, hypothesis-testing, and theory-building as well as a newer perspective: ideational process tracing. All examine the development of a policy, but with different aims and approaches. This paper utilizes ideational and case-centric process tracing in conjunction. The following section will briefly explain all four types of process tracing in order to clarify their differences and illustrate why the ideational case-centric process tracing is ideal for addressing the research question.

*Case-centric process tracing* is an abductive approach, which focus on a specific case without including other cases for comparison (Beach, 2011, p. 18). Since the selected case contains many complicated facets and is not generalizable, the focus is solely on one case (Kay and Baker, 2015, p. 6). The aim is to identify the mechanisms within a defined part of the case that may have contributed to a particular outcome (Y) (Beach, 2011, p. 11). While other types of process tracing can also involve normative and cultural developments, this type is more closely tied to concrete historical events, and it examines a longer time period (Kay and Baker, 2015, p. 7).

Derek Beach (2011, p. 20) explains two ways to investigate causal relationships within case-centric process tracing. The first is a deductive approach, similar to hypothesis-testing process tracing, where X and Y are identified first, followed by evidence of the relationship between them. The second approach is inductive, like theory-building process tracing, where causal links are identified first, followed by the identification of X and Y.

*Hypothesis-testing process tracing* deductively tests existing theories of inference between X and Y. In this approach, the study must question whether the causal mechanisms (still) exist in the causal relationship and whether the theory posited about this relationship has sufficient explanatory power (Kay and Baker, 2015, p. 6). This type typically involves multiple cases that are compared or used to strengthen generalizations about the investigated type of causal relationship (Beach, 2011, p. 11).

*Theory-building process tracing* is used inductively and aims to develop a theory about the causal relationship between X and Y. The difference between this and case-centric process tracing is that a causal relationship is already evident – perhaps even mapped out – but there is a lack of explanation for why causality exists (Kay and Baker, 2015, p. 6). Theory-building process tracing takes an inductive approach, where empirical data is gathered before theorizing about causal mechanisms (Beach, 2011, p. 17).



The final type of process tracing, *ideational process tracing*, was first introduced in “Process Tracing - From Metaphor to Analytic Tool” (Bennet and Checkel, 2014). Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel present an extension of process tracing, which increasingly, compared to the previously mentioned types, follows the development of ideas and the causal mechanisms leading to the tangible consequences of an idea – such as the path to the adoption of a policy (Jacobs, 2014, p. 42). Ideational process tracing closely resembles case-centric process tracing, with the primary difference that it allows for a closer examination of ideas and normative changes based on institutional developments (Jacobs, 2014, p. 59). Like case-centric process tracing, ideational process tracing examines development within a specific case over an extended time period (Jacobs, 2014, p. 57). Both approaches employ an abductive strategy. Jacobs himself highlights that ideational process tracing is particularly vulnerable to spuriousness, as an idea can be difficult to delimit, often “living in the shadows.” It is, therefore, essential to identify causal mechanisms that reflect both the institutional changes resulting from the idea and the moments when the idea is articulated (Jacobs, 2014, p. 72).

### **3. Methodology and analytical strategy**

The analysis will be structured in two parts: First, a thorough review of the process leading to the adoption of the parental leave directive in the EP, based on both plenary minutes from the EP and adopted texts. The objective is to identify causal mechanisms that can be considered key turning points in the process toward earmarked parental leave. Second, ACF will be employed to analyze these key moments and identify the coalitions involved, as well as what may have led to these moments based on the parameters of the policy process described above in ACF.

The analysis will draw on ideational case-centric process tracing to allow for theorization (in this case, using ACF) of possible normative and cultural trends at the time of a key event based on the statements of members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in the EP. Therefore, this project introduces the parameter of *internal normative change* in addition to the aforementioned ACF-parameters. The purpose of adding this parameter is to incorporate ideological and/or normative developments within the political groups of the EP, for example, in the liberal ALDE or the social democratic S&D. By doing so, ACF as a theory is expanded with a parameter that describes a more gradual and less drastic development in a coalition than the influence of shocks. This parameter also differs from policy-oriented learning, as it is not dependent on – though it may be influenced by – whether actors in an AC change their policy beliefs as a result of learning. Rather, it demonstrates that actors can change policy beliefs and/or secondary aspects as a result of cultural developments



outside the policy subsystem. In this analysis, the EP is delimited as the policy subsystem within which the policy process leading to the adoption of earmarked parental leave unfolds.

Ultimately, the theory and methodology will be combined so that process tracing forms a historical and institutional foundation for the analysis, thereby enabling the use of ACF to provide a normative or ideational explanation of why the ACs in the selected causal mechanisms acted as they did. Both theories are rooted in the actors' ideas and how they attempt to realize them. Both the methodology and the theory of the project account for actors' beliefs, how they act upon them, and how they may change within a given policy subsystem and in policy processes (Jacobs, 2015, p. 44).

### **3.1. Strategy of analysis**

The analysis is based on 38 documents from the EP which will be coded to map the process leading to the adoption of the directive on earmarked paternity leave for men in the EU. Only four particularly influential documents are included in this article, although the same method of analysis was performed on all 38 documents. The focus of the process tracing will be on documents from the EP, as these documents express the political groups' positions on earmarked paternity leave. This allows for the analysis of coalitions between political groups in the EP and how these coalitions contributed to the adoption of earmarked paternity leave. The discussion on earmarked paternity leave began in the EU during the 1999-2004 parliamentary term and continued until 2019 when the directive was adopted by the EP. As discussions on earmarked paternity leave only began in the EP in 2000, the analysis will be based on a selection of meeting minutes, adopted texts, plenary debates and submitted documents from 2000 to 2019. As described in the previous section, the analysis will aim to identify causal mechanisms that function as key points in the policy process leading to the adoption of earmarked paternity leave.

The empirical selection and analysis will be conducted in three stages. First, empirical data will be selected using search terms related to earmarked paternity leave from the EP's website, through data-driven coding (Jakobsen, 2012, p. 178). Second, these texts will be reviewed to identify the causal mechanisms in the process leading to earmarked paternity leave. Finally, the most influential causal mechanisms will be selected for in-depth analysis using the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), inspired by concept-driven coding (Jakobsen, 2012, p. 183). These stages are elaborated below.

The first stage involves selecting which texts from the EP are suitable for investigating the research question. These are selected from debate records and adopted texts on the EP's website. The search begins with the term "parental leave". From the search results, texts containing the terms

“equality”, “birth”, and “parental leave” are selected, as they are all related to earmarked paternity leave. This results in the selection of 38 debate records and adopted texts for analysis.

In the second stage, process tracing is used to identify the causal mechanisms present in the data that indicate developments in the policy process toward the adoption of earmarked paternity leave. This is achieved using several variables:

1. Which actors are involved? This includes both advocacy coalitions (ACs) and individual actors, where internal disagreement exists within a political group.
2. Whether the coalition is for or against earmarked paternity leave.
3. The specified position of the coalition or actor. Why is the AC for or against earmarked paternity leave?
4. The effect of the identified causal mechanism on the policy process.

Finally, the most influential causal mechanisms will be selected for further analysis using the ACF based on the categorization of the documents, their actors, and their influence on the policy process. These mechanisms will be evaluated based on the degree to which progress was made toward earmarked paternity leave in either the debate or the adopted text, the greater the institutional change, the more influential the mechanism.

#### **4. Analysis**

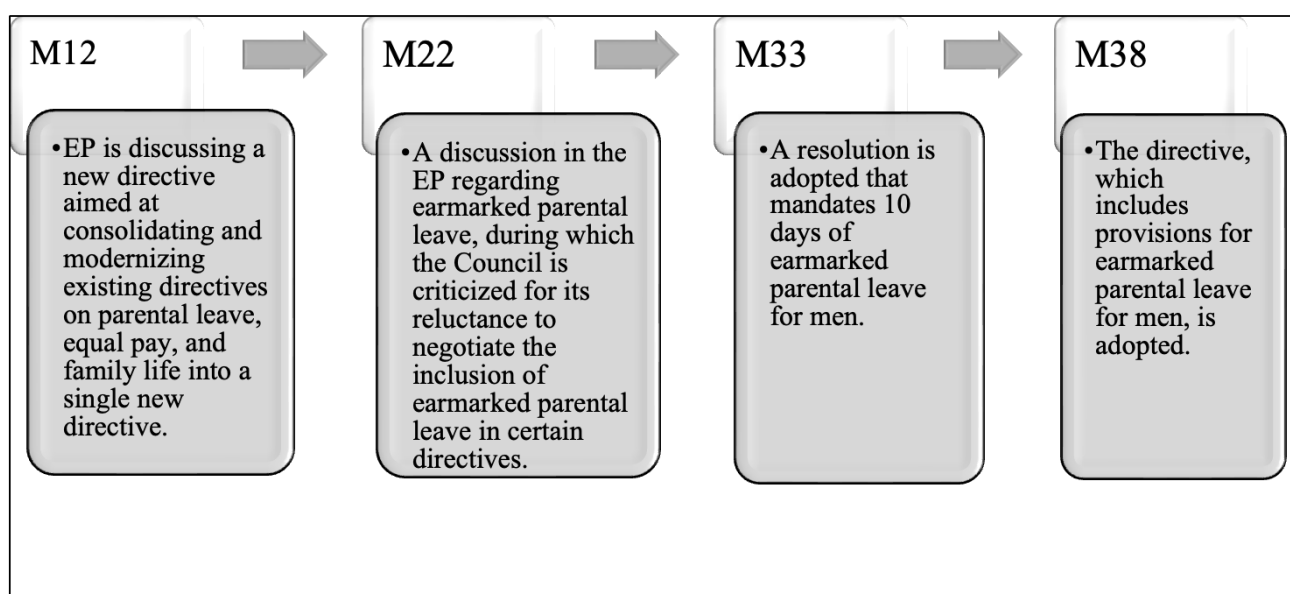
For an in-depth analyses, a four causal mechanisms were chosen as they represent key points in the development toward the adoption of the earmarked parental leave directive in 2019. Each selected causal mechanism is analyzed by identifying the analytical parameters described above from the ACF. If a particular parameter is not addressed in the analysis, it is because it is not present in that causal link. For purposes of brevity in this paper, the selected causal mechanisms for in-depth analysis are located in appendix 2 and the entire coding of causal mechanisms is located in appendix 3.

Through the analysis using process tracing, it is evident that there has been limited evolution in the political groups' stance on earmarked parental leave. There have been changes in the group constellations, where, for instance, ALDE and S&D emerged from earlier liberal and social-democratic groups, respectively. Regardless if development within the coalitions in the EP stems from shifts in actors (new political groups) or the transformation of political groupings, the new actors hold the same position as they did when they were part of a previous coalition of political groups.

A majority in the EP quickly formed in favor of earmarked paternity leave for men – the EP adopted a resolution in 2010, advocating for 10 days of earmarked paternity leave for men, though

this encountered resistance in the Council. It was not until 2015 that the EC took a stance on earmarked paternity leave, recommending that the Council adopt a directive on the matter. While the EC recommended a new directive in 2015, as opposed to the 2010 directive on maternity leave for women, it was expanded in 2019 to include earmarked non-transferable paternity leave for men, with the Council's support (EU, 2019: 2019/1158). All in all, the analysis of the developments regarding earmarked parental leave can be summarized in the following causal chain, which includes developments from documents containing causal mechanisms indicating significant change:

**Figure 2. Selected significant causal mechanisms of the directive on parental leave**



Source: Own illustration, causal links to be found in appendix 2.

Using process tracing we find the developments were clear throughout the policy process of the parental leave directive, but this leaves the question of *why* these developments took place. For this, we turn to ACF in the following sections and how the parameters of analysis might aid in shedding light on the developments.

### *Policy beliefs and secondary aspects*

Although there has been a long-standing majority in the EP in favor of earmarked paternity leave for men, a development was identified within the Christian-Democratic group, the European People's Party (EPP). This group evolved from being generally opposed to earmarked paternity leave to having most of its female members supporting it, and ultimately, the entire group endorsed earmarked paternity leave for men. This is particularly evident in the statements made by female

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) during the debates in the EP: “Mr President, the time has come to talk about shared parental leave, not maternity leave. To support working mothers, we have to involve fathers in taking responsibility for their babies, not oblige women to stay at home” (Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, EPP, European Parliament, 2015).

Among all coalitions, it was clear that although many within the coalitions held different core beliefs, they shared common policy beliefs concerning earmarked paternity leave for men. However, there was often internal disagreements within coalitions on the secondary aspects, more specifically, regarding the duration of earmarked leave and whether it should be a directive, act, or resolution.

A clear evolution can be observed within ALDE. When the group was formed in 2004 through the merger of the ELDR and EDP, its’ policy belief shifted from having no clear position on earmarked paternity leave for men to being in favor. Despite this, ALDE voted against a resolution in 2010, as they opposed directives on earmarked paternity leave, only to criticize the Council in 2019 for not making the directive sufficiently comprehensive. This reflects a shift in both policy beliefs and secondary aspects.

The shift in positions within ALDE and EPP regarding secondary aspects confirms Weible and Jenkins-Smith's (2016) hypothesis that coalitions exhibit greater consensus on policy beliefs than on secondary aspects. Furthermore, coalitions are more likely to compromise on secondary aspects rather than on core policy beliefs.

### *Relatively stable parameters*

In all key moments, the relatively stable parameters remained unchanged. These parameters form the framework for the subsystem and, therefore, the policy process, consisting of the formal rules governing the EU's institutional structure. In this context, the relatively stable parameters refer to the process of developing resolutions, rounds of amendments, and ultimately voting on these. The relatively stable parameters for the EP also include its institutional relationship with the EC and the Council, whereby the EC must propose directives to both the EP and the Council, and both institutions must adopt them for a directive to be official EU-legislation (Union, 2021, §1.3.1 – 1.3.8).

### *Mediator*

In the process leading to the directive on earmarked paternity leave, the EC has functioned as a mediator between the Council and the EP since 2012 and was a key player in the negotiations between the Council and the EP. As the body able to propose legislation to both the EP and the Council, it makes sense that the EC has tried to foster consensus between the two:

*Mr President, as you know, and some of you said it also in the debate, the negotiation process has not been easy. We have come a long way to reach this result and we all had to show flexibility and compromise on certain points. But I am convinced that the agreement on the table is well balanced and preserves the main objectives of our original proposal (Thyssen, EC, European Parliament, 2019).*

EU institutions have existed for many years, and when established coalitions must negotiate a policy, there is often a need for a mediator, as coalitions may have strong policy beliefs and secondary aspects. This was also the case in the deadlock between the EP and the Council, where the EC stepped in and contributed to brokering an agreement. Due to the relatively stable parameters, it is institutionally natural for the EC to assume this role.

#### *Policy-oriented learning*

A recurring feature is that all resolutions and statements adopted by the EP are based on extensive reports and studies, with MEPs requesting this data to gain better insight into the subject matter. Apart from IND/DEM and ENF (Krupa, IND/DEM, European Parliament, 2005), the actors within the coalitions are open to receiving new knowledge and revising their stance accordingly. This is unique to the policy process and helps explain how such a high degree of consensus was achieved in the EP on earmarked paternity leave for men.

#### *Internal normative changes*

In addition to policy-oriented learning and the mediation by the EC, there have also been normative and/or cultural changes within the EP that may have influenced the policy process. The most significant indicator of a normative change in the EP is the increase in the number of female MEPs between the election periods 1999 – 2019, rising by 12.9 percentage points from 27.5% to 40.4% (Women in the European Parliament, 2021). The gender distribution within political groups may have influenced how they voted on the issue of earmarked paternity leave, as well as on other equality issues. This is particularly visible in the evolving positions of the EPP and ALDE on earmarked paternity leave over time. Both groups have seen a marked increase not only in female members but also in women occupying prominent positions within the EU, including EC Vice-President Margrethe Vestager (ALDE) and EC President Ursula von der Leyen (EPP) (EPP, 2021 §Who We Are).

## 5. Discussion

The following section discusses the results of process tracing and how they contribute to answering the research question posed in this assignment, as well as how they may contribute to the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) as a theory applicable to the analysis of European Union politics. Additionally, alternative approaches for addressing the research question will be considered.

Given that my prior knowledge of the subject matter (earmarked parental leave) was limited, the approach taken in this assignment was relatively strict and inductive. This approach entails certain risks, and in this project, it became apparent through the process tracing that the scope of the subject matter was too narrow. As highlighted in the analysis in section 4.0, there has not been much development in the political coalitions within the EP since 2000, and a majority in the EP quickly supported earmarked parental leave for men. Tensions, on the other hand, emerged between the EC, the Council, and the EP. Had the analysis incorporated the Council and EC, it would have been possible to explore the development of earmarked parental leave for men from an ACF perspective in a more comprehensive manner.

Despite the fact that the subject matter could have been broader, the analysis still reveals certain trends within the EP. The most prominent trend is that the greater the number of women in the EP, the stronger the support for earmarked parental leave. This development falls outside the scope of what ACF can typically explain through its parameters of shocks and policy-oriented learning. It underscores the need for an additional parameter within ACF: *Internal normative changes*. Should a future study choose to include the EC and the Council in the analysis, internal normative changes could also be applied to understand how shifts in constellations of Commissioners can influence the agenda within the EC (and by extension, the EP and Council) due to their deep core beliefs and policy beliefs.

The research behind this paper was constructed as exploratory, which, in itself, may not answer a hypothesis that revolutionizes the study of international politics. Instead, it lays the foundation for further investigation – an outcome that is typical of exploratory studies (Klemmensen, Andersen, and Hansen, 2012, p. 27). Based on my observations through process tracing, I discovered, among other things, that there were unusually large disagreements between the EP and the Council regarding the issue of an EU directive on earmarked parental leave for men. Therefore, it became clear that the disagreements concerning earmarked parental leave were more prominent between the EP, EC, and the Council. A future study should include all three actors and treat the EP as a unified coalition against the EC as a mediator and the Council as another coalition. The EP can be considered a coalition based on its tendencies towards policy-oriented learning, as it is usually extremely difficult

for coalitions to learn across coalitions but relatively easy within (Rozbicka, 2013, p. 845-846). This is evident in the EP, where MEPs directly call for more information on the issue.

### 5.1. Theoretical contributions

Although the scope of this analysis could have been expanded to include the Council and EC, it still highlights a gap in the explanatory power of ACF when applied to the analysis of international politics. This is evident in the development of gender distribution in the coalitions within the EP and its influence on the policy beliefs of the coalitions. While policy-oriented learning can explain developments through the reports discussed in the EP, and shocks may influence how pressing equality issues are perceived by the coalitions, none of the existing ACF parameters explain how or why gender could influence the EP's stance on earmarked parental leave. This is where the new parameter of internal normative changes can be beneficial.

There is a missing hypothesis in ACF that accounts for normative and cultural factors influencing the behavior of actors and/or coalitions in international politics. These could include the number of female candidates in EP elections, the percentage of women in national governments (which affects the gender composition of the Council), or the influence of social movements on MEPs' attention to equality issues such as the social #MeToo-movement.

Since ACF was originally a theory designed to analyze national policy processes, there is a need to expand ACF with a parameter such as internal normative changes. EU politics are transnational, and coalitions therefore consist of actors with different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, which may affect their attitudes toward issues like earmarked parental leave. Although the influence of national cultural and normative developments may be challenging to identify within the EP, there are examples of the impact of normative internal changes on coalition behavior in the EP, most notably when the EPP excluded the Hungarian ruling party 'Fidesz' in 2021. Fidesz was excluded because its values no longer aligned with those of the EPP (EPP, EPP Statement on Fidesz, 2021). The justification for the exclusion was that Fidesz no longer met the EU's values concerning human rights, including gender equality. This internal change may have enabled the EPP to act more freely in advocating for gender equality, given that Fidesz members no longer had voting rights within the EPP. However, it is too early to draw firm conclusions via ACF, as the development is recent, and ACF typically analyzes changes over a longer period of time.

Furthermore, the parameter of internal normative changes could help explain the actions of the Council's members, as they are more responsive than MEPs to the national policies in place at the time of the policy process under analysis, due to their position within national governments.



Thus, ACF could be expanded with an additional parameter that indicates which cultural and normative developments are influencing the actions of coalitions. This leads to the need for a third hypothesis to be added to Weible and Jenkins-Smith's (2016, p. 29) two revised hypotheses on policy change, which were mentioned previously in the article. The new hypothesis is as follows:

### *Hypothesis 3 on policy change*

A policy-process may be influenced by cultural or normative changes in an agents or advocacy coalitions' deep core beliefs and policy core, which will inevitably affect the secondary aspects and final policy. This normative or cultural shift *cannot be solely a result of policy-oriented learning or shocks* but a result of social changes in – or around the agent or advocacy coalition.

Since the original two hypotheses merely describe changes for the entire subsystem or within a national policy process, a new hypothesis is added to allow for the inclusion of changes within individual coalitions. This could be applied both nationally, to describe changes in government or parliamentary constituencies, and in transnational organizations, to describe the influence of national factors on MEPs, as mentioned above.

## **Conclusions**

Finally, we turn to the research question posed in this paper: *What characterizes the process leading to the adoption of the EU directive on earmarked parental leave in the European Parliament, and can this contribute to making the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) more suitable for the study of the European Union?*

As the research question suggests, this paper has attempted to answer two key inquiries:

1. How did the policy process regarding earmarked parental leave for men in the EP unfold?
2. How can the experiences from applying process tracing and ACF to the analysis of the first sections of the research question contribute to expanding ACF, so that the theory is better suited to analyzing the EU?

Thus, the conclusion is twofold. As for the first part of the research question, it can be concluded that the policy process concerning earmarked parental leave was primarily characterized by consensus within the EP. As early as 2010, the EP passed a resolution urging member states to implement 10 days of earmarked parental leave for men. In the same resolution, the EP also requested that the EC propose a directive regarding earmarked parental leave. It took five years, until 2015, before the EC acted, and even then, the proposal faced resistance from the Council, after which the EC intervened



as a mediator between the EP and the Council. It thus became clear that the lengthy process towards earmarked parental leave was not due to disagreements within the EP, but rather resistance from other EU institutions. There were, however, some disagreements in the EP early in the policy process, primarily concerning the secondary aspects – whether earmarked parental leave for men should be a directive or a mere recommendation to member states, and the length of the earmarked leave. After several reports and discussions on earmarked parental leave, a near-unanimous consensus emerged in the EP, reflecting policy-oriented learning. In addition to policy-oriented learning, there were also internal normative changes within the coalitions in the EP. This may be a result of an increase in the number of female MEPs, particularly influencing the EPP and ALDE, which saw a rise in female members as their stance on a directive for earmarked parental leave for men became more favorable.

As for the second part of the research question, it can be concluded that the hypotheses and parameters typically employed within ACF, as outlined by Weible and Jenkins-Smith, are so far insufficient for analyzing policy processes within the EU. This paper introduces the parameter of *internal normative changes*, which aims to explain the normative and cultural factors that influence the actions of actors and/or coalitions in international politics – such as national and international social movements or shifts in gender distributions within coalitions. This parameter occupies a middle ground between policy-oriented learning, which explains what can explicitly change the policy beliefs of coalitions through reports, and shocks, which explains how sudden changes can influence the actions of coalitions. The application of this new parameter led to an addition to Weible and Jenkins-Smith's hypotheses from 2016, which aims to make ACF more suitable for the analysis of international politics.

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## Appendix 1. Abbreviations

- AC: Advocacy Coalition.
- ACF: Advocacy Coalition Framework.
- EC: The European Commission.
- EP: The European Parliament.
- EU: The European Union.
- MEP: Member of the European Parliament.
- The Council: The Council of the European Union.

### *Political Groups in the European Parliament included in the research*

- ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (2004 – 2019).
- ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists (2009 – Today).
- EDD: Europe of Democracies and Diversities (1999 – 2004).
- EFD: Europe of Freedom and Democracy (2009 – 2014).
- EFDD: Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (2014 – 2019).
- ELDR: European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party Group (1994 – 2004).
- ENF: Europe of Nations and Freedom (2015 – 2019).
- EPP: Europeans People's Party / European Democrats (1999 – today)
- GUE/NGL: European United Left / Nordic Green Left (1995 – today).
- IND/DEM: Independence / Democracy (2004 – 2009).
- NI: Non-Inscrits (MEPs outside a political group).
- PES: Party of European Socialists (1953 – 2009).
- S&D: Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (2009 – today)
- UEN: Union for Europe of Nations (1999 – 2009).
- Verts/ALE: The Greens / European free Alliance (1999 – today).

## **Appendix 2. In-depth analysis of selected significant causal mechanisms**

### M12: CRE-6-2005-07-05-ITM-029 EN: Equal opportunities in employment and work

The EP discusses a new directive aimed at consolidating and modernizing previous directives on maternity leave, equal pay, and family life into a single directive.

#### *Coalitions*

For: EPP (women) + PES + GUE/NGL.

Against: EPP (men).

No position on earmarked paternity leave: ALDE + Verts/ALE + IND/DEM.

#### *Compromise*

Several MEPs express their desire to include earmarked paternity leave in the reevaluation and consolidation of EU directives on gender equality in the labor market. The entire EPP group votes in favor of the directive but, following discussions with the EC, withdraws its amendments. The highest votes come from the PES group and the female MEPs of the EPP. Despite amendments, both groups vote together in favor of the directive. Overall, the EPP and PES call for a new directive addressing gender equality in the labor market, including earmarked paternity leave. The Commission responds that earmarked paternity leave is unacceptable for the EU to dictate and does not fit within the revision of the directive (Kovács, EC, European Parliament, 2005).

#### *Policy-oriented learning*

The EC's proposal for the new equality directive is based on a series of studies showing significant gender disparities in the labor market, particularly in terms of pay and parental leave. This forms the basis for the proposal of a new directive aimed at improving equality. Only IND/DEM opposes the proposal, arguing that women lack the same physical and psychological capacity as men (Krupa, IND/DEM, European Parliament, 2005).

This policy-oriented learning is evident as the EP's position on paternity leave is for the first time split within the EPP; the women support supra-national measures to improve parental leave conditions, while the men oppose them. Information about gender inequality appears to have shifted the views of female EPP members on parental leave.

### M22: CRE-7-2010-02-08-ITM-016 EN: Equality between Women and Men in the European Union — 2009 (Debate)

'COM(2009) 77 final' presents studies indicating that many member states fail to meet the EU's goals for gender equality in the labor market. This led to a discussion in the EP regarding earmarked

paternity leave, where the Council was criticized for its reluctance to negotiate the inclusion of earmarked paternity leave in any directives.

#### *Coalitions*

For: EPP + S&D + GUE/NGL + Verts/ALE + NI.

Against: ALDE + NI.

Does not address earmarked paternity leave: ECR + EFD.

#### *Shocks*

The report (COM(2009) 77 final), discussed in the EP, concludes that the 2008 economic crisis had a significant negative impact on the labor market, with women being disproportionately affected (§Gender gaps).

#### *Compromise*

S&D, GUE/NGL, and Verts/ALE urged the EC to propose earmarked paternity leave, and for the EP to include it as an amendment in 'COM(2009) 77 final' (European Parliament, 2010). Furthermore, these groups encouraged the Commission to act as a policy broker between the EP and the Council so that earmarked paternity leave could be adopted in a directive.

#### *Policy-oriented learning*

The report shows that women earn approximately 30% less if they have children, whereas men's wages increase when they become fathers (COM(2009) 77 final, 2009: §2.1). This statistic, along with others between this and the preceding causal chain, contributed to the shift in position within the EPP, with male members also supporting earmarked paternity leave. The EPP made a collective statement regarding the issue, highlighting how paternity leave adversely impacts gender pay equality.

#### M33: CRE 19/05/2015 - 15: Maternity Leave (Debate)

Another resolution on 10 days of earmarked paternity leave for men is adopted, and both the EC and the Council are criticized for not acting on earmarked paternity leave for men.

#### *Coalitions*

For: S&D + ALDE + EPP + GUE/NGL + Verts/ALE + EFDD + EPP.

Against: ECR + EPP.

Does not address earmarked paternity leave: NI.

#### *Shocks*

The Council has not responded to or addressed the EP's 2010 resolution on improved conditions for maternity leave. The EP strongly reacts, especially since the EC itself began advocating for earmarked paternity leave in 2012 (Jourová, EC, European Parliament, 2015).

### *Compromise*

The EC wants to propose earmarked paternity leave, but this is blocked by the Council. Therefore, the EC attempts to act as a policy broker between the EP and the Council. Both the Commission and the EP are now discussing the replacement of the directive on earmarked maternity leave for women with a new one addressing earmarked paternity leave for both genders (Jourová, EC, European Parliament, 2015).

### *Policy-oriented learning*

There is a discussion about whether EU directives on maternity leave should be revised. Here, the Council's president indicates that the Council has a significantly different stance from the EP (Kalniņa-Lukaševica, Council, European Parliament, 2015).

### M38: CRE 04/04/2019 – 3: Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers (Debate)

The directive on, among other things, earmarked paternity leave for men is adopted. ALDE (and GUE/NGL) vote in favour, but express dissatisfaction with the fact that the directive is not more ambitious regarding earmarked paternity leave for men. Council representatives are satisfied with the proposal. The EC would have preferred a directive with broader provisions on parental leave.

### *Coalitions*

For: EPP + S&D + ECR + ALDE + GUE/NGL + EFDD + NI + Verts/ALE.

Against: ENF.

### *Compromise*

With the EC acting as mediator and the EP's (almost) unified "a little is better than nothing" stance, a policy (directive) on earmarked paternity leave was negotiated (European Parliament, 2019). ALDE (and GUE/NGL) vote in favour but express dissatisfaction that the directive is not more ambitious concerning earmarked paternity leave for men (Weber, ALDE, European Parliament, 2019). The Council reached a compromise with the EP by negotiating a directive on earmarked paternity leave.

### *Policy-oriented learning*

The directive on earmarked paternity leave for men is adopted after many years of reports showing that women continue to take the majority of parental leave, and there are insufficient incentives for men to take leave. ALDE and the EC, among others, shifted from the position that earmarked paternity leave should not be dictated by directives to a desire for more far-reaching legislative requirements.



**Appendix 3. Coding of all causal mechanisms**

<i>M</i>	<i>Document number Type</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Agent Unique coalitions</i> <i>N<sub>1</sub>= For</i> <i>N<sub>2</sub>= Against</i>	<i>Effect</i>
1	CRE-5-2000-03-02-ITM-004_EN <i>Debate</i>	Resolution on women in decision making	02/03/2000	N <sub>1</sub> = Verts/ALE  N <sub>2</sub> = EPP + UEN	PES abstained from voting on the discussed document, as they do not believe it is comprehensive enough and argue that it should include specific provisions on, among other things, parental leave. The proposal was adopted without the incorporation of improved parental leave provisions.
2	CRE-5-2001-02-13-ITM-015_EN <i>Debate</i>	SITTING OF TUESDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2001	13/02/2001	N <sub>1</sub> = PES + NI  N <sub>2</sub> = EPP + UEN	The EPP supported the proposal from the EC, which is under discussion with amendments to place greater emphasis on the elderly but does not mention gender equality or earmarked parental leave. However, PES called for more focus on gender equality, as well as the inclusion of labor market stakeholders.
3	CRE-5-2001-05-31_EN <i>Debate</i>	SITTING OF THURSDAY, 31 MAY 2001	31/05/2001	N <sub>1</sub> = Verts/ALE+ PES + ELDR + GUE/NGL + (EPP)  N <sub>2</sub> = TDI + NI + (EPP)	GUE/NGL proposed that measures should also be implemented to upskill both men and women following a break (parental leave) from the labor market.
4	CRE-5-2001-09-19-ITM-010_EN <i>Debate</i>	Equal pay for work of equal value	19/09/2001	N <sub>1</sub> = PES + (female) EPP + GUE/NGL  N <sub>2</sub> = EDD (not against national laws, but EU-law)	The document discussed deals with equal conditions in the labor market, with a primary focus on women in leadership roles. Several from the pro-group argue that increasing the number of women in top-positions and ensuring pay and working condition equality would resolve the issue of gender equality in parental leave. There are calls for quotas and greater emphasis on this issue.
5	CRE-5-2001-10-23_EN <i>Debate</i>	Employment guidelines for 2002/Joint employment report 2001	23/10/2001	N <sub>1</sub> = PES + Verts/ALE + GUE/NGL + UEN  N <sub>2</sub> = ELDR+ EPP (except Astrid Lulling)	Verts/ALE and ELDR proposed amendments to introduce greater flexibility for women and men in the labor market after childbirth, but these were rejected.
6	A5-0067/2002 <i>Adopted text – Resolution</i>	Annual Report on equal opportunities for women and men in the European Union 2000	25/04/2002	N <sub>1</sub> = EP	Member states are urged to improve parental leave conditions for men.
7	CRE-5-2002-06-11-ITM-013_EN	Equal treatment for men and women (continued)	11/06/2002	N <sub>1</sub> = PES + Verts/ALE + ELDR	Earmarked parental leave is not included in the adopted text as a directive. Instead, it is agreed that

	<i>Debate</i>			+ GUE/NGL + UEN  N <sub>2</sub> = EPP (except Astrid Lulling)	parents have the right to return to an equivalent position after parental leave, provided this is also adopted in national legislation.
8	CRE-5-2002-06-12-ITM-005_EN <i>Debate</i>	Enlargement of the Union	12/06/2002		Although earmarked parental leave is not specifically mentioned by anyone other than Karamanou from PES, points are identified where prospective member states must improve their gender equality.
9	CRE-5-2002-09-24-ITM-012_EN <i>Debate</i>	European guidelines on employment	24/09/2002	N <sub>1</sub> = ELDR N <sub>2</sub> =	Only ELDR mentions gender equality in the context of parental leave.
10	2002/2025(INI) <i>Adopted text - Resolution</i>	European Parliament resolution on gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament	13/03/2003	N <sub>1</sub> = EP	Member states are encouraged to ensure parents return to the same or similar positions after parental leave.
11	P5_TA(2004)0152 <i>Adopted text - Resolution</i>	Work, the family and private life	09/03/2004	N <sub>1</sub> = EP	Member states are urged to extend parental leave, introduce earmarked parental leave, and ensure that parents return to the same or a similar position after leave.  This is the first resolution where earmarked parental leave is specifically mentioned.
12	CRE-6-2005-07-05-ITM-029_EN <i>Debate</i>	Equal opportunities in employment and work	05/07/2005	N <sub>1</sub> = EPP (female) + PES + GUE/NGL  N <sub>2</sub> = EPP (male)	EPP women would like earmarked parental leave to be included in the reevaluation of the EU-directive on gender equality in the labor market.  The EPP as a whole supports the introduction of an entirely new directive addressing social gender equality, which goes beyond simply equal pay and unemployment for women. PES supports this and insists on the inclusion of earmarked parental leave.  The Commission responds by stating that earmarked parental leave is an unacceptable issue for the EU to dictate and does not fit within the revision of the directive.
13	CRE-6-2005-07-06-ITM-023_EN <i>Debate</i>	Debates – Explanations of vote	06/07/2005	N <sub>1</sub> = GUE/NGL  N <sub>2</sub> = EPP + IND/DEM	EPP supports steps toward gender equality but is opposed to earmarked parental leave.

The role of gender in the European Union's path to earmarked parental leave

14	P6_TA(2005)0283 <i>Adopted text – Directive</i>	European Parliament legislative resolution on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation	06/07/2005		Member states are encouraged to introduce earmarked parental leave for men, but it is emphasized that this will not be made into a directive. Gender discrimination in parental leave is defined.
15	P6_TA(2006)0029 <i>Adopted text – Resolution</i>	European Parliament resolution on the future of the Lisbon Strategy from the point of view of the gender perspective	19/01/2006		Member states are urged to raise awareness of parental leave for fathers and make it more attractive.
16	CRE-6-2006-06-01-ITM-003_EN <i>Debate</i>	Equal opportunities and equal treatment in employment and occupation (debate)	01/06/2006	N <sub>1</sub> = PES + GUE/NGL  N <sub>2</sub> = EPP + IND/DEM	The Commission opens up the possibility of beginning studies that could lead to a proposal for a directive on earmarked parental leave. This is merely a statement, but earmarked parental leave is formally suggested as an encouragement to member states.
17	P6_TA(2007)0423 <i>Adopted text – Resolution</i>	European Parliament resolution of 27 September 2007 on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2007	27/09/2007	N <sub>1</sub> = EP	The EC is urged to investigate paternal leave and ways to improve gender equality in the area of parental leave. Member states are encouraged to provide equal compensation for parental leave for both men and women, so that women are not perceived as a greater financial burden for an employer.
18	CRE-6-2008-09-02-ITM-004_EN <i>Debate</i>	Social Package (First part) (debate)	02/09/2008	N <sub>1</sub> = PES + EPP  N <sub>2</sub> = EFD	The British delegation will not take part in the directive on gender equality in parental leave. The EPP would like to extend the mother's earmarked parental leave but prefers that a directive for earmarked parental leave for both parents be created instead.
19	CRE-6-2008-09-02-ITM-014_EN <i>Debate</i>	Equality between women and men (debate)	02/09/2008	N <sub>1</sub> = EPP + PES  N <sub>2</sub> = IND/DEM	The Commission states that, despite labor market stakeholders being positively inclined toward earmarked parental leave, it is not working on a proposal for this. IND/DEM does not see inequality as a result of gender, but rather as a matter of moral failing.

20	P6_TA(2008)0399 <i>Adopted text – Resolution</i>	European Parliament resolution of 3 September 2008 on Equality between women and men - 2008	03/09/2008	N <sub>1</sub> = EP	It is emphasized that fathers' parental leave is also essential for achieving gender equality in the labor market.
21	P6_TA(2009)0019 <i>Adopted text – Resolution</i>	European Parliament resolution of 14 January 2009 on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union 2004-2008	14/01/2009	N <sub>1</sub> = EP	Member states are urged to provide equal compensation for parental leave for both men and women, so that women are not considered a greater expense for the employer.
22	CRE-7-2010-02-08-ITM-016_EN <i>Debate</i>	Equality between women and men in the European Union — 2009 (debate)	08/02/2010	N <sub>1</sub> = EPP + S&D + GUE/NGL + Verts/ALE  N <sub>2</sub> = ALDE + NI + EFD +	gender equality – they also emphasize men's rights and the equal distribution of domestic labor. ALDE supports gender equality but does not want directives in this area.
23	P7_TA(2010)0021 <i>Adopted text – Resolution</i>	European Parliament resolution of 10 February 2010 on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2009	10/02/2010	N <sub>1</sub> = EP	Criticism is directed at the Council for not having adopted any directives on earmarked parental leave for men.
24	P7_TA(2010)0231 <i>Adopted text – Resolution</i>	European Parliament resolution of 17 June 2010 on gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis	17/06/2010	N <sub>1</sub> = EP	The EC is urged to submit a proposal for earmarked parental leave for men to the Council and EP.
25	P7_TA(2011)0085 <i>Adopted text – Resolution</i>	European Parliament resolution of 8 March 2011 on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2010	08/03/2011	N <sub>1</sub> = EP	The Council is urged to address the EP's proposal for a directive on gender equality and parental leave from 2010.
26	CRE-7-2011-10-25-ITM-015_EN <i>Debate</i>	State of the play of the Maternity Leave Directive (debate)	25/10/2011	N <sub>1</sub> = EPP + S&D + GUE/NGL + Verts/ALE + ALDE  N <sub>2</sub> = EFD + ECR	The President of the EU Council emphasizes that they still do not intend to work on a directive for earmarked parental leave. The EP seeks to introduce earmarked parental leave for each parent. This is strongly criticized by the EFD. The Maternity Leave Directive has not yet been adopted, as it is being blocked by the Council.

## The role of gender in the European Union's path to earmarked parental leave

					ECR calls earmarked parental leave economically unrealistic.
27	CRE-7-2012-03-12-ITM-017_EN <i>Debate</i>	Equality between women and men in the European Union - 2011 - Women in political decision-making (debate)	12/03/2012	N <sub>1</sub> = ALDE + S&D + EPP + Verts/ALE + GUE/NGL  N <sub>2</sub> = ECR + EFD	ALDE proposed measures, including earmarked parental leave. S&D urges the Council to proceed with earmarked parental leave. The Commission begins to realize that earmarked parental leave is linked to inequality in the labor market.
28	P7_TA(2012)0069 <i>Adopted text – Resolution</i>	European Parliament resolution of 13 March 2012 on equality between women and men in the European Union - 2011	13/03/2012	N <sub>1</sub> = EP	Member states are once again urged to consider introducing earmarked parental leave for men.
29	CRE-7-2012-05-24-ITM-005_EN <i>Debate</i>	Equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value (debate)	24/05/2012	N <sub>1</sub> = GUE/NGL + S&D + EPP  N <sub>2</sub> = None opposed to non-transferable parental leave.	The EPP now strongly advocates for gender equality in the area of parental leave, alongside S&D and GUE/NGL.
30	CRE-7-2012-09-10-ITM-027_EN <i>Debate</i>	Women's working conditions in the service sector (short presentation)	10/09/2012	N <sub>1</sub> = EPP + Verts/ALE + S&D N <sub>2</sub> = ALDE + ECR + NI	Iosif Matula (EPP): “We need more effective policies promoting the balance between work and family life, especially as the overwhelming majority of parents who apply for parental leave are women, an inequality which is also being felt by children”
31	CRE-8-2015-03-10-ITM-012-10_EN <i>Debate</i>	Progress on equality between women and men in the EU in 2013	10/03/2015	N <sub>1</sub> = S&D + NI + GUE/NGL + ALDE + Verts/ALE  N <sub>2</sub> = ECR + EPP + NI + EFDD	The EPP was divided in their voting. The EC is again urged to propose 10 days of earmarked parental leave for men.
32	CRE-8-2015-05-19-ITM-015_EN <i>Debate</i>	Maternity Leave (Debate)	19/05/2015	N <sub>1</sub> = S&D + ALDE + EPP + GUE/NGL + Verts/ALE + EFDD + EPP  N <sub>2</sub> = ECR + NI + EPP	The revision of the EU directives on parental leave is discussed. Here, the Council's president states that the Council holds a significantly different position from the EP. The EC would like to propose earmarked parental leave, but this is blocked by the Council. Therefore, the EC tries to act as a mediator between the EP and the Council.
33	CRE 19/05/2015 - 15 <i>Debate</i>	Maternity leave (debate)	20/05/2015	N <sub>1</sub> = EPP + S&D + GUE/NGL + Verts/ALE + NI  N <sub>2</sub> = EPP + EFDD	Another resolution is adopted regarding 10 days of earmarked parental leave for men.
34	P8_TA(2015)0218 <i>Adopted text – Resolution</i>	European Parliament resolution of 9 June 2015 on the EU	09/06/2015	N <sub>1</sub> = EP	The EC is asked to step in as a mediator between the EP and the Council in negotiations on earmarked parental leave.

		Strategy for equality between women and men post 2015			
35	2015/2097(INI) <i>Adopted text – Resolution</i>	European Parliament resolution of 12 May 2016 on the application of Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave concluded by BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC and repealing Directive 96/34/EC	12/05/2016	$N_1 = EP$	Member states are criticized for not taking adequate measures to achieve gender equality in the area of parental leave. It is stated that the EC should propose earmarked parental leave for men, ensuring at least two weeks of leave for fathers.
36	CRE-8-2016-05-12-ITM-010-06_EN <i>Debate</i>	Framework Agreement on parental leave	12/05/2016	$N_1 = NI + S\&D + ALDE + EPP + EFDD + GUE/NGL$ $N_2 = ENF$	A plan for cooperation with the EC in developing a proposal for a directive on earmarked parental leave for men is presented.
37	CRE-8-2016-05-12-ITM-006_EN <i>Debate</i>	Framework Agreement on parental leave (debate)	12/05/2016	$N_1 = EPP + S\&D + ALDE + GUE/NGL + Verts/ALE + EFDD + NI + ECR$ $N_2 = ENF$	Part 2 of the above debate (M36). The same effect.
38	CRE 04/04/2019 – 3 <i>Adopted text – Directive</i>	Work-life balance for parents and carers (debate) (debate)	04/04/2019	$N_1 = EPP + S\&D + ECR + ALDE + GUE/NGL + EFDD + NI + Verts/ALE$ $N_2 = ENF$	The directive, including earmarked parental leave for men, is adopted. ALDE (and GUE/NGL) votes in favor, but is dissatisfied with the directive not being more ambitious regarding earmarked parental leave for men. Council representatives are satisfied with the proposal. The EC would have preferred a more far-reaching directive in the area of parental leave.

## Comparison of decolonization history: a sample of Ottoman Empire

Yunus Emre GENÇ\*

### Abstract

*Traditional perspectives on decolonization, particularly how European states like France and Britain viewed and analyzed through during the history is vulnerable to find out the Ottomans' sample's elements of decolonization from the past. This paper encourages moving beyond Eurocentric perspectives on decolonization and adopting a more inclusive, globalized approach. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of decolonization processes across different regions and suggests that understanding these processes requires considering both European and local perspectives on behalf of experience of Ottoman Empire's experience in middle age era in decolonization. Decolonial movements are not merely about political independence but encompasses economic, cultural, and social liberation, as well. It calls for a comprehensive approach that integrates restitution, representation, and respect for all cultural heritage. This transformative process aims to restore agency to marginalized communities and ensure that they have the facilities which are necessary to chart their self destinies.*

**Keywords:** Decolonization, Ottoman Empire, Europe, Freedom

### Introduction

Historical impact of empires on human societies faces across different continents and cultures. It highlights how empires such as the Manchus, Mughals, Ottomans, Spanish, Dutch, British, and French shaped the path of history in several ways. These empires not only expanded their territories but also influenced the societies they ruled in terms of politics, trade, and social structures (Thomas and Thompson, 2014, p. 142).

Colonialism is believed to have had significant impacts on world history of western culture. European identity, which emerged with the Renaissance period, potentially led to the discovery of new lands through the initiation of industrial activities revolution. During this period, European countries, which were generally at war with each other, targeted the American continent and the Far East in the name of development and thrive. As the Ottomans weakened, Africa became fertile and

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\* Yunus Emre GENÇ is Dr. at Faculty of Tourism, Giresun University, Turkey, e-mail: yunus.genc@giresun.edu.tr.





Fertile lands for European countries looking for new colonies. From here, a new struggle for the allocation of African resources has begun in the various regions of Africa. As in Africa, America, India and the Far East, not only Portugal, Spain, Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium and Germany, but especially Great Britain and France are representatives of western culture narrating the war they fought from Europe to Africa (Uygur and Uygur, 2013, pp. 273-274).

The Ottoman Empire, once a powerful and vast empire that spanned across three continents, has faced challenges in the wake of decolonization movements around the world. As nations seek independence and self-determination, it is crucial for the Ottoman Empire to adapt and support the decolonization process from past.

To what extent foreigners had freedom of religion and conscience in the Ottoman Empire? Freedom of religion and conscience was privilege in the theocratic Ottoman Empire, defined as the freedom to choose any religion or philosophy, the right to believe in any religion, the right to practice any religion, and the right to receive religious education. These freedoms were based on both some basic rules of Islamic law and on agreements (capitulations) made with privileged countries. According to these agreements, foreigners could practice and teach their religion, and go on pilgrimages, provided that public order was not disturbed. The exaggeration of rights caused serious diplomatic crises between the Ottoman Empire and European countries (Konan, 2008, p. 168).

If we consider freedom of religion and conscience as the right of a person to believe in a religion or philosophy of one's own choice, to fulfill the requirements of the religion and philosophy one believes in as worship and prayer according to the methods determined by that religion and belief, to learn and teach the ideas of the faith he/she has accepted, to prepare and distribute books for this purpose, to make propaganda and to announce them to others, we can say that foreigners who were granted the right of capitulation in the Ottoman State also benefited from this inviolable and absolute right, and even that they were free to an extent that they did not have in their own countries (Konan, 2008, p. 180).

The difference of Ottoman Empire in compare with other states' decolonization experience is its success to unify different nations such Arabs, Romans and Africans with their cultural values and religious belief.



## 1. Literature

This paper aims to outline the specifications for the Ottoman Empire to embrace decolonization, promote freedom for all nations, and foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

In essence of the highlighted scholarly evolutions in Ottoman studies, where traditional views of the Ottoman Empire as non-colonized are being reevaluated through the lens of colonial theory and postcolonial studies, offering new insights into historical interpretations and methodologies. The recent trends today from late Ottoman studies to incorporate terminology and concepts from postcolonial literature discusses the evolving nature of Ottoman sample, incorporating insights from postcolonial literature to deepen understanding of power dynamics and governance within the Empire, while cautioning against simplistic comparisons with Western colonial models (Kechriotis, 2013, pp. 40, 44-45).

The examination of how imperial heroes have been viewed and understood in the decades following the collapse of the British and French empires, highlighting their enduring impact and the shifting perspectives on their legacies (Jones *et al.*, 2017, p. 1).

Kitchen (2017, p. 1) discusses the impact of the First World War on the colonial empires of those two nations, as well as the responses to ideological challenges to colonial rule. In summary, the War had profound implications for the colonial empires of Britain and France, leading to strain on their imperial systems, partial reforms, and responses to ideological challenges that included maintaining control through violent suppression of decolonial movements.

Anscombe (2014) challenges the predominant narrative that emphasizes nationalism as the primary force shaping the history of the Ottoman Empire, Balkans, and the Middle East, argues that religious affiliations were the most influential factor in shaping communal identities during the Ottoman era and continues to be significant in the region even today, still.

Augusti (2018, p. 338) appears to be a part of scholarly discourse examining how legal, geopolitical, and cultural forces intersected in 19th-century Europe, particularly in relation to the Ottoman Empire and its evolution amidst Western influences and pressures. It seeks to offer new insights into the complexities and repercussions of these interactions on both regional and global scales.

Sofos and Ozkirimli (2009, p. 46) explains how both Greek and Turkish nationalisms were influenced by Western European modernity and its perspectives on history. Both Greek and Turkish nationalisms were not identical in their emergence, but they shared a common influence from Western

European civilizations. This influenced their approaches to history, where they selectively used and repressed aspects of their past to construct national identities that aligned with contemporary Western thoughts of civilization in process.

Çapan (2022) provides a critical examination of Türkiye's positioning as a "bridge" between East and West, challenging the simplistic narrative by exploring its implications through the lens of coloniality and the modern international system and seeks to problematize and deconstruct the conventional narrative of Turkey as a bridge between East and West by highlighting the complexities of coloniality and its impact on global perceptions and power dynamics.

After reveal of this main material from the literature, it is understood that Britain and France were mainly role model for decolonization in Europe.

Story of Young Tunisian Muslim Mehmed bin Abdulcelil examines the situation of Ottoman subjects who were kidnapped and sold as slaves during the Ottoman period. Efforts to gain freedom through the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman courts, freedom trials were common in the 17th-century's Ottoman Empire. So much so that contemporary legal practice guides (sukuk) have always examples of how this happens to document them. But they have never been systematically studied throughout this period. Slave ownership was extremely common, and the legality of enslavement was only relied on religion and nationality. Using a sample of seventy-nine suits from major countries Istanbul and eleven sukuk manuscripts, how the illicit trade is carried out. The number of enslaved people, the heavy traffic of legal captives, and the theoretically preservation of Ottoman subjecthood conflicted with the practical difficulties on how to prove this, reveals the gap between slavery as a legal institution and slavery in practice. Whereas most freedom cases resulted in decisions in favor of the victims; most were illegal. Enslaved people unfortunately never got their cases heard or were turned far away of lack of information and evidence (White, 2023, p. 526).

Ottoman domination in Africa took place on the North African axis. At the beginning of the 16th century, the Ottomans advanced from the north of Africa alongside the southern shores of the Mediterranean to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. In the east, they progressed along the western shores of the Red Sea and reached the shores of the Indian Ocean. Ottoman sovereignty in North Africa begins in the 16th century when Barbarossa Hayrettin Pasha enters Ottoman service. The Ottomans initially ruled North Africa, which they called Garp Ocaklari, under the same administration, but later they ruled by separating their administrations. While these provinces in North Africa were initially completely dependent on the central government, then they began to act independently of the centre with the deterioration of the management mechanism. The revenues of

the provinces of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli consisted of goods, commercial properties and slaves obtained from their piracy activities. Especially during the period when the Spanish were massacring Andalusian Muslims and had no agreement with the Ottomans, The pirates of the Garp Ocaklari were plundering the islands and coasts of Spain and seizing merchant ships. The Garp Ocaklari pirates were considered equivalent to Maltese pirates damaging Muslim ships. In the mid-19th century, when piracy was at its peak, Egyptian governors annexed the intermediate lands of Sudan and Uganda to Egyptian territory in order to unify the Ottoman lands that continued in the direction of Egypt-Somalia and Egypt-Algeria. On the other hand, they tried to establish Ottoman rule in Niger and Chad by going south from Tripolis to the Lake Chad basin. Thus, many regions south of the Sahara joined the Ottoman lands. However, the ban on piracy at the Congress of Viana in 1815 weakened the Garp Ocaklari. France occupied a strategic position in the Western Mediterranean by occupying Algeria, with which it had commercial relations since the 16th century. There upon, he invaded Tunisia in 1881 with the approval of England and Germany. Italy occupied Tripoli in 1912 and the Treaty of Ouchy ended Ottoman rule in North Africa (Toprak, 2012, pp. 224-225).

### **1.1. Garp Ocaklari and its Role on African Colonies**

The Ottoman Empire began to dominate the Mediterranean and its surroundings since 16th century. It has dominated North Africa since 19th century. With Barbarossa's entry into service to Ottoman Empire, Algeria first, then Tunisia and Tripoli came under Ottoman rule and joined its lands. Thus, sovereignty in North Africa, starting from Algeria extends to Egypt and the east of the Mediterranean. These lands in North Africa were organized into three separate states and they became important bases of Mediterranean domination of Ottoman Empire. Especially European states, they played important roles in naval wars with others.

The administration established by the Ottomans in North Africa loosened over time and administration passed into the hands of local military forces. These local forces also put all their strength into the name of "tax", which was imposed on ships trading in the Mediterranean, leading them to engage in the piracy activities. They collected tribute under it. In the Garp Ocaklari, which earned their living in this way, piracy has become the only profession and source of income for them.

Administration and military affairs in the Garp Ocaklari were completely dependent on the piracy. In seaside port cities, some of the soldiers went to the city and when they were dealing with the security of its surroundings, the other part is taken from merchant ships in the Mediterranean.

Soldiers were trying to extort money. A small portion of the money which was collected is paid in annual taxes. While some of them are sent to Istanbul as salaries, some of them are distributed as salaries to the soldiers, and the remaining money was used to cover the state's expenses.

Garp Ocaklari is an almost autonomous state and they elected a governor, however Istanbul approved it. Regarding to Mediterranean trade, they could also make agreements with other countries without needing permission from Istanbul. Thus, by collecting annual taxes from the states they made agreements with. They displayed their flags. It grants free passage in the Mediterranean to ships carrying were taken tribute.

However, in 19th century, economic and political developments in the century disrupted piracy activities. Vienna was convened in 1815. European states that banned piracy in their congresses, followed by England by sending warships to the Mediterranean under their leadership. They caused damages. In addition to Europeans who advanced in colonialism in this century, states took over most of Africa, especially since the 1870s: Germany and Italy turned to Africa to gain colonies. Africa was made by the Garp Ocaklari a target. Thus, over time, all of the Africa was conquered by England. It has been the scene of conflicts of interest in between France, Germany and Italy.

Unfortunately, the great European powers are helpless against the colonial race, The Ottoman Empire did not have the power to protect the remaining Garp Ocaklari and defeats in the wars with Russia and Austria, internal rebellions, Due to reasons such as reforms was not given the desired results and external pressures to the Northern The Ottoman Empire, which could not protect Africa, made the decision with the Treaty of Ushi in 1912. Ottomans have to accept the lost of lands (Toprak, 2012, pp. 235-236).

Although the human rights doctrine is primarily a product of the Western history, non-Western understanding and interpretation of issues associating today with "human rights" can undoubtedly enrich the discussions.this topic. The Ottoman system prioritized the interests of communities they emphasized justice rather than individuals and freedom. Ottoman sultan and the courts took great care to comply with Sharia law, of course it was understood from a Sunni perspective, it granted broad rights to both Muslim and non-Muslim individuals. These rights included: life, property, fair trial and social protection, as well as certain women rights. Contrary to some claims, in the Ottoman state unless politics comes into play, try to take control of the "public sphere." After the Tanzimat reforms in the nineteenth century, State predominance by European laws and institutions' public space, those narrowing the scope of civil action (Aral, 2004, p. 454).

## **1.2. Euphrates Valley Railway Project in the Framework of Britain's Colonial Policy**

Railway projects began to gain importance after the 1830s, and railway construction began to gain momentum from the second half of the 19th century. England was at the forefront in this regard. The reason why England showed particular interest in the construction of railways was its colony, India. Tigris and Euphrates Valleys have an important place in the planned railway projects. One of the projects on the Euphrates Valley Railway line was the construction of the line that will connect the Euphrates to the Mediterranean. Another project was the idea of building a railway that would pass through the same regions as ship transportation that would reach India via the Euphrates and Tigris. Names such as Sir William Andros, Doctor Thomson and Francis Chesney played leading roles in the Euphrates Valley Railway Project. England later postponed the Euphrates Valley Railway Project. The reason for this is that England established a shipping company for postal transportation in 1846. The Euphrates Valley Railway project was postponed until the Crimean War. The Ottoman Empire negotiated with different companies for the construction of a railway in the Euphrates Valley. The Ottoman Empire wanted to ensure the security of this railway. Because for this, the Ottoman Empire had to show its influence against the tribes in the region and send enough soldiers to the region. In addition, this issue is also important in terms of strengthening the influence of the Ottoman Empire in the Baghdad Gulf. England and France fought on the Euphrates Railway. However, there were also struggles for influence between England and Russia in the Euphrates Valley, located within the Ottoman borders. England supported the project to reduce Russia's influence on the Ottoman Empire and provide benefits in terms of raw materials and transportation. Russia also implemented counter policies to reduce Britain's influence in the region. It is planned to create many different lines regarding the Euphrates Valley Railway. In addition, concession terms were determined, and contracts were made between the Ottoman Empire and England regarding this project. The Euphrates Valley Railway Project could not be implemented for various reasons (Arslanyürek and Alpoğlu, 2023, p. 760).

## **1.3. Starting Point of Regulation of Ottoman: Battle of Marj Dabiq in 1516**

The regional presence of Ottoman rules begins with the victory of Battle of Marj Dabiq in 1516. Ottoman authority adopted management styles in different regions. First, unless it contradicts the basic policy of the states that preceded, accepted Ottoman's administrative and economic systems. In

addition, they did not apply the same administrative system to the whole region. Egypt had a special status. The Ottoman administration provided peace in Palestine.

Arab countries experienced rapidly developing colonialism starting from the end of the 15th century with Ottoman rule protected against their activities. Because especially the Spanish and Portuguese first in the past, and in the following centuries The British and French spread to all the seas of the world. Ottoman Empire saved the Arab countries' sovereignty from the colonization.

On the other hand, according to Öztürk since there was never a distinction between the Motherland and the Colonies in the Ottoman administration style, all the country's lands were with the same value. Crimea and Cairo, Bosnia and Basra, Trabzon and Tripoli, Yemen and Yanya had no difference, no superiority over others. Likewise, people from all races, religions and sects were living within the Ottoman borders. People were under the supreme sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire and were entrusted to the Sultan by Allah. The state was very sincere. Because the deputies from all over the nations, from all languages and religions, were elected to the 1876 Constitutional Assembly. For the Ottoman Empire, all its people were of equal identity. But in the same period, the British or French Parliaments would be unimaginable for an Algerian, Senegalese, Australian or South African, because these places are colonies, in the eyes of Europeans,

Because of this thought, according to the period and conditions it is spread throughout the country throughout the period, as much as possible. It has made major investments in education, public works, health and other various areas. The region's cities and roads, railways, ports, educational institutions at all levels, post, telegraph, tramway, electricity and municipal services were developed.

However, there are specific results of Western states, especially England, France and Russia in compare with the Ottoman Empire's way of decolonization. This is richness of common history's outputs (2010, p. 325-326).

#### **1.4. Ottoman Empire's Decolonization from the Romani Literature**

The emergence of Romani literature and media in the Balkans during the Ottoman Empire can be better understood within the broader framework of the Roma civic emancipation movement in the modern era. This movement manifested in various ways, shaped by the specific contexts of different regions within the diverse Ottoman Empire.

In some instances, especially among Roma Christians, this movement was closely intertwined with the national liberation struggles of the Balkan Orthodox peoples. In contrast, among Roma

Muslims, it reflected the broader social developments within Ottoman society. This duality can be attributed to the unique status of Roma in the Empire's socio-political hierarchy.

Unlike their counterparts in Central and Western Europe, who often faced severe marginalization, the Roma in the Ottoman Empire—officially referred to as *Kıptı* (Copts) or *Çingene*—were recognized as full subjects of the Sultan. They possessed civil rights as early as the fifteenth century (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001). However, the socio-political landscape of the Empire was marked by religious divisions, with society largely categorized into Muslims and non-Muslims.

Roma were distinctive in that they were classified by ethnicity under Ottoman law, a rarity within the Empire. Their categorization as either Muslims or Christians created divergent pathways for civic emancipation. This led to different expressions of Romani literature and media, reflecting the complex interplay of ethnicity, religion, and the sociopolitical context of the time. The resulting literature and press thus emerged as vital components of the broader movements for identity and rights within the Ottoman framework, highlighting the multifaceted nature of Roma experiences in the Balkans (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021, p. 23).

Among Muslim Roma in the Balkans, a distinct civic emancipation movement emerged, diverging from the narrative of Roma Christians linked to national revival. Instead, Muslim Roma were integrated into the broader social evolution of the Muslim population within the Ottoman Empire, particularly during the transition to the Turkish nation-state in the early twentieth century, following the Young Turk Revolution.

This shift involved a significant departure from Ottoman identity, with Muslim communities—including the Roma—seeking their place in the new national framework. Some Muslim Roma began to pursue civic emancipation by establishing their own identities and communities, leading to the creation of the newspaper *Laço*. This publication marked a pivotal moment as it was the first Roma newspaper produced independently, without reliance on external influences like religious or state institutions, showcasing their aspirations for greater visibility and agency within society. (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021, p. 28).

The "Letter to the Editor" underscores a critical aspect of Roma integration within the Ottoman Empire, particularly for Roma Christians, whose social and civil status mirrored that of other Christian subjects (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001). This integration fostered a shared trajectory of development, allowing some members of the Roma community in the Balkans during the nineteenth century to advance their national consciousness.



This evolution marked a departure from traditional internal frameworks, as they sought recognition and equality within the broader socio-cultural landscape. The Balkan context played a crucial role in shaping their public identity, driving Roma to actively seek validation of a "glorious" historical past. They aimed to craft a national historical mythology that would bolster their claims for civic emancipation, positioning themselves as a distinct but equal community alongside their Balkan neighbors.

The aspirations articulated in the letter reflect a broader pattern seen among other Balkan nations during the nineteenth century, characterized by the establishment of educational systems, the creation of churches offering services in their own language, and an implicit vision of self-determination. This development signifies the Roma's quest for recognition and rights, echoing the national movements around them while highlighting their unique identity (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021, p. 26).

The rise of Romani literature and press, alongside the movement for civic emancipation within the Ottoman Empire, represents a significant historical process marked by shared goals, despite the initial division between Christian and Muslim Roma. This dual track did not undermine the unity of their aspirations. Following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, these distinctions quickly faded in the context of newly formed nation-states.

In Turkey, most Roma Christians left during the population exchange after the Lausanne Agreement, leaving predominantly Roma Muslims. In the newly independent Balkan states, the emphasis shifted from religious differences to the pursuit of ethnic unity among Roma. While early efforts toward this unity were often sporadic and led by individual community members without widespread impact, they reflected a broader trend seen across Central, South-Eastern, and Eastern Europe during the rise of modern nationalism.

This pattern of nationalism involved the emergence of a small national elite that spread its ideas to the wider population. For the Roma in the Balkans, evidence from the Ottoman period indicates they were still in the initial phase of this development, characterized by the birth of Romani literature and print media. These early cultural expressions laid the groundwork for a collective identity that would evolve as the community sought recognition and rights within the changing political landscape (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021, p. 33).

## Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper claims the Ottoman Empire could succeed the embrace decolonization, promote freedom for all nations, and build an inclusive and equitable society for different nations, cultures and religions in its land compare with other colonial states in history.

Said Halim Pasha is an important thinker and statesman who lived in the last century of the Ottoman Empire. He was the grandson of Governor of Egypt, Mehmed Ali Pasha of Kavala and son of Mehmed Abdulhalim Pasha, a member of the Council of State. Said Halim Pasha, who grew up in his distinguished environment and received a good education, served in various positions at the highest levels during the most depressed periods of the state. He held various positions and demonstrated his extensive intellectual knowledge through the works he wrote as well as the tasks he undertook. Said Halim Pasha, who had an important place in the Islamist movement of the Ottoman period, said, "Western colonization means intellectually benefiting from "civilization" and "alienating one's own culture and values". It opposed an understanding of Westernization at the level of "imitation" in Ottoman Empire. This opposition of Said Halim reflects the thought of Islamism. It is about anti-colonialism, which is one of its main themes (Şahin, 2022, p. 1215). This means Islam is freedom. Ottomans made benefit with civilization from Europeans. But it is not clear that it resulted successful. It was the better way to reach civilization era for Ottomans, but the Empire couldn't do that.

Missionary activities not only led to Christianization, but also to become good Christians, they devoted themselves to the service to white people. This also aimed to create societies dedicated to contentment. Religious legitimacy was also provided to people's "master" status. Language and cultural policy carried out together with missionary activities. It forms an important point in colonial activities. Moreover, it would be appropriate to exemplify this policy with Africa and South America. As a result of studies carried out on the axis of English and French presence in Africa; Portuguese and mostly Spanish languages in South America became the official language of societies (Uygur and Uygur, 2013, p. 280).

Modern Republic of Türkiye has rich history because of Ottoman Empire from past. This Empire is inspired by different countries in the world today, from its experience. This is wisely for the developing of the history of world. There is a quote in Türkiye that, if the lessons couldn't take from the past, the history would repeat once again. Ottoman Empire succeed the different nations were lived in peace together in the middle age era.

For instance, Portugal guided geographical discoveries, when United Kingdom, France, Italy was issued colonial experiences. Today decolonization takes place of colonization. The policy makers should consider works of academics, when they take decisions. Because science is once that we can all trust in without prejudices.

The birth of this paper's writing idea bases upon the lack in the literature. I tried out to reveal the reasons of unify in the Ottoman Empire time, and key conditions of success this way.

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## A review of the impact of labor migration and structural changes on the global crisis

Olga NOSOVA\*

### Abstract

*The paper examines the impact of labor migration and structural changes in Ukraine in the global crisis. The research shows the aggravation of the world situation under the migration effect caused by wars and armed conflicts. The paper synthesizes findings from existing studies and identifies the short-term and long-term impacts of migration from Ukraine on the global labor market. The influence of socio-economic factors on the migration process was analyzed as criteria for migrant origin and recipient countries. The requirements were chosen according to specific features. Policymakers are encouraged to adopt new policies to manage global migration based on international cooperation and compliance with the rule of law. The regulation of migration during the global crisis will be the focus of new policies adopted by international organizations.*

*Keywords:* migration, structural changes, labor market, global crisis

### Introduction

The paper aims to review existing approaches to the impact of migration and structural changes in Ukraine and places these findings in the broader context of global development challenges. Labor migration is defined as the movement of people from one country or region to another in search of employment opportunities. Depending on the situation and perspective from which labor migration and global development are viewed, these effects can be beneficial or detrimental. Labor migration leads to labor shortages, facilitates remittances, and encourages the transfer of skilled workers. Negative effects include brain drain and wage losses. To maximize the benefits of workers, governments need to implement effective management and labor market policies. Structural changes influence global development through the expansion of trade and production patterns.

This issue is critical to understanding global development and economic stability. The main global challenges are climate change, growing inequality and changes in the labor market caused by digital technologies. Global crises (e.g. geopolitical conflicts, economic recessions, global climate

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\*Olga NOSOVA is professor at Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania, e-mail: [olganosova@gmail.com](mailto:olganosova@gmail.com).



change) that have influenced migration patterns and structural changes over the last decade. The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East intensify migration processes and lead to instability in the global labor market. The emigration of labor, the low birth rate and the high mortality rate in Ukraine force us to think about a way out of the great demographic crisis, which has been exacerbated by the war. Labor migration in Ukraine intensifies competition in the labor market, especially among skilled workers. It is a source of replenishment for the budgets of countries receiving migrants.

This research methodology aims to examine existing studies and critically discuss the pros and cons of finding ways out of the current migration crisis. Managing the migration process requires a flexible approach for international organizations and governments. This study uses quantitative data on migration from international organizations and other secondary data. Research methods include descriptive statistics in the form of frequency analysis that describe and interpret migration data. The research is limited by the lack of original empirical analysis of migration and does not consider the study of cross-border migration and unskilled labor.

Technological advances in the economy are increasing productivity and improving the global economy. The introduction of automation, artificial intelligence, digital platforms, and changes in the supply chain improve economic development and the competitiveness of companies on a global scale. The processes of deindustrialization in developed countries and industrialization in developing countries are leading to economic diversification and economic development. Investment in education and skills development contributes to the creation of new sectors and technological progress in the labor market.

This work aims to summarize theoretical approaches, analyze structural change's impact on the labor market, review the economic and social consequences of migration, and propose a new migration policies adoption.

## **1. Overview of the literature**

The article examines the basic theories on the impact of labor migration and structural change on global development. The study provides insights into the current problems facing the structural and institutional characteristics of our economies and societies. The causes of migration are existing global imbalances, large differences in prosperity, conflicts and wars.

People are forced to migrate in search of employment opportunities, higher wages, and better living conditions. Labor migration has a significant impact on demographics, labor markets, industry, and global development.

The study provides an overview of migration theories and summarizes the findings of the literature sources. *The neoclassical migration theory* considers the differences in wage levels between the migrants' countries of origin and destination as the cause of population migration. This theory emphasizes the economic factors in the decision-making process of labor movement from countries with lower wages to areas with higher wages and better employment prospects. Labor economics and cost-benefit analysis focus on comparing the benefits and costs of people staying in their home country with lower wages versus moving to a country with higher wages.

This theory states that under the influence of economic progress, the wage gap narrows and incentives to migrate disappear. It ignores the influence of social, cultural, and political factors on labor migration. This approach lacks analysis of the unemployment rate, which limits our understanding of migration. The neoclassical approach assumes that the quantity and quality of all productive resources are the same in all countries. This theory supposes perfect information about the labor market and full employment. This analysis defines the policies of receiving countries and the extent to which migrants are treated and protected. Advanced countries grant legal protection to certain groups on humanitarian grounds.

The causes of migration include existing global imbalances, great differences in prosperity, conflicts, and wars. People are forced to migrate in search of employment opportunities, higher wages and better living conditions. Labor migration has a significant impact on demographics, labor markets, industry, and global development.

*The pull and push theory* analyzes the migration of population from rural areas due to overpopulation in agriculture as a pull factor and the demographic aging of the population as a push factor. Nyaoro (2023) defined the pull and push factors of migration in the decision-making process. Labor mobility, skills development and education, career training are factors that encourage people to migrate to other countries and accept new residences there. The push-and-pull models explain the socioeconomic process encouraging people to move out of their countries of origin to a new location, to avoid armed conflicts and better living conditions, advance their careers. The pull and push theory does not explain migration from countries with higher wages to countries with an average or lower level of development.

*The new economics theory of migration* proposes that the decision-making process is collective, involving all family members. According to the theory of the New Economy, labor migration flows from capital-poor/labor-rich countries to capital-rich/labor-poor countries. The goal of the migrants' decision-making process is to optimize their opportunities for work and income.

Migrants are unique people with their own identities, talents, cultures, and preferences. They have different skills and talents. Innovation and productivity gains can be attributed to migrant



workers. Destination countries have similarly complicated cultures with a wide range of constituents, interests, and decision-making processes, any of which may compete. Migrants' remittances play a vital role in decision-making.

Receiving countries consider the positive impact of labor migration on the economies of receiving countries. Most studies on the economic impact of migration assume that border controls are comparable to trade barriers and show that increased migration boosts global GDP far more than trade liberalization (Belaid and Slany, 2018).

Alwrekia, Mihi-Ramirez and Melchor-Ferrer (2023) determined the effects of the enormous influx of migrants brought on by the Syrian crisis and official development support. The results indicate that refugees have an insignificant effect on the labor market in their host nations. Additionally, self-employment has a beneficial, but limited, impact on the income level of the working poor (Alwrekia *et al.* 2023). The new economics theory does not explain migration from countries with similar economic conditions and ignores political stability factors.

A variation in the new economic theory of migration is *an effective job creation policy*. This approach examines fundamental theories of the effects of labor migration and structural changes on global development. This research sheds light on the contemporary issues facing the structural and institutional peculiarities of our economies 'and societies. Vakhitova and Fihel (2020) affirmed an effective job-creation policy targeting foreigners. They conclude that the most recent improvements in overall economic indicators did not result in substantial immigration levels. The authors pointed out the need for systematic measures to actively enhance the inflow of foreigners into the country and streamline hiring practices in industries when labor is scarce. The comparison of expected benefits and costs allows migrants to choose a country for migration. Migrants try to realize their professional skills and earn higher salaries. The approach of an effective job creation policy does not consider migrants' psychological factors when making migration decisions.

*A people-centric approach* justifies the distention of migration through investments in human capital at the micro level. The theory focuses on market factors, but it does not support the impact of international competition on the labor market. This theory emphasizes the effects of labor-market variables and individual human factors. A people-centric approach to migration acknowledges that migrants and refugees are people, who must make complex decisions and should be treated with fairness and respect (World Development Report, 2023). They advance their interests as sovereign states and as participants in the global community. People's decisions to cross borders have an impact on the growth and well-being of both the origin and destination countries.

The literature review highlights the problem of global economic crises and labor migration caused by Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, which resulted in 8,087,952 million refugees and over six million internally displaced people (IDPs). Migration has negative effects, resulting in the brain drain and outflow of high-skilled specialists from the country. The positive effect of labor migration leads to an increase in labor supply and affects wage levels and overall competitiveness of the labor market in country receiving migrants. Labor migrants increase the value-added to their host countries.

Institutions such as recruiting agencies, individual smugglers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based support networks constitute the foundation of shaping migration flows in the *institutional theory of migration*. These organizations assist in countering the challenges of illegal human trafficking. The institutional framework improvement includes the definition of rules, norms, behavioral forms for interaction between migrants and native people, and mechanisms enhancing their implementation. The advantages of the theory include the analysis of a broad spectrum of factors affecting migration and revealing the essence of migration as a complex process. International organizations regulate the flow of migrants. Darvas (2023) described the advancement of the institutional framework of the EU between the global fiscal crisis and the pandemic crisis because of strict banking regulations, uniform euro-area banking supervision, the establishment of crisis management agencies, and a stronger emphasis on macroeconomic surveillance. The Institutional theory of migration does not explain the causes and consequences of migration and the discrimination practices in the workplace.

*The Transition theory of migration* reveals the key stages of migration transition and focuses on immigration flows and the integration of foreign labor in the recipient country's labor market. These processes are reflected in Martin and Taylor's (1996) model of mobile transformation. The management of migrant flows proposes a complex understanding of migration patterns and consequences for host countries. This approach ignores the effects of global trade and capital movements, focuses on domestic causes, and assumes the same linear route for migrants. De Haas (2010) reviews "transition" theory that is better able to capture the patterns and trends of actual migration movements. He outlines the relationship between economic and human development associated with the highest overall number of migrants. The author explains the U-curve effect on emigration.

Sulaiman (2020) stressed the need for additional theoretical investigations into the factors, patterns, and effects of the migration phenomenon of the skilled labor force. Additionally, skilled migration is growing and has a significant impact on both sending and receiving countries.

Further research demonstrates the existence of a combined approach to migration, trying to unite the economic, psychological, and social characteristics that foster people to migrate. De Sherbinin *et al.* (2022) support a dual strategy that builds on the current theory while also employing strategies such as grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), who inductively develops theory through the analysis of empirical data. The current global crisis is likely to have deep-reaching effects. The assumption has been made that migrants will be a safety net for developing economies by providing labor during expansion and leaving during recession (Castles and Vezzoli, 2009). Kumpikaite and Zickute (2012) proposed an approach of a single integrated push-and-pull model that influences migration.

The analysis of migration theories in the labor market reflects the diversity of approaches for the recipient and migrant countries of origin. These theories outline the strengths and weaknesses of migrants' decision-making processes. Migrants focus their attention on their social connections and networks. Structural changes in national economies influence migrants and affect a decrease in employment in their home countries. The labor market in recipient countries could be unbalanced if labor self-regulation is absent.

## **2. Methodology**

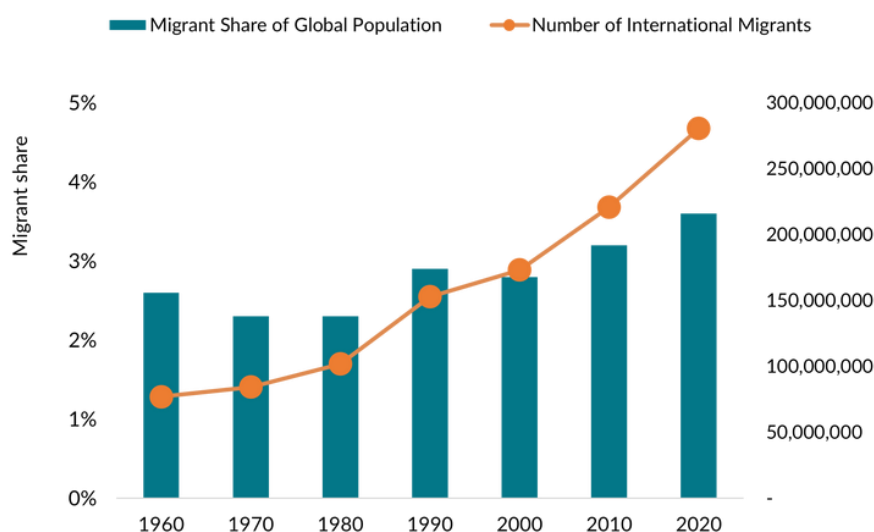
This study proposes to determine how labor migration and structural changes affect the global economy. This methodology uses an interdisciplinary approach. It allows the study of the migration process and proposes methods for regulating and improving migration policy. Migration impacts demographics, labor markets, and industries. This approach is based on a qualitative review of the existing literature and secondary data. The criteria used for selecting the studies reviewed were based on data from international organizations. These sources were analyzed based on statistical indicators characterized by the inflow and outflow of people from the country, remittances etc. Potential gaps in secondary data exist because of the impossibility of assessing the illegal flows of migrants. Our research combines existing approaches to the impact of migration and structural changes and contextualizes these findings within the broader framework. This study considered the impact and consequences of economic, social, and political factors on migration.

### 3.1. The effects of migration on global development

The effects of migration on global development and their impacts on recipient nations and migration senders were estimated through surveys analysis of international organizations. This study uses data from surveys of international organizations, including the International Labor Organization (ILO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Bank, and the International Organization for Migration. The ILO surveys (2022, 2024) outlined that anticipated crises exacerbate labor market disparities due to their disproportionate effects on specific groups of employees and firms. These publications mark the expanding gap in the labor market between emerging nations (ILO Monitor on the World of Work, 2022, World Employment and Social Outlook. Trends 2024, 2024.).

Migration is a reaction to both shocks, such as conflict and violence, as well as global imbalances, compared to wide disparities in welfare. Figure 1 illustrates a comparison of the migration share of the global population, and the number of international migrants illustrates the tendency of a growing number of international migrants (See Fig. 1). The World Development Report (2023) asserted that around 20% of the 184 million people reside outside their place of origin and are refugees. 43 percent of the people live in low- and middle-income nations. Most nations, regardless of their income level, serve as both origin and destination countries (WDR, 2023). One in every seven people worldwide is a migrant. International migration has surged by 107 million over the past two years (Hernandez *et al.*, 2023).

**Figure 1. Comparison of the migration share of the global population and the number of international migrants (numbers)**



Source: World Migration Report 2022, 2022

**Figure 2. The top 20 destination (left) and origins (right) of international migrants in 2020**

Source: World Migration Report 2022, 2022

Figure 2 displays the top 20 destinations (left) and origins (right) of international migrants in 2020 and shows that the top destinations of international migrants were the USA, Germany, Saudi Arabia, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom. These countries were India, Mexico, the Russian Federation, China, and the Syrian Arab Republic. The comparison data show that countries could accept migrants as well as their country of origin. The World Migration Report 2023 identifies the impact of migration on the destination migrant country and illustrates the need for improvement in the alignment of the abilities and qualities of all migrants with the demands of the societies where they will settle.

The migration benefits for destination countries are higher when migrants receive higher wages and transfer remittances to their home countries. Qualification recognition, skill proficiency, and access to the job market are prerequisites for the broad opportunities for migrants abroad.

### 3.2. Structural changes impact on the labor market

Structural changes include a change in the industrial production structure, the destruction of large enterprises and supply chains, the loss of part of the labor force, and fluctuations between skilled and unskilled jobs. Low employment corresponds to low- and lower-middle-income countries, while industrialized countries have reached their peak in manufacturing activity. After achieving its peak, the manufacturing share starts to decline steadily, whereas the part of the service sector starts to increase.

The assessment of structural changes in the inclusiveness and sustainability of socioeconomic development depends on the country. Both the relative supply of skills and skill-based technological changes tend to increase income inequality, although not in all countries (Nomaler, Bart and Adriaan, 2021).

The concept of structural transformation substantiates the transfer of resources (both labor and capital) to more productive economic activities (Felipe, 2015). Nomaler, Bart and Adriaan (2021) analyze how structural change affects well-being and observe the growing trend in living standards increase. Scientists have concluded that structural changes will increase or decrease inequality in the labor market. They prove that structural changes tend to increase inequality. Shustova (2011) verifies the effect of immigration flow on the composition of the economy and its various sectors and examines how structural changes affect the labor market.

Another approach describes the intensity of structural shifts in investment and labor. They stimulate changes in the production structure, investment policy, and labor market organization. The structural shifts in the Ukrainian economy increased the structural changes that smoothed the transition to the neoeconomy and transfer to the service sector. (Grynevych and Zirko, 2014). Vitas (2023) argues that the economy's structure is a complicated process, thus changes to it shouldn't happen too quickly or uncontrollably. Only then can structural reforms lead to economic progress.

Kovtun *et al.* (2019) point out the discrepancy between supply and demand in the labor market, a low level of innovation, and the inertia of transformational processes in the transition to the post-industrial stage of production. Olishevych and Lukianenko (2017) analyze changes in the level of employment in the region as a whole and separately in agriculture and industry. A comparative analysis of employed shares in Ukrainian and European economic sectors shows significant differences between them. The fundamental characteristic of the Ukrainian economy is the substantial overabundance of the agricultural and trading sectors relative to the construction, industry, transport, financial, real estate, and healthcare sectors.

Donovan and Schoellman (2021) assert the existing large sectoral productivity gaps in developing countries. This finding suggests (but does not show) that labor allocation is inefficient.

Many authors identify policy measures that enhance labor productivity under structural changes. Dustmann *et al.* (2022) found out that the minimum wage raised wages but did not lower employment. The reallocation of low-wage workers accounts for up to 17% of the wage increase induced by minimum wage.

Swiston and Barrot (2011) explored the relationship between structural changes and growth and estimated that the degree of structural efficiency by one standard deviation increases growth by ½ percent.

Pariboni and Tridico (2020) explore channels that operate through both the demand and supply sides of the economy, with a special focus on labor market flexibilization and transformations in the productive structure of the economies involved.

The employment share in manufacturing could decrease because of higher productivity growth. However, higher productivity boosts demand for a given income, a feature intensively studied in computer technology (Aiginger, 2009).

The structural policy debate highlights the predominance of the approach to the interdependence of economic growth and economic development based on the sectoral structure of the economy (Nosova, 2022).

Mulska (2022) conceptually characterized the migration process as dynamic, structural changes, related knowledge transfers, and consequences. Increased migrant activity leads to risks, losses, systemic threats, and structural changes in the countries of migrant origin. Migration threatens the labor force, including brain drain transfers, destabilizes the economy, reduces labor supply and productivity, and results in SME bankruptcy.

Structural changes in both the origin and destination countries of migrants have an impact on the migration process. Chung Tsung-Ping (2018) reveals the effects of structural change and job creation on sustainable development. The first focuses on the nation's economic sector changes with income levels. The second proposes the impact of manufacturing industrialization on industries. Both methodologies mark technological development, product innovation, resource efficiency, skill improvement, and the learning process. UNIDO report (2017) discusses the relationship between structural change and economic growth.

Structural changes in the labor market result in the redistribution of labor from labor-intensive to technologically advanced sectors. This causes changes in the demand for certain skill sectors and the loss of jobs in specific professions.

### **3.2. Effects of migration and structural changes in the labor market**

An evaluation of the literature demonstrates the existing imbalances caused by structural changes in the labor market. The forecast for the world's labor trends reflects an unfavorable situation in terms of both job quality and employment creation, which has significant consequences for inequality. In the coming years, the shrinking and continued aging of the EU population is negatively reflected in EU development.



Real earnings declined by 2023 in the great majority of G20 nations where pay data were available, indicating that salary increases were insufficient to keep up with inflation. (World Employment and Social Outlook, 2024). The existing imbalances in labor supply include unemployment, under-employment, and job gaps. Demand-side inconsistencies include labor shortage, skill shortage, and skill mismatch. Whether and how quickly these imbalances can be corrected depends on how labor markets respond to them.

The study of the effects of migration on the development of institutions in countries of migrant origin indicates the influence of emigration in general (i.e., people who emigrate can voice their opinions from abroad) and the transmission of norms from the host country to the home country. Using various institutional quality metrics, the occurrence of both impacts is confirmed. When skilled emigration is considered, the impact becomes more pronounced (Beine and Sekkat, 2013).

Nyaoro (2023), Hernandez (2023), Ecker (2023), Laederach (2023), and Maystadt (2023) outline the empirical models of migration that stimulate structural changes in countries of migrant origin and destination. These models display migrant movements but do not propose a mechanism for the reduction or management of migration flows.

A growing body of literature assumes that the existing relationship between migration and structural transformation leads to the creation of new activities and businesses with high value-added, labor productivity, and increasing returns to scale. The subject of how migration and structural changes affect economic development is crucial given the current state of global uncertainty, the considerable risk posed by the COVID-19 epidemic, and Russian military aggression in Ukraine. Egan (2021) explored the interconnection between labor migration and structural changes. The author emphasizes the migration injustice between wealthy migrants and citizens, who are responsible for the alleviation of inequality among poor migrants and considers the collective policy responses of non-governmental organizations and labor unions. Bistrina (2019) proposes a policy to protect the national interests of European countries. This policy has features of flexible solidarity procedures, rules, and practices.

The study of the effects of migration and structural changes revealed their complementary characteristics. Both processes enhance skills, education, training advancements, labor flexibility, and effective labor market policies. A summary of the analysis of migration theories suggests various scenarios for the basic needs of refugees in cases of armed conflict or in search of migrants for better life conditions and well-being. The analysis of migration and structural changes demonstrates the transformation of labor market organization under the effects of sectoral structural changes and shows the change from the predominance of industry and agriculture toward a growing share of the service sector.

Most theories agree that migration has a favorable impact on world development, including skills development and training, cultural interaction, and the interchange of ideas. It proposes that new job structures based on the hiring of low-cost labor will appear under the effects of increasing labor migration. One of the decisions could be the adoption of new systems of global migration governance by policymakers based on international collaboration and the rule of law by taking lessons from the crisis experience. Countries in the European Union and other economically developed nations should suggest migration policy initiatives to encourage opportunities for the local population in education, job development, and a favorable business environment in low-income nations.

#### **4. Labor migration in Ukraine: economic and social consequences**

After Ukraine gained independence in 1991, the migration process began. The nation's net migration indicator showed an excess inflow compared to outflow until the early 2000s in Ukraine. World Bank data on net migration confirmed a high inflow of 204,389 thousand people in Ukraine in 1992. The indicators dropped to -222,324 thousand in 1994 and increased to 68,840 in 2012. The trend of fluctuations in net migration indicators estimated (The World Bank Data, 2022).

Following the seizure of Crimea by Russia and the start of hostilities in Donbass in Ukraine in 2014, the number of migrants increased. Net migration was 65,667 in 2014 in Ukraine and fluctuated to 831 thousand in 2021. The number of emigrants reached 6.1 million in 2020. Due to the full-scale war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, people forced to leave their homes and ways of life, resulting in a significant population displacement in Ukraine. Approximately 8.05 million Ukrainians have fled their country, with Poland, Germany, and Czechia hosting the largest number of refugees from Ukraine (See Table 1). Table 1 presents the statistical data of the International Organization for Migration of countries accepting refugees from Ukraine in 2023 and confirms that the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine caused the outflow of people to cause humanitarian disasters (Nosova, 2023). The data of the OCHA (2023) determined that about 17.6 million people left their homes and are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and protection. This group of people includes 5.1 million internally displaced people (IDPs), 5.9 million Ukrainian refugees across Europe, and 4.8 million returnees. Eighty-three percent of Ukrainian refugees are women, children, and individuals over 60. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) number over 6 million in Ukraine.

**Table 1. Countries accepting refugees from Ukraine**

№	Countries	Refugees from Ukraine in 2023 (million)
1	Belarus	0.022
2	Chechia	0.504
3	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania	0.178
4	Germany	0.923
5	Great Britain	0.199
6	France	0.119
7	Italy	0.173
8	Moldova	0.107
9	Poland	1.580
10	Romania	0.108
11	Russia	2.850
12	Slovakia	0.108
13	Spain	0.173
Total		8.050

Source: Representation using data of the International Organization for Migration (2023), retrieved from <https://ukraine.iom.int/data-and-resources> (2023).

**Table 2. Expected consequences of migration processes**

№	Criterion	Migrant-origin countries	Authors	Migrant-recipient countries	Authors
1	Employment	decrease	Khan (2021), Hao <i>et al.</i> (2020).	increase	International Migration (2020)
2	Unemployment	decrease/increase	Gundogmus and Bayir (2021)	increase/decrease	Hai and Duc (2023)
3	Skills	decrease	Nathan (2014)	increase	Biavaschi <i>et al.</i> (2020)
4	Remittances	increase/decrease	Future of the World. Policy Brief. No 146. United Nations (2023)	decrease/increase	Refugees and Migrants (2023)
5	Demographic Issue	decrease	Perch (2020)	increase	World Development Report (2023)
6	Cultural diversity	decrease	Yerezhepova (2016)	increase	Rapoport, Sardoschau, Silve (2020)

Source: Author's approach

The International Labor Organization estimates that 2.75 million of the total number of refugees are of working age. Of these, 43.5%, or 1.2 million, were employed before the crisis began and either quit their jobs or lost them during the conflict. Over 87% of these refugees who were previously

employed held full-time positions. Eighty-eight percent of those surveyed were employed by businesses, while the remaining 12% were self-employed.

The advanced (tertiary) level of education is held by two-thirds. Only 15% of people were employed in low-skilled jobs, compared to half (49%) in high-skilled ones (ILO Brief, 2022). In the report from the United Nations Organization, 4.8 million Ukrainians lost their jobs in 2022. Twelve jobseekers are currently applying for one vacancy at the State Employment Center in Ukraine.

Ukraine's society is under tremendous strain from Russian attacks on vital infrastructure that started in October and destroyed 50% of the country's energy sector. With the Ukrainian economy predicted to downturn in 2023, an estimated eighteen million Ukrainians urgently require domestic humanitarian assistance. In addition to the terrible effects on the economy, the conflict has already resulted in environmental harm worth more than \$37 billion (ICMPD Migration Outlook 2023, 2023).

To determine the effects of migration on global economic development, we defined criteria for migrant origin and recipient migrant countries. We examined the expected outcomes of migration processes for countries (see Table 2). Table 2 demonstrates the author's approach to the possible scenarios of migration based on analysis of reviewed publications.

The criteria were selected based on specific factors. Migration negatively affects employment and leads to brain-drain of talented young people from migrant-origin countries. Majority researchers underline the positive effects of migration on the economic growth of migrant destination countries (Khan, 2021, Hao *et al.*, 2020). Gundogmus and Bayir (2021) asserted that the effective reallocation of labor, and labor migration, raises earnings and productivity by enabling workers to benefit from improved employment. The empirical results display employment enlargement, job creation in manufacturing or service sectors, and productive gains in migrant recipient countries. Hao *et al.* (2020) stated that immigration policies in China lead to structural transformation, reallocation of resources to higher productivity, and reduced internal movement between sectors and the labor force in provinces. Gundogmus and Bayir (2021) provided the empirical findings that there is no statistically significant relationship between immigration abroad and unemployment.

Hai and Duc (2023) illustrated in the empirical results that migration lowers unemployment in forty-seven Asian nations. The outflow of skilled workers and population level decline aggravate economic performance in countries. This research has led to the identification of important policy implications. Hai and Duc (2023) propose the need for significant educational reform in low-income and low-middle-income nations to prepare their workforce for a wave of migrant workers who leave their home countries in search of better economic opportunities. Biavaschi *et al.* (2020) justified that in almost every OECD nation, migration's skill bias improves welfare; nevertheless, the benefits in

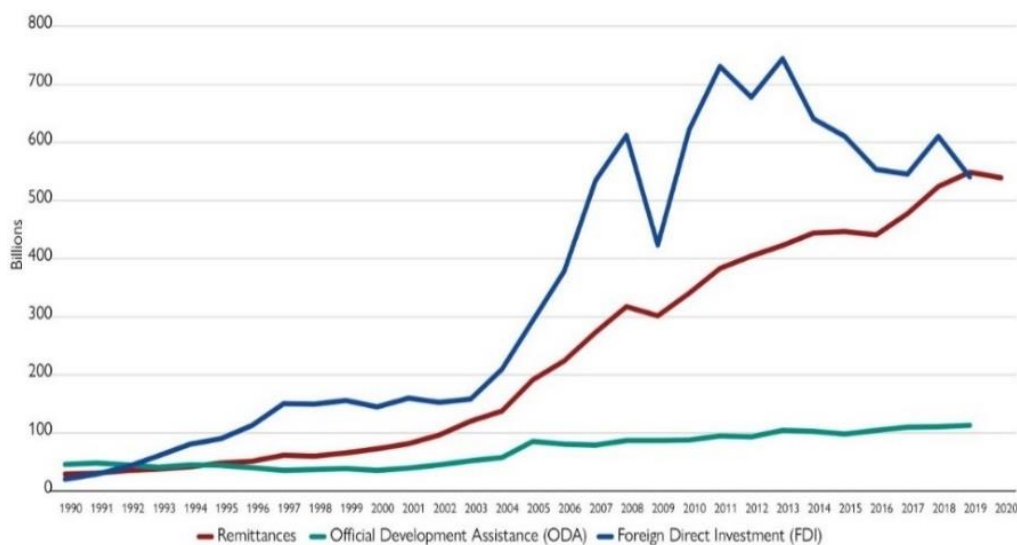
non-OECD nations are less pronounced. In many nations, they are negative, but in those with significant migration-related externalities, they are positive. The authors prove that the skill bias has an unmistakably favorable global effect. Yerezhepova (2016) called into question the accountability of government officials and business executives who have worked to both prepare highly skilled and competitive individuals and to establish the conditions necessary for them to stay and benefit their nation. Nathan (2014) argued that the benefits that talented diasporas and different cultures generally offer the skilled workforce. Consistent with social-cultural positive outcomes for migrant recipient countries, migration results in population rise, educational issues improvement, and other cultural diversity issues development. The employment growth enhances the inflow of young people, skills improvements, demographic rate rise, and cultural development in these countries. Rapoport *et al.* (2020) analyzed cultural similarity throughout nation pairs and noted changes within country pairs over time. Although migrants certainly contribute to cultural convergence and diffusion, the main purpose of their actions is to spread cultural norms and values from their host nations back to their home countries, often known as cultural remittances.

The received results enable us to ascertain the effect of various factors on labor migration. The importance of each criterion is also contingent upon the immigration source nation, labor costs, and socioeconomic circumstances in the area. Remittances' effects on a recipient country's economic progress are ambiguous. It can weaken the competitiveness of the remittance-receiving countries in international markets by increasing the consumption of non-tradable products, raising world prices, appreciating the real currency rate, and reducing exports. The share of international remittance flows to low and middle-income countries was growing constantly with some small fluctuations compared to foreign direct investment (FDI) flows reduction and stable flows of official development assistance flows from 1990 to 2020 (See Fig. 3). Figure 3 shows the data on international remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries from 1990 to 2020.

From 2008 to 2023, remittances to Ukraine averaged 2237.86 USD million; they peaked at 3671.00 USD million in the fourth quarter of 2021 and fell to a record low of 1218.00 USD million in the first quarter of 2010.

According to World Bank data, Ukraine had record-high inflows of USD 18.2 billion last year, making it the largest beneficiary of remittances in Europe and Central Asia before the Russian invasion in 2022. However, compared to the monthly average in 2020–2021, the National Bank of Ukraine observed a 10% decline in the volume of private remittances transferred to Ukraine from January to July 2023 (See Fig. 4). Figure 4 presents data on Ukraine remittances and shows that the volume of transfers decreased after the beginning of the large-scale war in Ukraine.

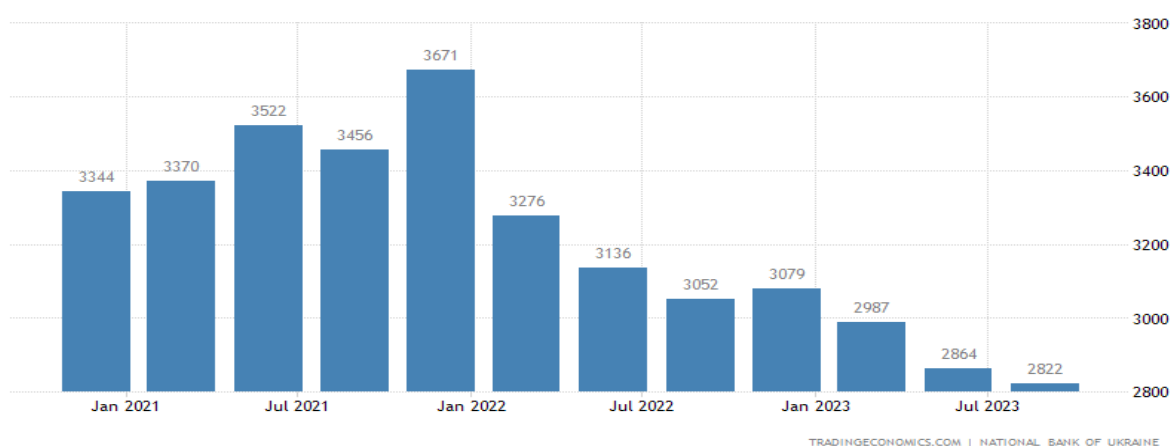
**Figure 3. International remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries (1990-2020)**



Source: World Migration Report 2022, 2022

In the first quarter of 2024, remittances to Ukraine fell to 2634 USD million from 2790 USD million in the fourth quarter of 2023. The lowest number of remittances made up 1218.00 USD million in the first quarter of 2010. The economist considered that the amount of money transferred from the European Union to Ukraine could increase from 15% to 20% if the situation stabilizes in the Ukrainian labor market.

**Figure 4. Remittances received by Ukraine**



Source: Trading Economics, retrieved from <https://tradingeconomics.com/ukraine/remittances>

The United Nations Refugee Agency conducted a study for Ukrainian refugees hosted in Europe and elsewhere in 2022 with 4,800 responses. This research proved the difficulties that migrants encounter and their short-term goals. Most new entrants are educated, prepared to work, and

eager to aid in the growth of their home nations, but they require consistent support. The urgent needs include language classes, official acknowledgment of credentials, and childcare so that parents can work outside the home (Refugees and Migrants, 2023). Reintegrating into the workforce will help refugees become less dependent on social security.

The assessment of Gradus Research Company of war consequences highlights that more than one-third of Ukrainians have left their permanent homes, the majority of whom were women and children. Of these, 82% relocated domestically or to Ukraine, while 18% went abroad. The Eastern areas are home to most migrants; however, other regions also have substantial movement activity. The percentage of Ukrainians who have jobs but are not engaged in the working process is falling as more and more people start working again. At the same time, 78% of the population has seen their income decline. Ukrainians constantly show high commitment to supporting the government, the military, and one another. Two-thirds of citizens frequently give money to military and humanitarian needs responded 64% (Social Trends 2023, 2023).

The new tendency of the labor market shows the lack of vacancies for high-skilled jobs in Ukraine in 2023. The number of vacancies is growing in building, sales, and services. The most necessary jobs for SMEs are sales manager, sales manager assistant, driver, cook, and accountant. The study of the labor market conjuncture identifies that the IT sector had actual growth in 2022 in Ukraine. During that period, the average salary in the financial sphere increased by more than 16% related to informational technologies amplified by 12-22%. (Shevchenko and Nekrashuk, 2023).

Companies implement the strategy to ensure wage growth. The companies provided financial assistance to support workers during the war in Ukraine. Managers have taken a wait-and-see approach and are analyzing the market dynamics. Few companies are pursuing a wage freeze strategy, watching the labor market dynamics. This approach does not apply to the category of critical workers. The comparison data of skills in the world's estimations proves the competitive character of the labor force in the global markets.

Global Skills Report (2023) describes the competitiveness of the labor force in Ukraine. Ukrainian workers are among the world's top employees. Ukrainians came in at number 21 on the general qualifying scale, ahead of Great Britain, Georgia, Hungary, Spain, and the Baltic states. Ukraine ranked eighth in the world's technical proficiency, behind Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, Denmark, Switzerland, and Belarus (See Table 3). Table 3 provides the data of regional skill proficiencies produced by Coursera, which reveals the competitiveness of the labor force in Ukraine and high proficiency in some qualifying scales with advanced countries of the world.



**Table 3. Regional Skill Proficiencies**

Global Rank	Country Name	Business (%)	Technology (%)	Data Science (%)
1	Switzerland	96	99	77
2	Spain	48	100	97
3	Germany	93	84	92
4	Luxembourg	98	58	95
7	Slovakia	80	90	76
8	The Netherlands	87	83	84
9	France	65	88	89
10	Belgium	83	75	91
11	Denmark	95	65	85
12	Italy	89	86	64
13	Sweden	77	82	83
14	Austria	86	71	82
15	Ukraine	54	94	67
17	Finland	71	80	81
54	Romania	35	56	53

Source: Global Skills Report 2023. (2023). Coursera, retrieved from <https://www.coursera.org/skills-reports/global/get-report/pdf/gsr-2023>

The research findings support the idea that the development of a favorable and secure economic, social, and cultural environment in the nation is a precondition for the emergence of the factor, which motivates individuals to return to their home countries. Governments must implement favorable measures to encourage residents to stay in their nations by enhancing work opportunities, training programs, skill development, and providing social and cultural activities.

The research results of expected outcomes of the migration process for migrant-origin countries and migrant-recipient countries confirm ambiguous results. Governments, international organizations, and nonprofit organizations (NGOs) must improve labor migration policies for creating affordable institutional environment. They need to address the economic, social, and educational requirements of underdeveloped nations while considering economic and socio-cultural issues.

The lack of original empirical analysis of migration is considered a limitation of this paper. These limitations can affect the conclusions drawn about the relationship between labor migration and structural changes. The inconsistency of statistical data on migration is explained by the absence of a standard definition of “country of residence for migrants.” The future research of migration will be based on empirical data of migrants applied in statistics. This analysis can give more complete information about international flows and outflows of migrants.

The government policy elaboration and adoption for returning Ukrainian refugees include the creation of security and safety conditions, a safe workplace, an innovative growth strategy, and a sizable amount of government assistance (housing provision and infrastructure development).

## Conclusions

Economic, social, political, and health-related factors affected the relationship between migration, structural changes, and global crises. World turbulences are exacerbated or responded to through the labor movement, affecting migrant-origin and migrant-recipient nations. Controlling the effects of migration during times of crisis is crucial for global development. The adoption of effective regulations and an international collaboration strategy can provide transparency, flexibility, and stability in the labor market. The existing system for regulating migration processes based on international cooperation and the rule of law must be modernized.

The structural changes have led to the redistribution of labor between labor-intensive and technologically advanced sectors. This outcome changes the demand for certain skill sectors, causes job losses in specific professions, and affects migration.

The study results provide credence to the theory that enhancing factors that drive people to return home is a crucial factor in regulating labor migration flows. It requires the formation of a secure and favorable social, cultural, and economic environment in the country. Governments must put forward supportive policies to entice citizens to remain in their countries by expanding employment possibilities, offering training programs, fostering skill development, and suggesting social and cultural events.

Conducting migration policy aimed at protecting economic interests including attracting labor to unfilled sectors of the economy. EU countries need to have a coordinated migration policy to attract labor. Consider professional qualifications and work skills in economic sectors to create conditions for self-realization in the host country.

The EU countries and other economically advanced countries should propose migration policy actions to stimulate education for the local population, job creation, institution settings, and attractive business environment in low-income countries. International organizations need to improve the mechanism of migration regulation and solutions to humanitarian problems.

The paper offers a critical review of the literature, emphasizing the gaps and inconsistencies in current research, and suggests a direction for future studies that may include original data analysis.

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## Factors influencing employee' technology adoption in HR

Irina IONEL (BUTNARU)\*, Doina BALAHUR\*\*

### Abstract

*If a set of individuals is exposed to the same technology, the emotional response is different and even more, the adoption degree is different. Given the increased presence of technology in our life, what motivates individuals, in general, to adopt technology faster and what triggers a positive emotional response in their relationship with technology? Our research aims to bring additional evidence that companies can operate studied changes to increase their employee' adoption of HR technology in early stages, by reducing the alternative channels meant to handhold users and ensure access to the human resource function services. The results would benefit companies to redirect funds to focus more on adopting and personalizing technology that has a higher chance to be easily embraced by employees, especially in human resources domain, where digitalization is also perceived as a de-personalization of the function, making employees even more resistant to change.*

**Keywords:** employee experience, technology adoption, innovation, alternative communication channels

### Introduction

In understanding humans' relationship with technology, we must consider the entire journey. From rudimentary tools to today's artificial intelligence, our evolution has been shaping our behavior in relation to technology and changing expectations from technology.

Furthermore, we cannot talk about technology if we don't introduce the 'self-service'<sup>1</sup> concept, largely leveraged from retail – in 1916 Clarence Saunders revolutionized the shopping experience, by giving shoppers freedom of choice and reducing personnel costs, opening the Piggly Wiggly store in Memphis, Tennessee (Freeman, 2011).

Starting with 1980s, the use of ATMs (automated banking machines), self-check-in, some check-out features in some stores in the United States, shaped the customer behavior and opened the

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\* Irina IONEL (BUTNARU) is PhD student at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, e-mail: irinaionel22@yahoo.com.

\*\* Doina BALAHUR is professor at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, e-mail: d.balahur@uaic.ro.

<sup>1</sup> Self-service is an approach (be it system or process) where individuals perform tasks or access a service on their own, without direct assistance from others.





perspective of empowering users to reduce the waiting time, to use the technology at their own pace, while making use of the service according to their availability (withdraw cash, for example).

The first commercially successful personal computers have been vended in 1975 – “Altair 8800” – in a kit form, for enthusiasts to assemble themselves. The aim at that time was to create a machine easy to interact with from a hardware perspective; there was less focus on friendly interfaces or complex operations. Having a personal computer was attractive from a social status perspective, from a cognitive perspective – knowing how to make use of technology – and was seen more like an empowerment tool. The simplest input-output relationship with the computer, without too much interaction of the tool with the user, has been sufficient for many years. If we look at the use of computers in the organizational space, up to the personal computer era, the specialized personnel had access to centralized computers, in part because of the cost of hardware and in part because of the limited pool of resources with knowledge. So, one can tell that it was a privilege to operate a computer-based technology.

In the early 80's, when computers became quite popular, and population had access to a personal device - still limited to those who could afford one but also who could make use of it – organizations started to equip their staff with individual computers. The focus moved slowly to creating documentation on use of computers, knowledge being limited still. An important limitation that characterized the hardware era has been data storage – locally – that prevented users from collaborating in real time with peers from distance.

Also, the internet made technology self-service a big part of our day-to-day life – online banking, e-commerce, etc. – and developed the need for individualized experiences.

The fundamental shift came with the transition to cloud-centric era. With having access to cloud data and opening the collaboration channels fully, the evolution of technology changed our perception over usability and power associated with its cognitive value. Neuroscientists' opinion about adoption is connected to brain's preference for collaboration and efficiency and this is exactly what cloud-computing brought. Adoption increased dramatically not only at personal level, but organizations started a fast-track race to moving everything to cloud. It is this shift that had a major impact over focus of designers and developers, so from now on, the focus is on *user experience*.

This evolution of computers and the internet enhanced not only cognitive collaboration between specialists but offered organizations the possibility to create a virtual space for their employees, virtual space that changed not only the work behavior, but also changed the perception over their life at work.

As the Human Resource function of the organizations started to play a crucial role in the era of digitization, technology also started to mediate the interactions between HR Specialists and Employees and quickly became the focus of the leadership. Creating a virtual space to foster collaboration and engagement, organizations started to investigate plugging more employee tasks into the digital space, life at work being now handled by the systems – like annual leave requests, references, time and attendance, bonuses, all one can think of.

One decade has been spent helping organizations to shape self-service and technology adoption strategies, constantly focusing on how to achieve more efficiency, because, in the end, employees will have to utilize the technology to fulfil their responsibilities in relation to their employment. In all cases, adoption of the self-service (technology) comes late, after spending a huge effort on educating, handholding, ultimately forcing self-service utilization.

While companies focus on increasing customer loyalty, they now must focus on employee loyalty too, through engagement strategies. Having access to employee surveys of different companies, we noticed one major concern that would stand out every time – technology. Even technology companies have the same challenge – employees feeling demotivated or less engaged because of technology.

What happens when we fail to use technology or when technology fails our expectations? How is this shaping our behavior and how much is this influencing adoption? What if we identify some key indicators or factors that can predict technology adoption and help us make better decisions in selecting features and tools to ensure we maximize self-service to get the return of investment?

This study started from the need to improve adoption of HR Technology and thus the self-service associated, by employees of companies, to reduce the human interactions for improved quality of service and cost efficiency reasons. On the one hand, it is challenging to deal with increased number of calls/chats/emails in initial phase of implementing technology (HR portal), and, on the other hand, it is not cost efficient because the service provider must invest in securing a buffer pool of resources to enable learning and also good quality of service.

## **1. Literature Review**

In analyzing the adoption of technology by humans in general, literature considers few factors that have a major influence: accessibility of technology, consumer behavior in relation to technology, quality of service (efficiency, speed, convenience), cultural background (Minsky, 1987; Norman, 2003; Chevalier and Buckles, 2013; Sidhu and Doyle, 2015; Quality, 2024).

Starting with 21st century, accessibility hasn't been an issue any longer for international businesses, their workforce being equipped properly with devices to enable large scale communication and access to data. Users have been experiencing tools and systems that were enabling them to make decisions, be more efficient, discover new risks and needs, so a major up-skilling process has begun. It is exactly this start of the journey that opened new doors to explore how technology use is shaping human behavior and what triggers humans to use technology and moreover, what motivates them to self-service.

If we explore the consumer behavior in relation to technology, besides the historical overview already presented (Minsky, 1987), suggested technology needs to be relatable to humans, capable of displaying problem-solving and learning capabilities, besides being accessible, efficient. Hence, we can at least assume that self-service will be successful if user interactions that fail will not be repeated, features will be available at all times, reducing frustrations associated with humans not being properly educated or qualified to use it (we have been exploring and learning by doing).

According to Pamela McCorduck (2004) the machines will surpass the human cognitive abilities, and employees will have to become more adaptative, collaborative, and only the 'anthropomorphism' such as personality traits will trigger emotional connections to enable all this – 'behavioral mimicry' understood as natural language, emotional expression to create more intuitive user experiences.

On the same tone, emotional engagement – visceral and behavioral design (Norman, 2003) is based on immediate reactions of technology to user's needs, reducing cognitive load and frustrations. Hence, we can assume that users will adopt technology if they relate to it as being human-like, encompassing human attributes, allowing them to build emotional meanings that resonate with their personal values, aspirations.

It has been only in 2014, 10 years later, that 'Alexa' – virtual assistant developed by Amazon - has been introduced. The individualized Western societies embraced the product for better productivity and efficiency, while societies that prioritize collectivism might take longer to adopt new technology. In 2021, Amazon announces 'Alexa will enter the age of Self' (Prem Natarajan, 2021), becoming more self-aware and more self-learning, which brings the idea of anthropomorphism that blurs the lines between the human and machines. This not only raises some ethical questions but can also lead us to consider the concept of 'uncanny valley', according to which the more human the technology appears to be, the less likely is for the user to adopt it or stay loyal. People seem to develop a repulsion if technology is too human like – may be because of fear of losing control, may be because of need for privacy or just the instinct of preservation.

Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing, big data, and, lately, social media revolutionized business models, providing new perspectives on how to use technology to foster growth, both to business and individuals as professionals.

Inder Sidhu (2015) emphasized the importance of same set of factors mentioned above while also adding the competitive advantage to the list – in the IoT era it is important to attract users with unique or new features, as we are still exploring technology. Competitive advantage can be excluded from the study because utilization of systems to complete employee tasks is not optional, hence, this factor is not contributing to higher adoption and it doesn't make sense from a financial perspective (companies focus on generating revenue, hence on end user experience, rather than employee experience).

On the other hand, but not opposed, Professor Leslie Willcocks (2016) emphasized the opportunity technology has brought to businesses and the need for re-skilling and up-skilling so that humans make most use of technology in a self-service model. The routine tasks will be automated in the end and users of technology will only operate complex ones. Hence educating them and preparing them for the future will be the key to success. Also, even before the pandemic, automation and robotics will re-shape the workplace, transforming it into a more dynamic one, without boundaries of space and time – remote and flexible. Technology will augment humans, helping them reach their full potential and go beyond – creating new possibilities.

## 2. Methodology

Technology is continuously evolving, and developers work with Agile methodology<sup>2</sup>. In technology, well defined plans are only around the platforms, tools and systems to be used, the technology landscape and the integrations to be built, but then the functionality of the tools and systems is not documented a priori, part of the plan, but it is documented in real time, as the technology implementation and configuration happens (Ionel (Butnaru), 2024). It is precisely to allow developers to explore the technology capabilities and allow integration of improvements that come from testing and experiencing the tools. Agile is not just about being flexible but also about a mindset that fosters collaboration, efficiency, and continuous improvement (Appelbaum, 2023).

In social sciences, a similar approach in terms of managing change from within and follow a more adaptable path to implement a change, is represented by Action–Research. Moreover, this

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<sup>2</sup> Agile methodology is a project management and software development approach that emphasizes flexibility, collaboration and customer involvement. It involves iterative cycles of planning, executing and reviewing allowing change adoption and improvements on the way.

methodology applied by 'internal resources of an organization seeking to inquire into the working of their own organizational system, in order to change something in it, can be considered or understood as undertaking insider action-research' (Shani and Coghlan, 2013). Action-Research, as a method applied in the workspace, was inspired by Kurt Lewin, a renowned German American psychologist based in the USA, a pioneer in the field of psychology applied in society and organizations. The method can be applied in any situation of change in a phased manner, based on 3 steps – planning, action, and evaluation/research – and in a democratic organizational environment, will promote critical thinking and collaboration. Nowadays, the methodology most often applied in technological projects is Agile, a methodology based on the same principles. But technology alone can't bring the big benefits. It has been mentioned in the previous sections that the world of training has most easily adopted these innovative methods and multiple controversial theories around which the most advanced organizational structures in the world have been built. Collaboration and immediate action are the key components to adapt solutions to the current dynamics (Ionel (Butnaru), 2024).

In the context of HR Technology, finding the right approach to study how human touch or humanization of technology might influence adoption, must be linked to both technology and people. As suggested when analyzing the key performance indicators, we cannot study the technology or the people only, as we need to identify a way to study both and ensure some level of alignment.

### **3. Findings and Discussions**

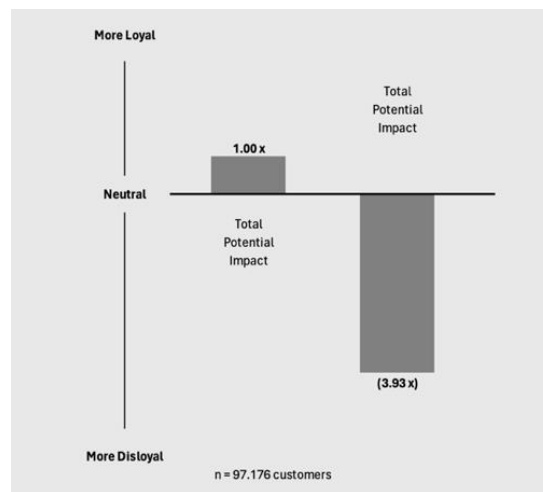
To reiterate the objective, the study started with the need to improve adoption of HR Technology and thus the self-service associated, by employees of companies, to reduce the human interactions for improved quality of service and cost efficiency reasons. Customer Satisfaction Score has been always challenging to sustain, since the employees reaching out to service center have been failed by technology most of the times. Dealing with irate customers/employees<sup>3</sup> is not an easy job. Especially when launching the service to a customer, it is taking a lot of effort to maintain the service quality standards. Humans need time to learn processes, to learn how to navigate systems, and it takes more time to become proficient and be able to help others navigate. Especially when working with unexperienced resources (economical advantage), it takes time and creative learning modules and

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<sup>3</sup> Irate customer/employee is an individual who is extremely angry or upset, typically due dissatisfaction with a product, service or experience overall.

practice to bring them to the level needed to secure the quality of the service. The actual educational system does not prepare workforce ready to be deployed without proper training. Hence, reducing the human interactions would not only diminish the risk to fail on customer satisfaction rate, but would also help achieving the objective associated with technology use – in the end, we implement technology to be used.

**Figure 1. Impact of Customer Service on Customer Loyalty**



Source: Dixon, Toman, and DeLisi, 2020

It may be precisely because of the technology failure to meet customer expectations, that we do not meet the Customer Satisfaction Scores. The customer behavior and expectations changed over time and, as technology plays a more important role, we expect to get things done in the systems, not having to be assisted by humans any longer.

Being assisted by humans might mean we failed to make best use of technology, which is completely changing our expectation from our interlocutor (the service center representative) – disappointed consumers are almost 4 times more likely to lose loyalty over a service and thus share their feedback with peers – as shown in the first chart (Figure 1).

The data used for the purpose of identifying which factors influence most the adoption of technology has been aggregated from all systems used in time<sup>4</sup>, to help understand what triggers the end user behavior in relation to technology. The data has been collected during 2012 – 2019, from 7

<sup>4</sup> Systems of reference: database consists of reporting tools, ticketing systems – in house grown or licensed, surveys. We exported data from all existent systems into excel and analyzed with Power BI. The data has been limited to the 7 companies included in this study. Reports showing type of queries handled by service center, reports showing unique users accessing the service, type of channels for all queries, quality survey results have been included in this study.

companies with a number of employees ranging from 18.000 to 130.000, in the early stages of the service/technology adoption and ongoing, for each particular case, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Metrics analyzed to determine main factors influencing adoption of technology**

<b>Change Management</b>
Navigation queries out of the total number of queries received by the service center.
Process queries out of the total number of queries received by the service center.
<b>Technology Use</b>
Unique users who accessed the service center through all channels.
<b>Alternative channels</b>
Queries retrieved via portal from total.
Queries retrieved via chat from total.
Queries retrieved via phone from total.
Queries retrieved via HRBP from total.
<b>Alternative channels</b>
Quality Satisfaction Survey Score

Data analysis – descriptive statistics - has been instrumental in calculating the weight of the 4 notable factors (using mean, median, average from total) that are influencing the adoption of technology:

- Existence of alternative communication channels (HR Business Partners accept to take queries from employees in face-to-face meetings and/or email/chat/phone is still an option);
- Technology itself (novelty of technology or additional technology to the existing one, in our research we do not have data on perception over technology quality and it is not relevant to the study, however technology itself or the reason users adopt technology as a primary option should be studied and it is part of future research);
- Change management quality (how easy did we make it for users to understand where to go, what process to follow, how to utilize technology);
- Quality of the service center (human representatives providing support in navigating the portal or acting on behalf of the user).

Also, after analyzing the profile of the seven companies, we could streamline four categories, based on the similarities, considering the “personas” that have been used when implementing the technology and service:

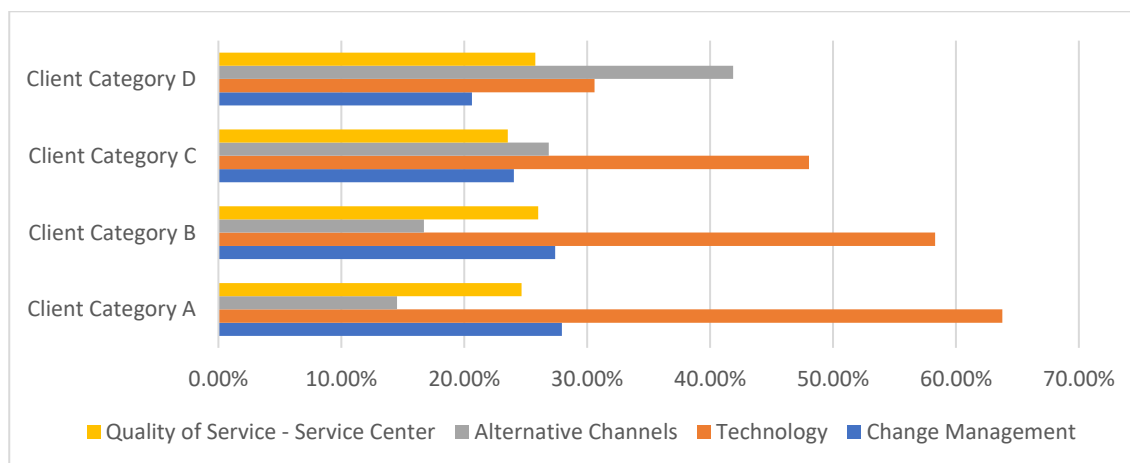
- Category A (1 client – number of employees: 22.000): Professional Services Practitioners, highly skilled in use of technology, highly skilled in business process improvement area, accustomed to systems and navigation;



- Category B (2 clients – average number of employees 60.000): IT Professionals, highly skilled in use of technology, highly skilled in technology development, accustomed to systems and navigation.
- Category C (1 client – average number of employees 18.000): Highly Specialized Professionals (e.g. healthcare), highly skilled in use of technology, accustomed to systems and navigation;
- Category D (3 clients – average number of employees – 18.000): Professionals in Logistics and Production, with some skills in use of technology, not very used to systems and navigation.

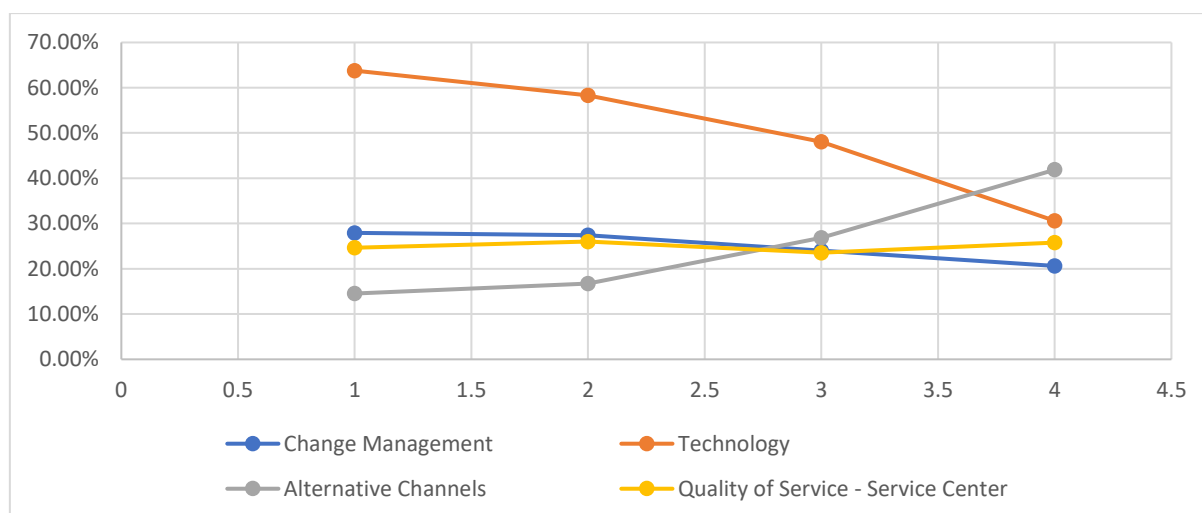
The total population – our sample – consists of approximately 235.000 employees from 72 countries, and since this study is limited to factors influencing adoption of technology from a global perspective, we did not consider demographic data. The KPI data aggregated to help analyzing the impact of each factor out of the 4, can be seen below in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Major factors influencing technology adoption**



Source: own representation

Although the weight from total is equal for 2 factors – change management and quality of service, technology stands out (average of all clients); also, the variation chart below (Figure 3) is showing that the 2 factors that are deviating the most from the average, for some clients, are alternative channels and technology use seen as quality of technology. And these factors are interdependent – if there were no alternative channels, technology would be used. It would be interesting to investigate in a future study a scenario in which if technology were to meet end user expectations, the users would still access the alternative channels.

**Figure 3. Variation chart of major factors influencing technology adoption**

Source: own representation

In the above figure it can be observed how technology as a factor influencing adoption is standing out, at least in the first 3 years from deployment or change, being the major contributor to individuals embracing the self-service. However, existence of alternative channels becomes more and more important after the 3 years from deployment as users become more customized with their practicality. Change management and quality of service are stable, contributing by 20-30% to the overall adoption.

In Client Category A, although the employees can still make use of traditional channels like email, phone and HR face to face, technology adoption is higher than in Client Category D, with access to the same channels, which shows a direct correlation between the profile of user and technology adoption. Also, the day-to-day activity might influence the type of channel used – in category A (professional services) the employees make use of laptops/computers more often than Category D (logistics and production), hence accessibility to systems is different.

In 2017 a workshop has been conducted with a client in Category D (logistics and manufacturing) to understand what could prevent employees from using the technology if the portal is user friendly and intuitive. The conclusion of the workshop has been enlightening – not all the users had access to smartphones and not all the users had a personal laptop, hence, alternative channels were a must for this category of people at least until smartphones become accessible to all people. As a side note, in 2023, another client from this category, willing to invest to obtain high adoption levels (not included in the data) decided to equip all its employees with smartphones to enable access to technology. It would be interesting to see, subject to further research, if adoption increases (the customer is still in the implementation stage).

If we exclude Category D from the data analysis, alternative channels and technology use still stand out from the rest.

**Table 2. Use of HR Technology during first 3 months of implementation**

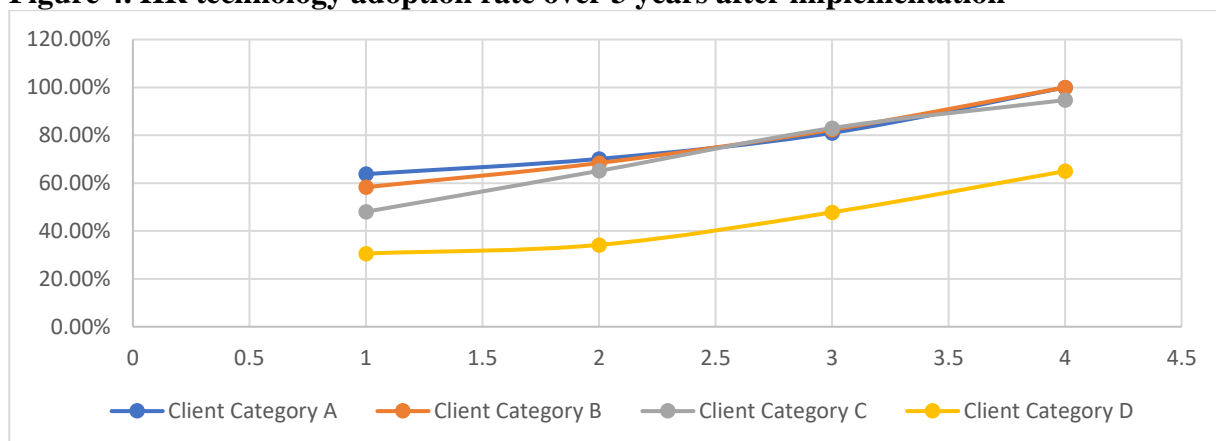
	Client Category A	Client Category B	Client Category C
<b>Technology use</b>	<b>63.78%</b>	<b>58.32%</b>	<b>48.06%</b>

Use of technology, especially in the first months of deployment – it usually takes 6 to 9 months to stabilize the systems and have users accustomed – was not getting close to 60%-70% (as shown in Figure 4) which would have been the objective (again, we are talking about 2012 – 2019).

Technology use has been determined based on the number of unique employee transactions (meaning unique employee as user, independent of the number of transactions) during the first 6 months of the deployment, without any support from the alternative channels (HRBP, Service Center).

The data for 3 years after deployment of technology (for all client categories) has been showing progressive improvement in technology adoption, like in the chart below (Figure 5).

**Figure 4. HR technology adoption rate over 3 years after implementation**



Source: Own representation

The category of clients that stands out is D, specifically because of access to smart devices of the employees working mostly in logistics and manufacturing, obviously for them technology/portal being a personal (may be from financial reasons, but this must be further analyzed) choice among other channels (HRBP, phone). Even if intuition would say phone call would be preferred over face-to-face meeting with HRBP, for this type of employees initially the preferred channel was the latest. Worth thinking about how technology mediated the relationship between employees and HR would

substitute the direct human interaction – hence my interest for “human touch in HR technology”, the subject of my PhD thesis.

What is interesting is that the linearity of the adoption for this category of employees is perfect (average of 11% year over year increase in adoption), and we learned that this type of employees would not necessarily have an annual appraisal, their performance being measured in terms of conduit, professional behavior, productivity, but outside of any systems. Hence, we will exclude again, Client Category D from my further research.

What we can observe in the chart (Figure 4) is that most of the employees get to use the system fully by the third year, in their third year coming to the service center only to resolve technical issues they encounter but also raising new queries that haven't been raised before – to resolve this, the service center developed “most frequently asked questions” (FAQs) documents/library to share best practice within the team, a living document, improved with each new inquiry.

Increase in use of technology was expected, especially because we had a high number of volunteers – 1,6%, seen as early adopters of new technology – for testing the new portal. Also, change management in large international companies is taken seriously (although critics would argue it can always be improved) and guides and manuals are being published continuously with every change.

Alternative channels must be available, especially given the nature of services provided – human resource – that could have a massive impact on employee engagement. So, it became important to analyze what type of queries related to navigation (handholding the user to use the technology) the service center handles, to improve technology in those specific areas, to resolve the problems that could prevent users from adopting technology (like disappointing experience feedback spread through word of mouth).

**Table 2. HR technology adoption rate (3 years monitoring)**

	Client Category A	Client Category B	Client Category C	Average Increase
<b>Technology Use</b>				
- 0-6 Months	<b>63.78%</b>	<b>58.32%</b>	<b>48.06%</b>	13.69%
<b>Technology Use</b>				
- 6-12 Months	78.23%	71.12%	61.87%	13.69%
<b>Technology Use</b>				
- 12-24 Months	94.33%	87.50%	78.34%	16.32%
<b>Technology Use</b>				
- 24-36 Months	100.00%	100.00%	94.70%	11.51%

An analysis on the type of transactions during the second year, revealed that client categories A, B and C, conducted yearly appraisal cycles that somehow forced the employees to utilize the

systems and hence, an increase of 16.32% has been accomplished. The number of transactions associated with annual appraisal was specifically 4.02% out of the total transaction volumes, which may explain the peak in the linearity of adoption (Table 2).

Services companies, and not only, have the tendency to intuitively apply action-research methodology, without being conscious about it. There is a culture to constantly improve metrics, to constantly strive for better performance; hence, improvements to the systems and services are applied, after remediation plans are being discussed in multiple forums, with professionals from all areas of service – quality, data analytics, operations management, client management, even the client itself. In most of the cases, the proposer of the plan will incorporate the feedback resulted from the “democratic dialogue” between all stakeholders.

After discussions in different forums (quality, training, operations, business intelligence), based on collected data and financial impact of each set of measures, we concluded we needed to look at reducing the channels to contact service center, to transfer the budget spent on resources handling phone calls to technology enhancements.

“Cut the old roots” metaphor seemed to resonate with most of business leaders, hence we started analyzing the preferred channels of employees, to eliminate the less preferred ones, to observe. We decided together with one customer (Category A customer) to pilot switching off the phone lines, given that only 8% of the employees were using this channel, compared to 12,45% who already preferred chat.

One should never take the risk to disable some of the alternative channels without analyzing the technology use factor, especially in HR, where employees need to have access to their data, fulfil some duties, feed the systems to enable payroll process completion. In all surveys, employee satisfaction is mostly given by the level of compensation, hence, an issue in their compensation and benefits would be catastrophic. Before disabling some of the alternative channels – although some like chat and phone can be also highly automated, we need to understand why technology usability is low in first 3 to 9 months and how it can be improved, so we meet our collective objectives – customer satisfaction & profitability.

Being assisted by humans might mean we failed to make best use of technology which is completely changing our expectation from our interlocutor (the service center representative) – and this is exactly what we were going to solve for: moving the focus from service center to technology, by reducing channels of communication, starting with phone.

Once decision has been made (February 2019), plan for switching off the phone lines has been presented to leadership of both companies – customer and provider – and we collectively embarked into the journey.

On 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2019 we switched off the service center phone lines for all employees of our customer, exception being made for emergency calls related to employee incidents (employee relations). Part of the resources handling calls for the customer have been redeployed to augment the chat team; in case the channel will face increased volumes due to the change. The volumes of queries that reached the service center decreased overall because of the change – although there has been an increase in volumes for chat team and for HR Business Partners too – for the first 4 months, starting the descendent trend as employees started to get more familiar with portal. As shown in Table 3, chat queries increased by an average of 2,10% for the first 3 months, showing that a portion of users who were previously calling for help, used an alternative channel to access the service or get guidance on how to use the portal. Another increase has been noticed in the queries coming through HR Business Partners who have been then trained to not raise tickets or to not resolve queries on behalf of employees if the technology was accessible to them and they had guides to do it themselves. The HR Business Partners managed to reduce the percent of queries to a lower level than before the phone switch off in 6 months.

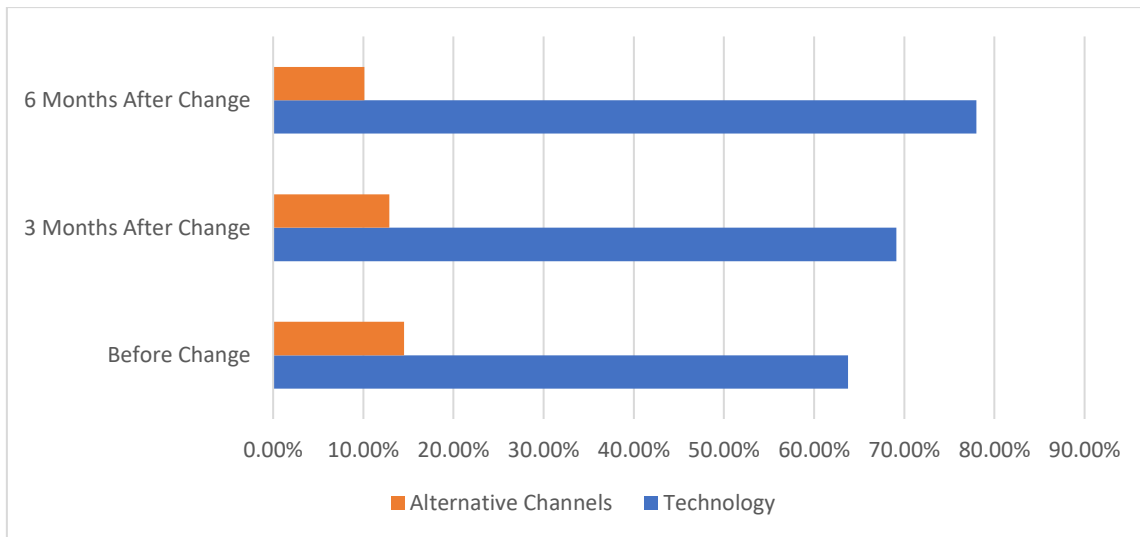
The most important aspect is that we could see a significant increase of 5,22% in the first 3 months and another 3,68% in the following months, so that a total of 8,9% was achieved, showing that employees were adapting to the new settings.

**Table 3. Source of queries after phone lines closed**

<b>Client Category A</b>	<b>Before Change</b>	<b>3 Months After Change</b>	<b>6 Months After Change</b>
Queries retrieved via portal from total	64.11%	69.33%	73.01%
Queries retrieved via chat from total	12.45%	14.55%	12.12%
Queres retrieved via phone from total	8.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Queries retrieved via HRBP from total	15.44%	16.12%	14.87%

Analyzing the channels separately to understand the impact of the change, proved that steps to increase the use of technology can be taken, one by one, to allow re-distribution of resources to technology improvements, given that employees must use it in the end to complete their employee duties. Below bar-chart (Figure 5) shows the direct correlation between removal of alternative channels and use of technology.

**Figure 5. Technology use after reducing alternative channels**



Source: Own representation

Another dimension that we need to consider in consumption of service, or utilization rate, is related to necessity – if an action is necessary, or mandatory, as part of the employee duties, the struggles associated with use of technology or service overall are disregarded; completion of the task itself is rewarding and any struggle is forgotten. If we take the payroll tasks, as example, they are mandatory for employees, but they are also necessary from a motivational point of view, because employees must fill in a time and attendance form as required by company, but they have the motivation behind too, as they want to get fully paid for the time worked. They might struggle with the system, but they will do their best to complete the task, removing all barriers.

Thus, reducing alternative channels, although in HR services provided to employees might be beneficial from a cost and quality of service perspective, should be limited to this domain and these circumstances, as it can impact the perception over the service overall if applied in another domain. And this is specifically because employees have some level of obligation associated with their tasks, that cannot be transposed to regular clients who access any type of services. I chose to use ‘some obligation’ instead of absolute obligation due to existence of restrictions, in some countries, to mandate employees to perform some tasks in systems or at all.

## Conclusions

Coming back to the objective, the study started with the need to improve adoption of HR Technology and thus the self-service associated, by employees of companies, to reduce the human interactions for improved quality of service and cost efficiency reasons



Technology journey we all embarked in is continuously evolving. All companies want to reach that state when administrative tasks or repetitive tasks that add no value to the business or to its employees are 100% automated. We all want to simplify processes, we want to reduce cost, we want technology to really augment humans.

Resource scarcity is one of the most pressing risks companies must deal with now – and it is not only the demographic concern but also change in expertise needs, re-skilling being now more usual than ever before.

It is imperative to analyze how companies can use their resources for more complex and added value work instead of repetitive work. Also, it is imperative to analyze how companies can increase the use of technology in the absence of budgets allocated to administrative functions and/or processes.

Analyzing the factors that contribute the most to human resource technology adoption by employees of companies, we can highlight one that can be a short-term solution and can lead to early adoption during the transition to digital space – alternative channels.

When implementing technology, companies should define the personas – employee types or categories – and the preferred communication channels. They should try to reduce them to a minimum, making sure at the same time that the ones selected are available to all their employees (not all channels could be available to all employees, but employees should have access to at least one alternative channel).

Reducing alternative channels will enable more focus on quality of technology: reducing the data analysis perimeter, reducing training investment, reducing the cost with resources associated with the channel, will put the emphasis on technology and that is the 'channel' to be continuously improved, based on new user expectations but new advancements too.

Our study has its limitations and that companies should analyze user behavior prior to making any decision, because of the nature of human resource services involving some obligation. Nevertheless, if companies need resources to enhance technology or if they lack resources to handle the alternative channels, we proved that a controlled reduction of channels (through data analysis and change management) can bring the efficiency expected and support redirection of focus.

We did not see a significant impact on customer service satisfaction, and it might be that part of it is because we switched off the less used channel so not enough critical mass to influence the overall scores, part of it because the pandemic changed perspectives too. we cannot draw a conclusion on this without deeper analysis, but it is important for our study to conclude that removing less used alternative channels will not have a significant impact on user satisfaction.

Our study aims to offer a solution to improve technology adoption in companies that lack financial resources to invest in technology quality. Independent of area of life - work, education, leisure, etc., technology design is important, and the more designers focus on technology friendliness, efficiency, accessibility, the higher the adoption level will be. It would be interesting to go beyond and understand what keeps them loyal to a technology over time – is it attachment, confidence, routine, or fear of change; or understand if they are inclined to like more adaptive technologies that introduce enhancements step by step and take the users along in the journey?

On the other hand, it is imperative to understand up to what level technology is to be humanized to ensure adoption and loyalty of user, to avoid falling into the ‘Uncanny Valley’ – ‘the closer something gets to looking human but stops right before it reaches a realistic look, the more it falls into the uncanny valley’ (Alexander S. Gillis, 2024), influencing the user to reject the use of the technology.

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**Appendix 1. Gender**

	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>male</b>	38.0	38.0
<b>female</b>	62.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	100.0	

**Appendix 2. Age in years**

	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Under 18 years</b>	8.0	8.0
<b>18-25 years</b>	53.0	61.0
<b>25-40 years</b>	19.0	80.0
<b>40-55 years</b>	18.0	98.0
<b>over 55 years</b>	2.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	100.0	

**Appendix 3. Current level of education**

	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>secondary education</b>	1.0	1.0
<b>high school</b>	22.0	23.0
<b>university</b>	71.0	94.0
<b>postgraduate studies</b>	6.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	100.0	

**Appendix 4. Monthly income**

	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative</b>
<b>under 1000 lei/month</b>	25.0	25.0
<b>1000-3000 lei/month</b>	28.0	53.0
<b>3000-5000 lei/month</b>	26.0	79.0
<b>5000-7000 lei/month</b>	12.0	91.0
<b>over 7000 lei/month</b>	9.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	100.0	

## Students' attitude towards international mobility programmes

Răzvan-Ionuț DRUGĂ\*

### Abstract

*This paper presents an overview of international mobility programmes for students at Ovidius University of Constanta, Romania. International exchanges are an increasingly sought-after tool by higher education institutions in order to implement internationalization strategies. Considering the number of international exchanges that increases from one year to the next, universities should adopt the best policies to further support this trend by promoting mobilities and stimulating students to access them. The case study will follow, among others, the reasons why students would access a study or internship scholarship, the limits that constrain them to take this step, as well as the identification of the most suitable destinations for such mobility. By analyzing behavioral intentions, university representatives can be confident that the number of mobilities that can be carried out in the coming years will be increasing.*

**Keywords:** higher education institutions, international exchanges, internationalization, mobility programmes, students

### Introduction

The higher education system has recently benefited from many changes that have contributed to its development throughout the world. An important factor that determined this evolution is represented by the internationalization process (Egron-Polak, 2012).

Throughout history, when the internationalization process was discussed among higher education institutions, the relationship between these organizations was highlighted in several directions: 'student and staff exchange'; 'working together in aid/development projects'; 'shared and joint research and scholarship' (OECD, 2019). Depending on the institutional size that certain universities have, the previously mentioned directions, taken individually, have a lower or higher priority in their internationalization strategies (Egron-Polak and Hudson, 2012).

However, international mobility programmes are a tool that universities around the world are increasingly using. Choudaha (2017) found that, in recent years, international students have accessed

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\*Răzvan-Ionuț DRUGĂ is assistant professor at Ovidius University of Constanta, Faculty of Economic Sciences, Constanta, Romania, e-mail: razvan.druga@365.univ-ovidius.ro.

at least three waves of opportunities, each driven by a specific motivation: financial support (Wave I: 1999-2006), academic support (Wave II: 2006-2013), and career support (Wave III: 2013-2020). This study confirms that student needs are constantly evolving, influenced by the changing geopolitical and economic context.

One of the most popular programmes of this type is Erasmus Plus, “the European Union Programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the 2021-2027 period” (European Commission, 2024a). It not only facilitated the exchange of people from one country to another, but had two major contributions that still have effects today: it was an important factor for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to join the European Union, as well as for other states that aspired to this status; managed the implementation of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), through its initiation within international exchanges (de Wit and Altbach, 2020).

In the period 1987-2023, over 15.1 million beneficiaries accessed a learning mobility financed by the Erasmus Plus Programme, the interest increasing from one year to the next (European Commission, 2024b). Depending on the sector referred to, the programme supports the participation of several categories of people in such exchanges: ‘students’, ‘pupils’, ‘teachers’, ‘trainers’, ‘young people’, ‘youth workers’, ‘volunteers’, ‘athletes’, ‘coaches’ and others (European Commission, 2024a).

As previously mentioned, the fields of education and training are some of the sectors supported by the European Commission through the Erasmus Plus Programme. According to the latest data published on official channels, in 2023, the last reference year, these areas benefited from the largest budget distributed by the European Commission, of approximately 74% of the total value for that period (European Commission, 2024b). The Education and Training category includes the following sectors: ‘Higher Education’, ‘Vocational Education and Training’, ‘School Education’, ‘Adult Learning’ and ‘Cross-sectorial’ (European Commission, 2024b).

In the field of Higher Education, the promotion of international mobility can be a priority, due to the benefits that both the participants and the institutions involved can obtain (Turnea *et al.*, 2022). A university that supports such opportunities could benefit, among other things, from a development of cooperation and collaboration with organizations abroad (Diem *et al.*, 2023). This can serve for better external visibility, better positioning in international rankings and, of course, it can facilitate obtaining funds for the consolidation and development of activities from internationalization and research strategies, but not only. On the other hand, participants in these international exchanges have the opportunity to enrich their academic knowledge and acquire a mutually beneficial learning experience (Turnea *et al.*, 2022).

Considering the aspects presented, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the perception that students have regarding international mobility programmes. For this, a research will be carried out among the students of a university in Romania. The tool used will be a questionnaire distributed online. The results obtained will allow the analyzed university to propose different measures to stimulate students' interest in accessing international study or practice mobility in the coming years.

## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1. The Erasmus Plus Programme: a brief history

Currently known as the Erasmus Plus programme, it represents one of the most significant achievements of the European Union. It was launched in 1987 with the Council's decision to adopt the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) (Official Journal of the European Communities, 1987). The programme demonstrates the European Union's dedication to promoting a united, diverse, and knowledge-based Europe (Pinari, 2024).

At its inception, the programme included only eleven countries: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom (Hubble *et al.*, 2021). Over time, with the expansion of the European Union (EU), the number of participating countries has increased significantly. Currently, 33 countries participate with full rights, including EU member states and several third countries associated to the programme: Iceland, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, and Türkiye (European Commission, 2024a). In addition, the Erasmus Plus Guidelines specify a category of third countries not associated to the programme, which can participate in certain actions but not with full rights (European Commission, 2024a).

Romania is one of the 33 countries that can be fully involved in all actions carried out under the auspices of the Erasmus Plus Programme (European Commission, 2024a). This status is due to the fact that it is one of the member countries of the European Union. In 2023, the last reference year in the European Commission's statistics, over 1,270 mobility projects were implemented in Romania in all fields (European Commission, 2024c). Of these, the higher education sector benefited from the largest funding, totalling EUR 52,610,090 (European Commission, 2024c). This reflects the increased interest of universities in attracting funds for the implementation of mobility projects financed by the Erasmus Plus Programme.

To date, a total of 246,517 people have visited Romania through an Erasmus Plus mobility, with Türkiye and Italy among the most popular sending countries (European Commission, 2024d).



Regarding outgoing mobilities, 381,194 individuals have benefited from Erasmus Plus scholarships abroad, with Spain, Italy, and Portugal being among the most popular receiving countries (European Commission, 2024d). These figures are expected to change as beneficiaries complete their ongoing or planned mobilities.

A university in Romania that has implemented such projects is the Ovidius University of Constanta. Over time, international exchanges have supported the higher education institution in order to implement the internationalization strategy. Also, the results obtained in these mobility projects, together with other corresponding activities in the field of internationalization, can bring Ovidius University of Constanta a strengthening of its reputation and the possibility of offering educational services adapted to the new requirements of the global economy and society (Jugănar and Drugă, 2022).

Based on the institution's internal records, during the academic year 2022-2023, Ovidius University of Constanta facilitated 118 outgoing mobilities, for study or internships, conducted in European Union member states and third countries associated with the programme (Ovidius University of Constanta, 2024). In the same period, the university hosted 59 incoming students from the same category of states and one student from a third country not associated with the programme for study or internship mobilities in Constanta (Ovidius University of Constanta, 2024). These figures highlight significant progress achieved by the programme implementation team. For instance, in the academic year 2013-2014, only 39 outgoing and 29 incoming mobilities for study were recorded, and these were limited to programme countries at the time (Ovidius University of Constanta, 2020).

Observing this constant evolution of both the countries that are part of the Erasmus Plus Programme and the increasing number of mobilities carried out year after year, the responsible institutions should also analyze the needs of the beneficiaries. In this way, taking into account the current geopolitical context, they can better tailor the programmes to meet students' expectations. Ensuring that students' satisfaction is prioritized and addressing their specific needs will likely lead to a more positive attitude toward these opportunities. Over time, this could transform these scholarships into a necessity for students, reinforcing the significance of international mobility as a core element of their academic and personal growth.

## **1.2. Determinants of Erasmus Plus Programme Mobilities for Students**

According to a study, students who are beneficiaries of international mobility are considered those persons who “have crossed a national border to study or to undertake other study related

activities, for at least a certain unit of a study programme or a certain period of time, in the country to which they have moved" (Kelo *et al.*, 2006). From this point of view, we can highlight at least three conditions that such a student should meet: moving to another country; the purpose of the trip must be closely related to the learning activity or related to it; the period spent in the host country should be limited.

Depending on their own interests, students from a university can apply through the Erasmus Plus Programme for mobility, in physical format, for study or internship, with a duration of between two and twelve months, for bachelor's and master's study cycles, excluding travel days (European Commission, 2024a). Since there are cases where, for various reasons, the duration of the period prevents students from benefiting from such mobility, the programme can also offer them the chance to apply for a blended mobility, which necessarily contains a virtual component, and which can be between five and thirty days (European Commission, 2024a). Doctoral students are eligible to apply for both periods for a mobility held in physical format (European Commission, 2024a).

According to a study carried out by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), a non-profit international student organisation, and published in 2022, among the main motivations of students to benefit from an Erasmus Plus mobility can be included: „meeting new people”; „experiencing different learning environments”; „living abroad” (Erasmus Student Network, 2022). These factors can subsequently determine the final settlement of students in the host country, either to continue their studies or to find a job according to their needs. It is well known that, in addition to their educational impact, Erasmus Plus scholarships also contribute to the economic development of the host country. Upon completing their mobility, beneficiaries often express a desire to remain in the country where they studied to pursue employment opportunities. Familiar with the local environment and academically well-prepared, they contribute to the strengthening of an integrated European labor market (Parey and Waldinger, 2010). Additionally, if they become ambassadors after completing their mobility, students can promote the host country and city to their family and friends, encouraging them to visit as tourists or apply for an Erasmus Plus scholarship in the same destination, thereby helping to increase the number of international students (Amaro *et al.*, 2019).

Another factor that would determine the intention of students to apply for an Erasmus Plus mobility can be represented by the superior quality of the educational services offered by an institution abroad, which can thus contribute to the professional and personal development of the candidate (Granato *et al.*, 2024). In order to choose the right university, students have the opportunity to consult the list of inter-institutional agreements that the organization they belong to has concluded with other institutions in other states. Other tools they can use are represented by international

rankings. These can provide an overview of the educational act carried out at the universities that are present there. Among these rankings, we can list: Academic Ranking of World Universities (ShanghaiRanking Consultancy, 2024); QS World University Rankings (QS Quacquarelli Symonds, 2024); THE World University Rankings (Times Higher Education, 2024).

Once the decision to apply for an Erasmus Plus mobility is made, students will have to step out of their comfort zone and carry out certain preliminary activities, in order to prepare their experience abroad as best as possible. In addition to the part of getting the scholarship and the acceptance of the host university, students should pay special attention to the language preparation, resource management and the adjustment period to the new culture, the new different educational context and the new student body (Granato *et al.*, 2024).

Erasmus Plus mobilities can represent opportunities even for local students, who could interact with international ones. Each incoming student experience differs greatly from one to another. In addition to the academic part, there are other aspects that can decisively influence the time spent at the university abroad, such as: ‘social integration’, ‘friendship development’, ‘personal educational differences’, ‘different communication styles and customs’, ‘help seeking approaches’, ‘funding issues’, ‘career choices’, and other ‘soft skills’ (Bista, 2019). Thus, the involvement of local students, either individually or as ambassadors or volunteers in various associations such as ESN (Erasmus Student Network, 2024), could support the integration of incoming students in the host country. On the other hand, this involvement of local students will be able to develop certain soft skills and generate their interest to apply for a future study or practice mobility.

At the same time, local students and ESN association volunteers can be a real support in promoting study and practice opportunities among other university colleagues. In their efforts to stimulate students’ interest in applying for a scholarship abroad, universities, even through their volunteers, can also target candidates with limited opportunities who, in some cases, are less likely to benefit (Granato and Schnepf, 2024). Recently, the Erasmus Plus Programme even offers additional grants for those people with fewer opportunities, with special needs or for those from different regions who face certain challenges due to localization (European Commission, 2024a). These types of support make the programme much more inclusive, aiming to offer this opportunity to a wider range of students, not just those with parents who have higher education or above-average incomes, as may have been the case in the past (Kratz and Netz, 2016; Di Pietro, 2015).

All the efforts of the aforementioned students could be rewarded by additional points in the selection process, if they decide to apply for international mobility. There are universities that have in their evaluation grid a criterion for the volunteering activities carried out by the candidates. Thus,

students who have been involved either in supporting incoming Erasmus students, promoted international mobility to other colleagues or carried out various volunteer activities, receive additional points from the selection committee (Ovidius University of Constanta, 2022).

In addition to all the positive things mentioned, international mobilities could even be seen as threats to the quality of higher education. In a controversial way, these exchanges can be defined as: 'commercialization of trans-national higher education'; 'brain drain'; 'flooding by foreign students' (Rivza and Teichler, 2007). Such attributes only lead to the risk of lowering the reputation of international mobility programmes. In this case, the universities involved should always promote the benefits of these opportunities, the career prospects of students, as well as the economic advantages that cities and countries where such international exchanges take place can benefit from.

Analyzing the presented information, Erasmus Plus mobilities can be regarded as a key tool supporting both internationalization at home and abroad. They play a significant role in implementing university strategies, serving as a valuable resource for fostering students' academic and professional development while upholding the core values of higher education (Roman and Bulat, 2023).

## 2. Research methodology

The main purpose of this research is to analyze the attitude of students at Ovidius University in Constanta, Romania, regarding international mobility programmes. We have formulated no less than three objectives that can support us in this endeavor:

O1: to identify the degree of knowledge of international mobility opportunities;

O2: to identify the geographical regions that show a high interest for the development of international mobility;

O3: to identify the behavioral intentions of students regarding international mobility.

To achieve these objectives, we conducted a mixed-methods study based on a questionnaire. The tool used contained both closed questions, with simple or multiple answers, but also questions with open answers or that required the use of a semantic differential scale or a 7-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire was distributed between June and November 2024, online, through the university's social networks and by sending emails to student databases. The collected data were processed and analyzed using the SPSS Statistics software, version 30.

A total of 229 students provided responses. Details of their demographic profile are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Sample structure**

Variable	Biological gender				Marital status			
	Male	Female	Married	Single	In a relationship	Bachelor	Divorced	Widower
%	20.5%	79.5%	12.6%	55%	26.2%	4.4%	1.4%	0.4%
Variable	Age							
	18-24 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55-64 years	over 65 years		
%	74.2%	14%	7%	2.6%	1.8%	0.4%		
Variable	Average monthly net income (RON)							
	<= 2,300	2,301-3,000	3,001-4,000	4,001-5,000	over 5,000	no income		
%	21.4%	10%	7%	6.1%	10.5%	45%		

Source: own processing based on data collected

As we can see in the previous table, most people who participated in the research are female (79.5%). Regarding the age of the respondents, most of them are between 18-24 years old (74.2%). Regarding marital status, 55% of the students who answered the questionnaire are single. Finally, when discussing their average monthly net income, 45% of them have no income.

Regarding their studies at the time of completing the questionnaire, most respondents were enrolled in a bachelor's degree programme (84.3%), followed by those in a master's degree programme (14.4%) and a doctoral study programme (1.3%).

If the form of education is discussed, 97% of the students were in full-time education, 1.7% of them in part-time education, and 1.3% were enrolled in a study programme in the form of distance education.

Last but not least, regarding the form of study financing, 47.2% of the students were following a study programme in the form of education without fees, 37.1% in the form of education with fees, 12.7% were in the form of education without fees and with a scholarship, and the remaining 3% were enrolled in the form of education with fees, but with a scholarship.

Next, the answers collected from the students of the Ovidius University of Constanta will be analyzed and discussed, closely related to the objectives of this research.

### 3. Findings and discussion

A first thematic question addressed to the students of the Ovidius University of Constanta referred to their degree of familiarity with the international mobility opportunities available at the institution to which they belong. A 7-point scale ranging from 1 (very unfamiliar) to 7 (very familiar) was used to answer this question. Descriptive data for this question can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2 - Degree of familiarity with international mobility opportunities**

Item	N	Min.	Max.	Mean
Degree of familiarity with international mobility opportunities	229	1	7	4.17

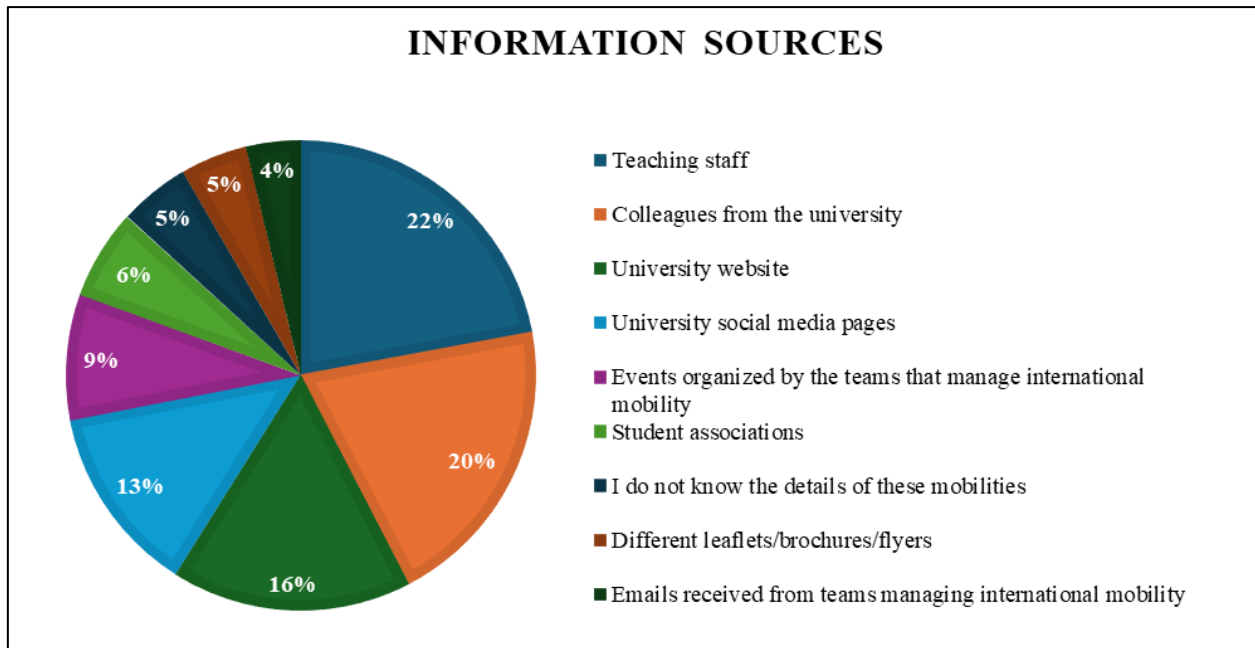
Source: own processing based on data collected

According to the results obtained ( $M = 4.17$ ), we can consider that several students know some information about these opportunities that they can take advantage of during their studies. However, some respondents are less familiar with them. For this, the teams that manage them should intensify their promotion activities. However, a significant part of the respondents is in their first year of undergraduate studies, and thus, at the time of the research, they have not yet had the opportunity to be introduced to these mobility programmes. Only 10.9% of the students who participated in the research managed to benefit, until now, from international mobility. Of these, 41% benefited from study mobilities, 26% benefited from practice mobilities, 21% benefited from both study and practice mobilities, and 12% participated in various cultural exchanges.

Among all international mobility opportunities, the most popular among students of Ovidius University of Constanta are those carried out through the Erasmus Plus Programme (95.2%). Other scholarships mentioned by students were: DAAD scholarships (2.3%); Fulbright scholarships (1.7%); CEEPUS scholarships (0.4%). The popularity of the Erasmus Plus Programme can be explained by the number of countries in which international exchanges can be carried out, compared to the other programmes that offer more limited opportunities from this point of view. 0.4% of respondents do not know of any opportunity for international mobility offered by the institution where they study.

Analyzing the results in Figure 1, it seems that the most popular sources of information from which students learned details about these international mobility opportunities are: teaching staff (22%), colleagues from the university (20%), the university website (16%), and the university social media pages (13%). The high percentages for these sources of information can be represented by the frequency with which they encounter or use them. Since we are talking about a very high proportion of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 (74.2%), people responsible for promoting international mobility programmes should take this into account and adapt their marketing strategies and policies depending on the profile of the students. Of the total respondents, 5% answered that they do not know details about these mobilities.

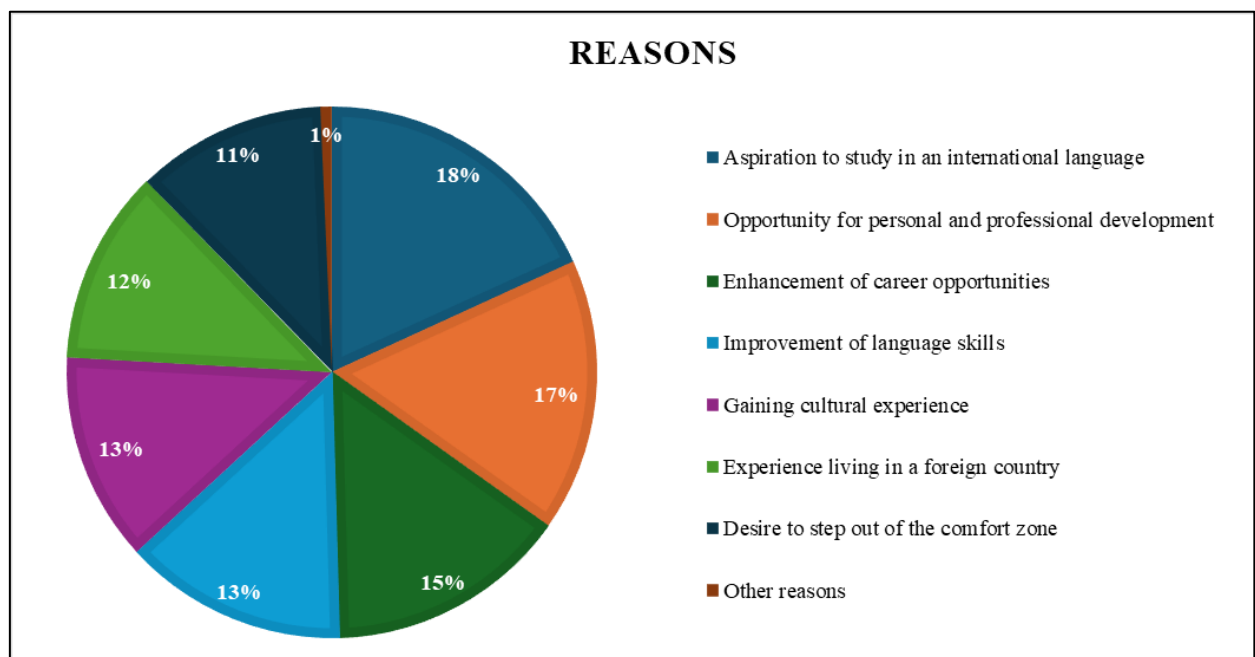
**Figure 1. Sources of information about international mobility**



Source: own processing based on data collected.

The main reasons why beneficiary students applied for international mobility, or why other students would be interested in applying for such a scholarship, are presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Reasons to access international mobility**



Source: own processing based on data collected.



As we can see, the main reasons that led or may lead Ovidius University of Constanta students to apply for international mobility are: aspiration to study in an international language (18%), opportunity for personal and professional development (17%), enhancement of career opportunities (15%). Since many students do not have the opportunity to study abroad full-time, an Erasmus Plus grant for a fixed period offers a viable alternative. This allows students to gain not only theoretical knowledge but also develop new soft skills, which may be among the most valuable benefits of such a programme.

These reasons align with four key dimensions of the Erasmus Plus experience: academic, social, cultural, and personal/psychological development (Gallarza *et al.*, 2024). Even if not explicitly mentioned, such an experience could also help develop entrepreneurial skills, including financial literacy, teamwork, idea capitalization, self-awareness, and others (Grosu *et al.*, 2024).

The following table shows some barriers that students believe they may encounter or have encountered when applying for international mobility.

**Table 3. Barriers encountered when applying for international mobility**

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>%</b>
Lack of necessary information / Insufficient promotion of opportunities	13%
Fear that subjects studied abroad will not be considered equivalent or recognized	10%
No barriers	10%
Fear of getting low grades at the university abroad	9%
Family responsibilities	8%
Fear of leaving the comfort zone	7%
Difficulties finding suitable accommodation	7%
Insufficient knowledge of an international language	6%
Fear of not adapting to the new culture	6%
Perceived value of the grants offered	6%
Job-related commitments	5%
The university's mobility offer	4%
Incompatibility of study programmes	4%
Interaction with the international mobility team	2%
Previous student experiences	2%
Other reasons	1%

Source: own processing based on data collected

As can be seen in the previous table, the biggest challenges students face when applying for international mobility are related to their limited knowledge about these opportunities (13%) and the fear that the subjects they study abroad may not be recognized or credited (10%). Less frequent challenges include concerns about previous experiences of other students (2%), interaction with the international mobility team (2%), and other minor reasons (1%). To address these barriers, university

teams should focus on providing solutions through their promotion of international mobility. One option could be to invite former beneficiaries to share their experiences and explain how they overcame any obstacles. In addition, the university could play a direct role in addressing some of these barriers by clearly communicating the principles promoted by the Erasmus Plus Programme through its Charter, for example (European Commission, 2020).

In addition to the barriers encountered, students were asked to mention several recommendations that they consider useful in order to increase the number of students who could access international mobility. The results are presented in Table 4. The top recommendations made by students were as follows: enhanced promotion of international mobility opportunities provided by the university (12%), offering larger grants (11%), developing an online platform for application submissions (11%), providing support courses to improve language skills (11%), and assisting students with finding accommodation in the host country (11%). By improving these aspects, the university could significantly increase the number of students applying for international mobility. Where feasible, the university should implement these recommendations or share them with relevant stakeholders, such as ministries, agencies, and commissions, in their annual reports. By doing so, the university can enhance educational outcomes, better prepare students for success in a rapidly evolving world, and foster global citizenship (Kitiashvili, 2024).

**Table 4. Recommendations for increasing the degree of access to international mobility opportunities**

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>%</b>
Enhanced promotion of international mobility opportunities provided by the university	12%
Offering larger grants	11%
Developing an online platform for application submissions	11%
Offering support courses to improve language skills	11%
Providing support for finding suitable accommodation	11%
Providing informative materials in faculty halls	10%
Providing counseling services pre- and post- mobility	9%
Establishing inter-institutional agreements with prestigious universities globally	8%
Increased support from the international mobility team	7%
Creating an alumni network for international mobility participants	7%
Other recommendations	1.5%
No recommendations	1.5%

Source: own processing based on data collected

Regarding the ideal period that an international mobility should have, 32% of students prefer a period of one semester for their international mobility, followed by 26.2% who prefer a duration of 16-30 days, 13.8% who opt for two months, 12% who favor two semesters, 10.7% who choose 8-15

days, and 5.3% who would prefer a mobility period of 3-7 days. It is an advantage that the Erasmus Plus Programme offers both short-term scholarships (5 to 30 days) and long-term scholarships (2 to 12 months), aligning with students' varied preferences for mobility durations.

When discussing the geographical regions that would be of interest for future international mobility, 72% of students selected Europe as their preferred destination. Other responses included North America (12.6%), Asia (7.7%), South America (3.6%), Africa (2.3%), and Australia (1.8%). This preference for Europe may be influenced not only by the extensive opportunities provided through the Erasmus Plus Programme but also by factors such as the proximity to students' home countries, similar eating habits, favorable climate, and shared social values and norms. Additionally, Europe's cultural and historical connections with many countries, as well as its diversity in lifestyle and academic offerings, make it a popular destination for mobility.

Finally, the last set of questions aimed to analyze students' behavioral intentions regarding the international mobility opportunities offered by Ovidius University of Constanta. To assess these intentions, a 7-point Likert scale was employed, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The results are presented in Table 5

**Table 5. Analysis of behavioral intentions regarding international mobility opportunities**

Item	N	Min.	Max.	Mean
In the future, I intend to apply for an international mobility programme.	229	1	7	4.65
In the future, I intend to recommend other students to apply for an international mobility programme.	229	1	7	5.15

Source: own processing based on data collected

According to the results obtained in the previous table, students' behavioral intentions regarding international mobility opportunities appear to be positive. When asked about participating in an international mobility programme in the future, students generally expressed agreement with the idea (M = 4.65). A study by Granato *et al.* (2024) found that students in their early years are particularly motivated to take advantage of mobility opportunities. Perhaps more intensive promotion, along with participation in counseling sessions, could further boost their confidence, helping them become more determined to apply.

Additionally, whether or not they choose to participate, students expressed their willingness to recommend others to apply for an international mobility programme (M = 5.15). This could have two advantages. Firstly, by participating in promotional events, students would be open to sharing the information they have learned with their peers. Secondly, even if some students are not yet ready to

embark on mobility, they could still become volunteers with student associations supporting such exchanges, contributing to the promotion of these opportunities.

## Conclusions

This paper analyzed the attitudes of students regarding international mobility opportunities, with a particular focus on those from Ovidius University of Constanta, Romania.

Although international mobility programmes offer various benefits, potential beneficiaries often encounter obstacles when applying. The primary barrier identified by students in relation to these opportunities is the insufficient information available to them (13%). Despite this, students have access to various information sources, including teaching staff, peers from other faculties, and the online environment (such as the university's website and its social media pages). However, for this interest to be fruitful, it must be matched by proactive engagement from the students.

On the other hand, universities should adapt their marketing strategies to align with students' profiles. New solutions could include creating a newsletter or leveraging platforms like TikTok to promote mobility programmes. Other useful tools may include student information seminars, testimonial campaigns from students who have participated in mobility programmes, mentoring sessions with teams managing these mobilities or career counseling centers, and regular updates of faculty notices with information on mobility scholarships. Such activities can increase students' awareness of international mobility opportunities and foster a more positive attitude toward participating in them.

An analysis of both the behavioral intentions of Ovidius University of Constanta students and the official statistics from the European Commission suggests that interest in international mobility will continue to grow in the coming years. For future mobilities, the majority of students would prefer to choose a European country (72%), although some are also interested in destinations in North America, Asia, and beyond.

In this context, universities should consider students' interests when updating their international mobility offerings. The increased interest in specific countries or regions should serve as the basis for determining how available funds are allocated. Another key factor is the students' needs during the mobility application process. Based on these needs, universities can offer personalized counseling services to help students select the most appropriate destination. When these conditions are met, the international experience will better align with students' expectations, leading to positive feedback.

To conduct a more effective analysis, universities should organize focus groups or surveys at least once a semester to better understand students' needs and create profiles of potential beneficiaries. As a result, some students may apply for international mobilities to develop technical skills, while others may seek opportunities to enhance their soft skills. Based on these findings, higher education institutions, particularly those responsible for managing international relations, should support the development of inter-institutional agreements with new universities that could attract students' interest in these scholarships.

Lastly, it is crucial to implement measures that ensure the effective development of international mobility programmes in higher education institutions. Given the increasing demand for international mobility, host universities will need to adapt their staff structures and infrastructures to provide a satisfactory experience for incoming students. Limited material, time, and financial resources - particularly within international relations departments - can make it difficult for higher education institutions to deliver high-quality educational and administrative services to incoming students (Bista, 2019). Additionally, bureaucracy and complex procedures further hinder the efficiency of the departments involved (Roman and Bulat, 2024). As a result, there is a risk of damaging the institution's reputation, even though internationalization has been a key factor in its strengthening. The same challenges apply to outgoing mobility.

To address these issues, international mobility departments could include a staff member dedicated to analyzing students' development needs. This role would help balance students' academic programmes with the demands of their future professional careers (Choudaha, 2017). Furthermore, streamlining administrative procedures and offering more tailored guidance can reduce barriers for students and ensure a smoother experience.

This research also has certain limitations, primarily due to the choice of target group. To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of Romanian students' perceptions of international mobility programmes, a broader study including multiple universities across the country will be necessary. This would allow for more generalizable conclusions and a better understanding of the factors that influence students' decisions regarding international mobility.

In conclusion, international mobility opportunities are vital tools for implementing universities' international strategies. By executing these programmes efficiently, the benefits will be numerous: for students, in terms of their personal and professional development; for universities, in terms of increased visibility and prestige; and for the community, which will benefit from well-prepared individuals entering the labor market. To maximize these benefits, universities must continue to

evolve their approaches to mobility programmes, considering both students' preferences and the logistical challenges involved.

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## Highlighting the relationship between smart city and quality of life. An analysis of the municipality of Iasi, Romania

Ioana BEJENARU\*, Bogdan Constantin IBĂNESCU\*\*, Corneliu IAȚU\*\*\*

### Abstract

*The Smart City concept is essential for urban areas to develop the city through sustainable strategies. This paper assesses how the citizens of Iași, a dynamic city that quickly implemented this concept, perceive the impact of the initiatives on their quality of life, achieved mainly through the digital component. Iași is the second city in Romania in the Smart Cities ranking, especially in the smart mobility category. The results show a smart strategy mainly focused on transport, especially public transport networks and facilities. These initiatives are the most popular and recognized by citizens. Still, the results also highlighted several oversights between the vision of public actors and the population's needs. These oversights are common to initiatives related to paying taxes, registering complaints, and promoting points of interest for locals and tourists. So we can say that the course of this place and the progress made are obvious but insufficient.*

*Keywords:* smart cities, urban development, quality of life, digital inclusion

### Introduction

As smart strategies become widespread worldwide, their impact on citizens' lives is becoming increasingly visible. Today, many cities are developing smart plans aimed at incorporating initiatives into society that serve the daily activities of citizens and increase the quality of life, usually associated with their well-being. While the smart city trend emerged in North America, Western Europe, and Southeast Asia, it also slowly captured the attention of policymakers from other regions. In Romania, an increasingly dynamic sector has developed during the past decades, although inadvertencies and minor errors partially mark it due to the late and hasty implementation (Ibănescu et al., 2020, 2022). Their impact manifested upon various important aspects of the urban communities, such as the resilience capacity and resilience performance of cities to various shocks (Bănică et al., 2020;

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\* Ioana Bejenaru is PhD student at Faculty of Geography, Alexandru Iona Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, e-mail: bejenaruioana98@gmail.com.

\*\* Bogdan Constantin IBĂNESCU is researcher at Centre for European Studies, Alexandru Ioan University of Iasi, Romania, e-mail: ibanescu.bogdan@uaic.ro.

\*\*\* Corneliu IAȚU is professor at Faculty of Geography, Alexandru Iona Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, e-mail: ciatu@uaic.ro.



Pascariu et al., 2023; Sandu et al., 2021), the quality of life (Serbanica and Constantin, 2017), or the sustainable transformation of urban tourism (Bourdin et al., 2023; Pascariu and Ibanescu, 2018), among others.

Nevertheless, most of the research that scrutinized the various impacts of smart initiatives used a rather national or regional approach, most of the results being based on microlocal data. Few grassroots approaches, such as semi-structured questionnaires or interviews, can be identified. Our study tries to fill this gap by capturing how smart initiatives from one of the most dynamic Romanian urban areas are perceived and accepted by society. The paper's main objective is to give an overview of how the inhabitants of Iasi, and especially the younger generation, the most technologically connected, understand and relate to this development approach, mainly through the digital component. Furthermore, several possible issues are identified based on in-depth analyses, and solutions are suggested to improve the current situation.

The paper is structured as follows: the first chapter covers a thorough literature review on the smart city concept, both at the global and Romanian level, while trying to identify the relation between smart city and quality of life; the second chapter describes the methodological approach; while the last part details the results and the implications.

## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1. The evolution of the smart city concept from innovation to mandatory urban strategy

Given the global population dynamics and the trend towards a generalized *urban sprawl* (Brueckner, 2000), there is a growing need for models to organize urban areas better, strategies to guide them towards sustainability, energy efficiency, an environmentally friendly framework, as well as a safe and protective place (Bourdin et al., 2024). Urban areas are the main inhabited spaces, and the number of urban citizens is expected to increase in the near future (Eremia, 2017; Ritchie et al., 2023). This fact has led, over time, to the implementation of increasingly complex urban management systems and the need for continuous development of services, industries, housing, etc., with the idea of building communities that are more adaptable to the daily dynamics of life and various natural or artificial hazards.

As urban living spaces become more complex due to increasing population density, reduction of living space, the need for more green space, more parking, office and commercial space, etc., they require more attention and in-depth strategical approaches. Thus, smart city initiatives have emerged due to the need to facilitate coexistence in an increasingly complex environment and improve quality

of life (Gracias et al., 2023; Paskaleva and Cooper, 2022; Toli and Murtagh, 2020). Over time, the smart city concept has been included in many urban development strategies, and currently, there is a general trend for cities to become smart(er). In addition to the emergence of the concept, the term itself has become fashionable, used in various administrative and social contexts, in development strategies, or the public speeches of political leaders (Granath, 2016; Söderström et al., 2021). However, further investigation of the operationalization of the concept by urban policymakers raises an important question: do the policymakers fully understand what a smart initiative means and how it should be integrated within the urban strategies, or does it just look smart because it contains the word “smart”?

Eremia (2017) listed a series of terms that have been used over time to describe the cities of the future and the geographical areas where they have been mainly used. The author also mentions the various periods of popularity for each of these terms, and “smart city” is noted as being popular only since 2009, after the “digital city” was outpacing in popularity. Therefore, one can deduce that everchanging trends also influence the “smartness” of a locality, as the core concept is based on the continuous evolution of society and updated to the present-day necessities, which means considering sustainability, connectivity, or social balance.

Although there is no universal framework that defines what a smart city is (O’Grady and O’Hare, 2012), several studies have identified six key dimensions that capture the necessary aspects of a city to be considered smart (Caragliu, Del Bo, and Nijkamp, 2011; Samih, 2019; Kozłowski and Suwar, 2021; Ruohomaa, Salminen, and Kunttu, 2019; Monzon, 2015; Ghosh and Mahesh, 2015). The six smart dimensions are based on traditional regional and neoclassical theories of urban development and include economy, people, governance, mobility, environment, and living (housing). Moreover, the six dimensions are “on theories of regional competitiveness, transport, and ICT economics, natural resources, human and social capital, quality of life, and the participation of society members in cities” (Caragliu et al., 2011, p.70). The same authors underline that a city is considered “smart” if it has continuous economic growth, a high quality of life, and natural resources managed coherently. According to Ghosh and Manhesh (2015) all of this “smartness” is based on good investment in social capital, human capital, and communications infrastructure. To a certain extent, this shared vision combines the directions pursued by the six dimensions mentioned above and provides the main guidelines a city needs to follow to become smart. It is also accepted and emphasized that smart cities combine technology and the human element to ensure sustainable development that supports a high quality of life for residents (Ghosh and Mahesh, 2015).

## 1.2. The apparition and insertion of the concept in the Romanian literature and urban strategies

At the European level, there is generally a visible gap between Western European countries and the rest of Europe (Ibanescu et al., 2022). Central and Eastern European cities do not focus on long-term development strategies but rather apply short-term solutions, which are often not correctly integrated (Ibanescu et al., 2022). In the European Union, several actions have been initiated for metropolitan areas aiming at urban development through smart city projects (Caragliu et al., 2011). However, the concept remains relatively new for CEE countries, such as Romania. Nevertheless, an accelerated catching-up process has been observed during the past decade, especially during the first pandemic wave (Pascariu et al., 2023; Sandu et al., 2021). Furthermore, one can observe a broader diversification of smart initiatives and the emergence of original, territorial-based smart projects.

In Romania, the literature focusing directly or adjacently on the smart city concept originated in the technical (Eremia et al., 2017), economic, and administrative fields (Alpopi, 2016). The geographical, spatial-based approach appears later, and it still encounters difficulties in being fully induced in urban policies (Bănică et al., 2020; Ibănescu et al., 2022; Pascariu et al., 2023; Sandu et al., 2021), thus, creating imbalances in terms of prioritized interventions. Besides the discrepancies in field representation, the Romanian urban smart development encountered additional issues related to unreliable inventories of smart initiatives. To date, besides various reports generated by the company Vegacomp<sup>5</sup> and smart city platforms generating databases with self-reported smart initiatives, there is little to no information regarding smart city implementation. Furthermore, the existing reports present contrasting data sets and lack in-depth analysis and local mapping of initiatives. Therefore, the overall image of smart city development is still unclear.

In the Romanian map of smart development, as unclear as it may be, Iasi city stands as a reference, both in national reports and the scientific literature (Baltac, 2019; Ibănescu et al., 2022; Ivan et al., 2020; Pop and Proștean, 2018). The intensity and dynamics of smart initiatives place the city among the national frontrunners and ensure a decent ranking at the European level (Misinciuc, 2019). However, the leading position of Iasi is often based on quantitative approaches that focus almost exclusively on the number and budget of smart initiatives and less on their impact. Very few studies scrutinize smart initiatives' impact on citizens' well-being and quality of life. Most likely due to the excessive technological and economic approach that dominated the "smart" discourse, the policy implementation omitted aspects related to the perceived effects by the inhabitants.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://vegacomp.ro/category/smart-city/>

The transportation sector is the most popular (by far) of all Romanian smart strategies. For example, in Iasi, this sector dominates the smart discourse, primarily due to the numerous smart initiatives it encompasses: from safety measures (such as surveillance cameras) to the electric fleet of vehicles (trams and buses), the provision of information to citizens about public transport through apps and station panels, and the purchase/payment options for tickets and subscriptions, both physically and online.

### **1.3. The place of the quality of life in urban smart strategies**

Over time, the concept of quality of life has been intensively studied and has received various definitions. Most of them refer to the relationship between the physical space and its inhabitants and the way a person perceives everything that this relationship implies: material, emotional, social, and human (Banica and Muntele, 2020). There are also several additional terms associated with this concept, namely happiness, well-being, and satisfaction (Marans and Stimson, 2011; Gheorghiu and Ibanescu, 2023). Attempts have been made to measure the quality of life or to find objective standards, but the degree of subjectivity involved is relatively high and difficult to manage methodologically. Over the years, several studies have been undertaken to provide an “objective” analysis based on official, statistical data (Gheorghiu and Ibanescu, 2023) or a subjective analysis based on surveys that analyze people’s perceptions (Senlier et al., 2008).

At a global level, the World Health Organisation has also defined the project WHOQOL (World Health Organisation Quality of Life), which aims to find a universally valid method for assessment. The definition emphasizes the idea that quality of life is a subjective assessment related to the cultural and social components of each individual: “WHO defines quality of life as an individual’s perception of his or her position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which he or she lives and in relation to his or her goals, expectations, standards and concerns”.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of quality of life presents many facets. Therefore, research is no longer concerned with establishing a lasting definition but rather with identifying practical tools for measuring and analyzing it. As a result, most research in this area in the past three decades has focused on identifying and developing new and innovative ways to measure the quality of life in its various forms and derivations. Given the complexity of the concept, objective, subjective, and integrated approaches have been used to examine it from different angles and at different scales (McCrea et al., 2006), demonstrating the importance of the findings for academics and policymakers. Despite this, scholars

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.who.int/tools/whoqol>



conclude that there is no direct correlation between the results obtained through objective and subjective methods, demonstrating the difficulty of providing a unique and unified measurement (Schwarz and Strack, 1999). The European Commission has reignited the interest in measuring the quality of life through the Urban Audit tool by measuring perceptions of various parameters of urban quality of life in 79 European cities and metropolitan areas since 2007. The questionnaire, carried out every 5 years in each of these cities, reveals the inhabitants' general perception of the different sub-domains of quality of life. The results show a clear spatial pattern in the perception of quality of life, with large Mediterranean and Eastern European cities having the lowest quality of life scores. In contrast, small and medium-sized cities in Nordic and Western countries show the highest scores (Roşu, Corodescu and Blăgeanu, 2015).

The interest in adequately measuring the quality of life overlaps with the increasing sprawl of urban smart initiatives, which is unsurprising given the declared core objectives of smart strategies. While smart city initiatives aim to improve the quality of urban life, little is known about how and if they manage to achieve it. Currently, numerous national and international hierarchies address the concepts of smart city and quality of life. However, most of the time, this is made individually for each of them such as IESE Cities in Motion Index (CIMI) for smart city and for quality of life an important ranking is Eurobarometer. The various existing hierarchies are generally produced by organizations, local authorities, or institutions (Toh, 2022) to assess the level of development and observe the strengths and weaknesses of different areas of development. Among the most popular rankings for the smart city segment are the Smart City Index (IESE Business School) and Global Smart City Index (Quantum), while for QoL are Monocle and Numbeo and Urban Audit (instrument of European Commission for monitoring cities across Europe).

These rankings are important for several reasons. They help decision-makers to identify key areas for development, identify critical issues that need to be addressed, and provide a set of "best practices" that can be later adopted by other urban areas (Giffinger et al., 2007). At the same time, it should be mentioned that the same rankings do not stand as an integrated evaluation measure, sometimes being nothing more than the result of local government marketing strategies (Giffinger and Haindl, 2009). Each city has its contexts of development, legislation, implementation, and acceptance of proposed initiatives; therefore, the rankings' analysis may not truly capture the entire progress of an area.

While rankings are necessary as a point of reference, they do not fully reflect the level of acceptance of smart projects, nor the entire impacts upon inhabitants' quality of life, sometimes potentiating increasing inequalities between individuals or between center and periphery within cities

(Borruso and Balletto, 2022). As defined by Caragliu et al. (2011), there are six main directions in constructing the smart city concept, each of which improves citizens' quality of life while reducing social inequalities.

In recent years, there has been significant interest in identifying the link between smart initiatives and quality of life, with some studies aiming to highlight how they manage to improve the improvement overall quality of life in urban environments (Macke et al., 2018; Rodríguez Bolívar, 2021). Smart cities use technology to improve urban life, including transportation, energy consumption, public safety, healthcare, and education. In addition to these benefits, smart cities can also improve the overall quality of life for residents by providing better access to information and services, improving communication and social interaction, and creating more opportunities for growth and economic development (Gracias et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2022).

However, it is difficult for policymakers to apply the smart initiatives uniformly across the city, and certain drawbacks may appear, such as widening gaps that result from unequal access to the internet or specific digital devices, major differences regarding the distance to the nearest bus stop, etc (Nijholt, 2020). To implement the concept for the benefit of the whole community, a range of services covering the entire urban area is needed so that the whole community has similar high accessibility to the services offered by the city. The level of education of the population in the use of digital technology must also be brought into the discussion. It is necessary to take into account the education of citizens in promotional campaigns or to involve them when they are new users.

Fredericks (2020) presents the importance of collaboration and interaction between policymakers and citizens to properly develop urban environments and achieve innovation or new skills to meet the latest needs of cities. However, the few existing studies (Vázquez et al., 2018; Wang and Zhou, 2023) that examine the extent of the link between quality of life and smart cities fail to address the strength of this link, despite the growing evidence of smart initiatives presence in citizens daily life. Furthermore, a study based on a questionnaire and t-tests addressed to students in Spain obtained results according to which there are differences and discrepancies between the expected results of smart initiatives and their actual, perceived effects (Vázquez et al., 2018). This study also argues that residents' experiences are critical in creating urban planning, as they directly impact their quality of life. Moreover, the technological dimension, which should be a mediator of interaction between citizens and urban components, is differently perceived by policymakers and citizens. As per the investigation conducted by Wang and Zhou in 2023, a discernible negative correlation was identified between sentiments of happiness and ICT. Furthermore, contingent on one's educational

attainment and age cohort, divergent perspectives were discerned concerning the influence of investments in smart city infrastructure on the quality of occupational endeavors.

## 2. Methodology

In order to investigate this complex relationship between smart initiatives and quality of life we decided to apply a representative questionnaire in the study area (Iasi city, Romania). The instrument was developed after a thorough consultation and in-depth analysis of all smart initiatives implemented in Iasi during the past decade. Each initiative was assessed based on their type and dimension, as established by the literature. The instrument also included elements from the European-wide Urban Audit which analyses the quality of life in 79 European cities every few years, looking at various, such as transport, culture, public administration, etc.. Afterwards, the instrument was pre-tested within a representative group of 30 participants, and following several corrections, the research team started data collection.

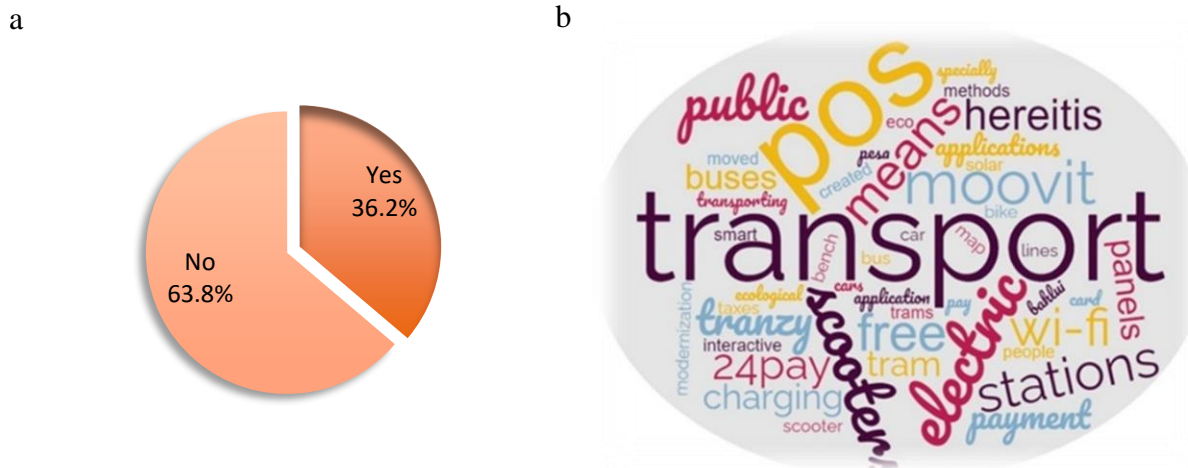
The data collection implied both online and physical forms of the questionnaire to ensure the widest possible coverage of the local population. Through this approach, we aimed to obtain a detailed and representative picture of citizens' perceptions. The use of online platforms allowed us quick and efficient sampling especially for the younger population, while the physical application of the questionnaire in different locations in the city of Iasi ensured the participation and feedback of age and occupational groups with limited access to an online environment. Our survey is structured to cover several relevant aspects of urban life, as well as the perceived impact of smart city projects. It includes questions on transportation, environment, public services, access to technology and security, all taking into account the basic principles of smart cities. The data analysis step included both advanced statistical techniques and qualitative interpretation of the open responses.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Awareness of smart initiatives

The results show that the citizens are only partially aware of the existing smart initiatives in the city. Specifically, a majority of "NO" (not aware of smart initiatives in the city) appears, 63.8% weight of the total, while the "YES" (aware of smart initiatives in the city) was the choice for 36.2% of the total (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Awareness of initiatives within respondents: a) Pie chart of response percentage; b) Wordcloud of known initiatives by respondents**



Source: own representation

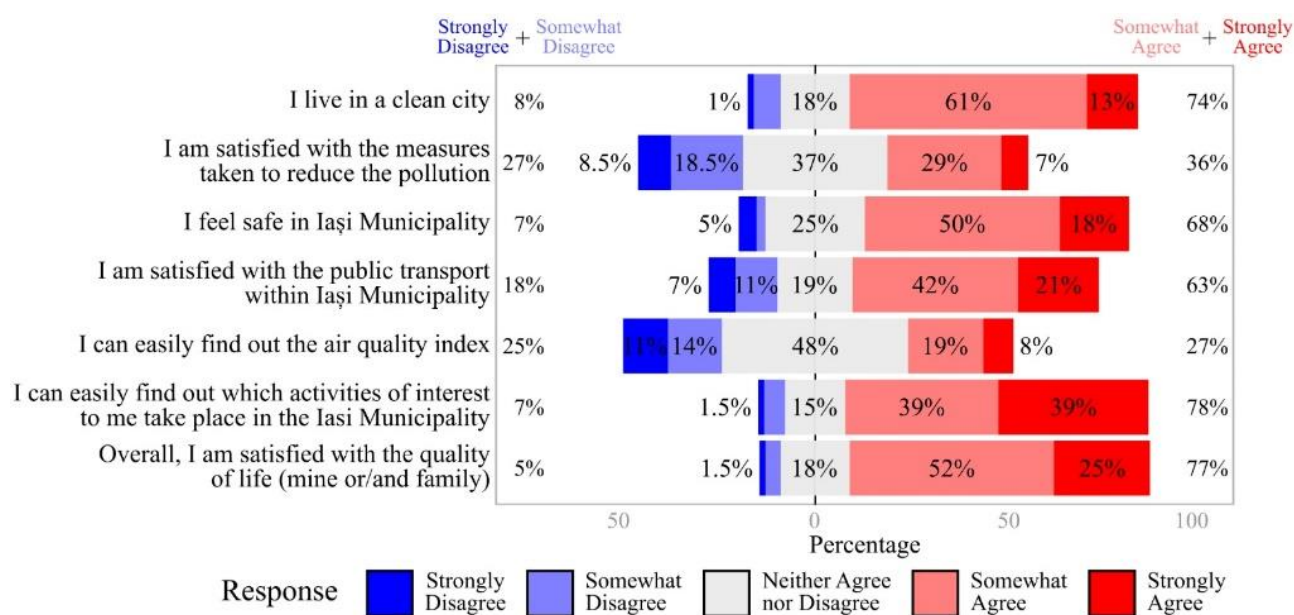
Among the most frequently mentioned initiatives or elements associated with the concept, those related to public transport stand out, also highlighted in the wordcloud graph (Figure 1). Among the most frequently mentioned words are: hereitis, electric, transport, public, POS, scooter, moovit. Currently, transport is a very active development direction in Iasi, and this may explain the fact that citizens are aware of the applications, functions, etc. in this field. This question was answered by less than half of the respondents, which underlines the fact that the population does not know the concept or does not associate it with the existing initiatives in Iasi. However, it is possible that among those who did not answer, there are people who use the initiatives all the time, but do not know that they are part of a recently launched concept, or perhaps do not know exactly what they are called. This means that there is also a problem of communication, insufficient promotion. There is a need for accurate and continuous information that keeps pace with developments.

This observation raises important questions about the effectiveness of communication and awareness strategies regarding new urban initiatives in Iasi. It suggests a potential gap between the implementation of sustainable transport solutions and the population’s understanding or recognition of them. The lack of awareness could impede the full social and environmental benefits of these initiatives, as community engagement and active participation are crucial for their success. Furthermore, the findings indicate a need for more targeted information campaigns that not only promote the use of these services but also clearly explain their connection to broader sustainability goals.

### 3.2. The aspects related to the quality of life

Starting from the fact that one of the basic objectives of a smart city is to improve the quality of life of its inhabitants, the aim was to understand the perception of the inhabitants about their quality of life and how they relate to it, depending on certain general aspects that also result from the presence, application and use of smart initiatives. It was found that most of the respondents perceived the positive impact of smart initiatives on their quality of life. The statements in the section on people’s satisfaction with their lives, public transport, safety and cleanliness in the city had the following response options (Figure 2): strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree. The answers to all 4 questions are mostly uncertain, with no statements receiving the options “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree”. Most of the responses are to the “somewhat agree” option, which can be interpreted as a satisfactory stage in the city’s long development path. This response may indicate that there are higher expectations from the initiatives, as well and that they fail to fully meet citizens’ needs.

**Figure 2. Likert plot of citizens perceptions about their quality of life in Iași city**

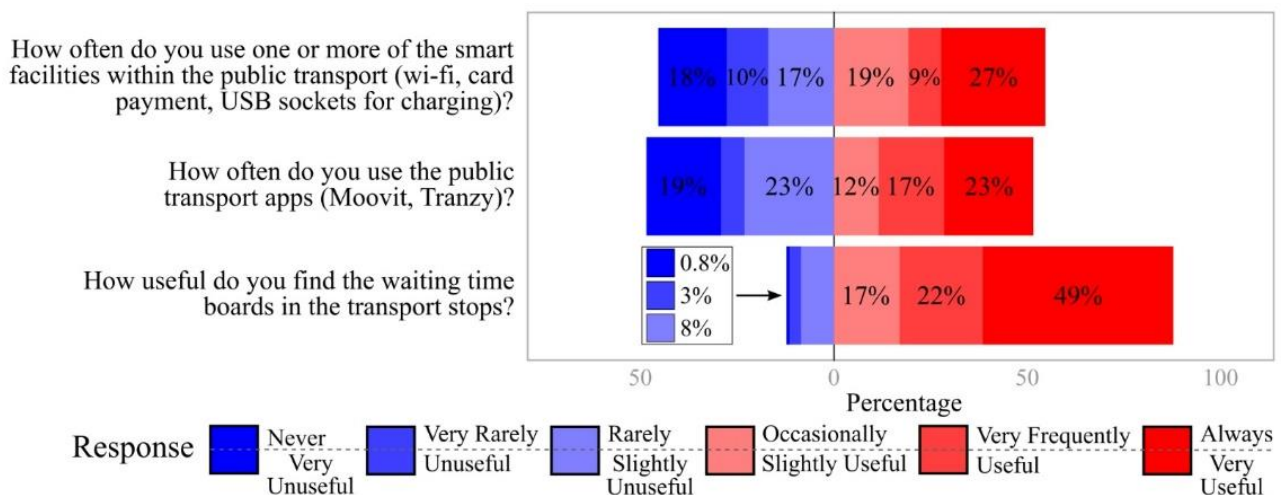


Source: own representation

Regarding transport data, the analysis considered smart features on trams, buses, and the availability of free applications that residents can use to check routes and waiting times. As illustrated in Figure 3, the respondents’ answers do not reveal a clear consensus but instead suggest a diverse and dynamic pattern of responses. The overall trend indicates that the use of these smart transport

facilities is generally widespread, though it reflects a current and evolving practice rather than a uniform or stable adoption. This fluctuating response may be due to dissatisfaction with long waiting times at stations or the price of tickets.

**Figure 3. Likert plot of citizens perceptions about their transport facilities in Iași city**



Source: own representation

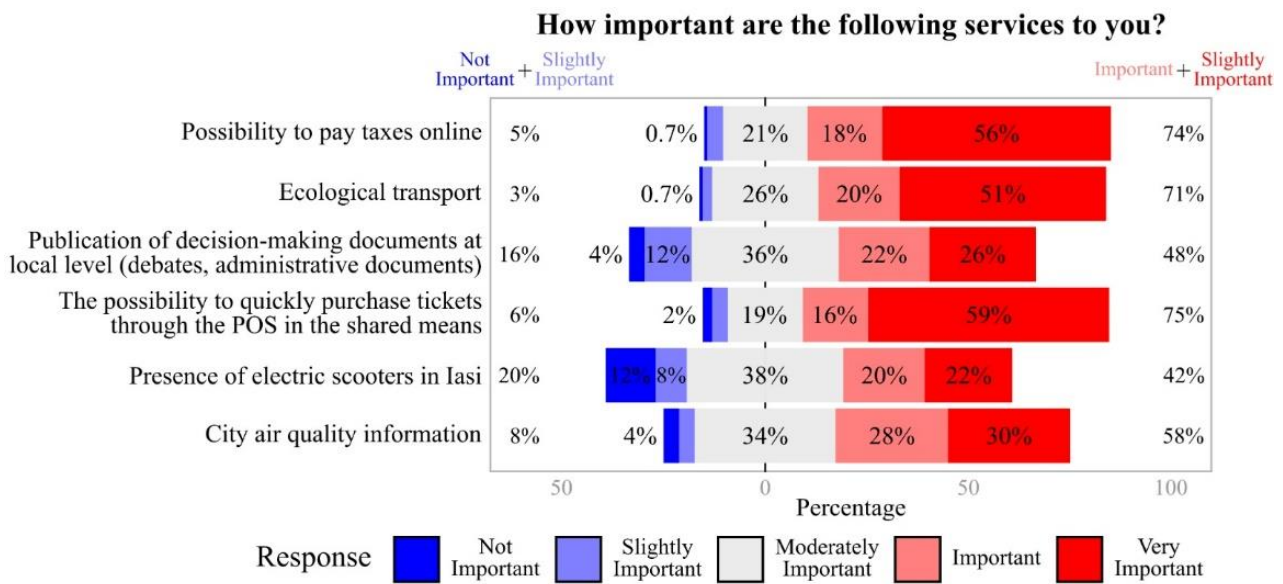
The fourth section presents the importance of some services in the life of citizens. They aim at improving some aspects related to the quality of life, which make it easier for citizens to carry out their daily activities or to observe how the city of Iasi is managed. The answers are mostly positive, with the options supporting the importance of services being the most chosen. It is clear that online toll payment services, ecological transport and the possibility to buy tickets via POS machines are highly appreciated. There was less interest in the services of publishing decision documents by the administration and electric scooters.

### 3.3. The distribution of initiatives across the smart axes

The distribution of initiatives across the six main smart axes appears uneven, yet each axis includes representative projects that citizens engage with to varying degrees and levels of accessibility, depending on their awareness. Additionally, it is important to consider that certain initiatives may simultaneously fulfil the criteria of multiple axes. As a result, several initiatives in this study are positioned at the intersection of multiple categories, reflecting these projects' complexity and multifaceted nature.



**Figure 4. Likert plot of citizens perceptions about importance of services in Iași city**



Source: own representation

According to the data collected, **smart governance** has a relatively high level of awareness, but the initiatives, although known, are not used as much or are not considered easy to use (Figure 5). Of the initiatives considered in the study, five fell into this category (Table 1). The most widely known and used initiative was the 24pay app. This application works in several cities in Romania and is not a local product.

The results for the smart living category show that the initiatives are poorly known, even less used, and not easy to use. Two initiatives have good results for all three questions, namely, free Wi-Fi on transport and the 24pay app. The latter is the most successful and maintains its appreciation, as in the case of the analysis of the smart governance axis.

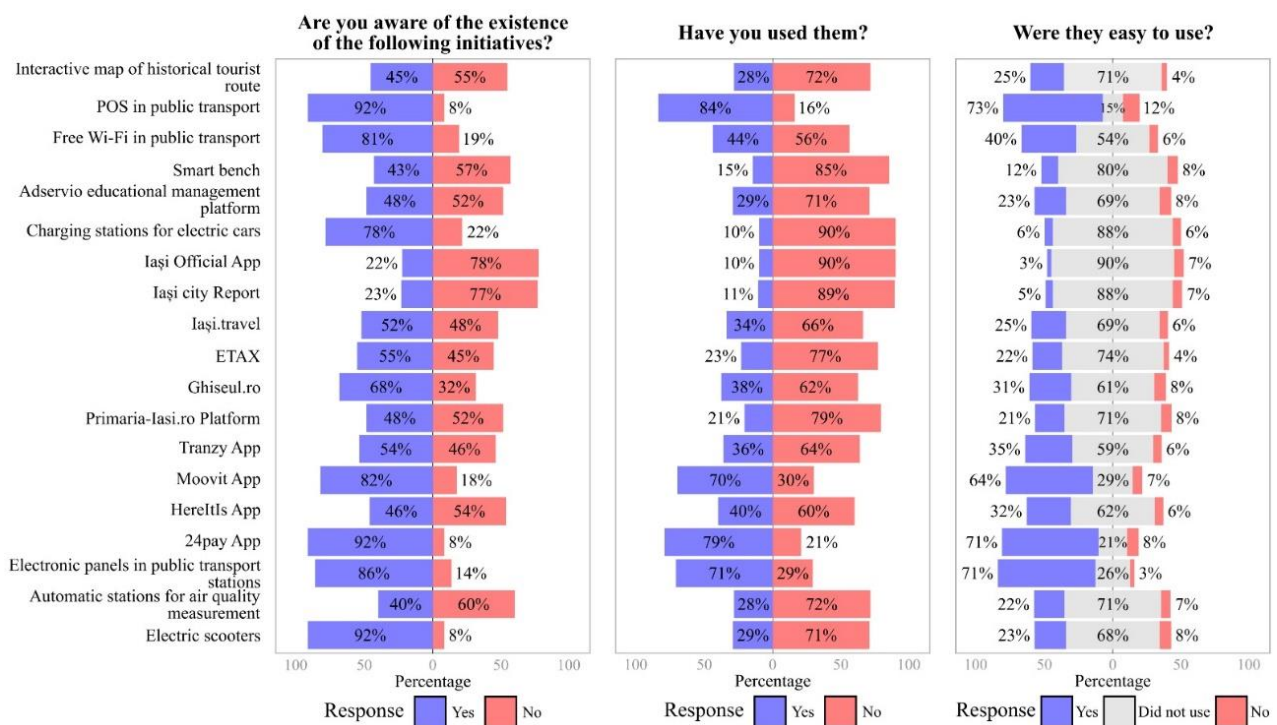
The **smart mobility** axis is the best represented in terms of the number of initiatives, as is the case in most cities in Romania (Table 1). It has a high level of awareness among the population, the level of use of initiatives is high and it is the most accessible axis in terms of the use of initiatives that are both physical and virtual (apps). In general, public transport is very well represented in the smart strategies of Iasi City Hall.

The initiatives associated with the **smart people** axis appear to be the least popular (Table 1). The number of initiatives within this category is quite limited, and respondent feedback further suggests that these projects have not gained significant traction in the community. They are characterized by low levels of awareness, limited usage, and restricted accessibility. Within this category, the Adservio platform is a notable example, primarily utilized in the education sector by students, teachers, and parents.



The **smart economy** sector is extremely dynamic, especially in terms of payments, with transactional initiatives being the most used. The development and use of payment applications and platforms has been accelerated during the pandemic. For example, ETAX is an application that facilitates the remote payment of taxes, which was very necessary during periods of restrictions. However, Figure 5 shows that it is not widely used by the surveyed population.

**Figure 5. Likert plot of citizens perceptions about the most popular initiatives and how used they are in Iași city**



Source: own representation

Despite being a pressing and widely discussed topic both locally and globally, environmental initiatives remain neither numerous nor diverse. The **smart environment** domain is notably the most underrepresented area in Iasi, as well as in other major Romanian cities, reflecting a clear lack of support for environmental efforts. This scarcity highlights a significant gap in addressing environmental sustainability through smart initiatives.



we want to mention a series of possible solutions and recommendations that would facilitate the use, accessibility and visibility of the initiatives.

Given the state of digitalization in Romania and the observed decline in digital literacy with increasing age, smart initiatives should be designed to be accessible to a broad segment of the population, not just younger or middle-aged individuals. Additionally, these initiatives, often developed as applications, should evolve beyond their current form. For example, real-time updates on air quality, public transport arrivals, traffic conditions, events, and weather forecasts could be displayed in public transport stations or high-traffic areas. While some panels already exist, they are not widespread across the city. Therefore, efforts are needed to ensure this information is accessible to all citizens, regardless of their neighbourhood.

Furthermore, given the current dominance of initiatives in smart mobility, actions must be launched to develop initiatives in other categories in order to reduce the existing gap, to create a coherent environment, to support the development process even more rigorously and, at the same time, to create a framework in which the quality of life is taken in consideration.

For better communication of information between public administration and citizens, attention should also be paid to the direction of participative administration. Real-time communication, coming from both sides, can lead to a quick resolution of any problems, or in this way, complaints, possible solutions and even the creation of a favourable environment for both, through good cooperation based on communication. various ways.

A more extensive promotional campaign is necessary to help citizens understand their role in the development process and the importance of these concepts in creating a better living environment. This would also encourage them to incorporate smart solutions into their daily routines to fully benefit from what is offered. Solutions with positive outcome would be a recognizable image of the smart city, such as a city logo to identify smart components, along with leaflets and colourful stickers, crucial for promoting and highlighting smart initiatives. These elements ensure not only visibility but also a higher familiarity for residents. Future smart projects could extend to areas like healthcare, energy, waste management, government services, street lighting, public safety, and traffic management.

## **Conclusions**

Based on our results, Iasi Municipality can be assessed as in a fully developing process with many and diverse actions related to smart city. These initiatives create multiple partnerships and

attractive environments for new and intelligent ideas, placing them at the national top. The study's results indicate that Iasi is among the cities with comprehensive access to the implementation and optimization of smart resources. The presence of these initiatives has fostered numerous partnerships, even positioning the city among the leaders in terms of the number of smart projects. This has also led to the creation of dynamic and attractive environments that encourage the development of new ideas. Consequently, the concept of smart urban development can no longer be overlooked or treated superficially, as demonstrated by the substantial number of initiatives and their significant societal impact.

Today, the Smart City is becoming indispensable in the efforts of local authorities to develop and create an environment that generates the highest possible level of quality of life, that is sustainable and, at the same time, able to keep pace with changes over time. It is an essential contribution to creating communities and living areas that are resistant to the possible disruptions. The concepts of quality of life and smart city influence each other and have a common denominator: *sustainability*. The initiatives that outline the smart city concept have a direct impact on improving the perception of the level of quality of life.

Currently, as the data analysed indicate, the initiatives in Iasi are primarily centered around transportation, with a particular emphasis on public transit. These transport-related initiatives are the most recognized and popular among citizens. However, there is a noticeable lack of uniformity in their implementation throughout the city. For instance, electric information panels are only present at select transport stations, creating inconsistencies and even fostering negative perceptions of the smart city concept.

Additionally, the concept itself has not been extensively promoted, leading to citizens being aware of the initiatives but not feeling a personal connection to them. This disconnect poses a significant challenge in the effort to expand and better integrate these initiatives into daily life. Furthermore, there are perception issues, as the facilities provided are not always associated with an improved quality of life.

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