

Article

## A Generational Divide? Coping With Ethnic Prejudice and Inequality Among Romanian Roma Transnational Returnees

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### Abstract

Roma people are likely Europe's most discriminated and marginalized minority. In the past years, increasing attention has been paid to their migration to Western Europe and their limited social mobility in their countries of destination. Our article focuses on the "post-return" experiences of Roma and the changes generated by return migration in their communities of origin, a topic largely neglected so far. We build on recent debates around post-return positionality, asking how adult and old Roma returnees experience return. We thus contribute to the growing literature on return migration and lifecourse that distinguishes between the return migration of children and youth, that of adults, and that of older migrants. Focusing on Roma returnees, we employ an understanding of migration not just as a means of generating resources, but also as a learning process where the Roma population acquires new ideas and a sense of agency and dignity. Informed by long-term fieldwork in ethnically mixed localities in Romania (including participant observation and 76 semi-structured interviews), we inquire into the ethnic relations and negotiations between Roma and non-Roma populations. Migration results in a weakening of the economic dependency of the Roma on the non-Roma. In this new context, which is still marred by ethnic prejudice and inequality, we analysed how local interethnic relations were reshaped by the returned Roma's new consumption practices, new modes of communication, and new claims for equality. While adult Roma tend to demand equality and decent treatment, setting in motion a process of ethnic change, older returned Roma tend to maintain more submissive practices.

### Keywords

ethnicity; generational divide; lifecourse; positionality; return migration; Roma; Romania; social change

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

In this article, we examine the changing positionality of Roma returnees in multi-ethnic settings. Recognized as Europe's most discriminated and marginalized minority (Vermeersch, 2021), increased attention has been paid over the years to the Roma population's social mobility and marginality (Dimitrova et al., 2021). While scholars have assessed patterns of segregation in European cities (Cousin et al., 2020; Tarnovschi, 2012), lasting seg-

regation in schools (Duminică & Ivasiuc, 2013; Rostas, 2012; Zamfir & Zamfir, 1993), education deficits, and prevailing racism (Duminică & Ivasiuc, 2013; Rostas, 2012), there is much less knowledge on how the Roma population reintegrate in their societies of origin upon their return from Western Europe (Anghel, 2019; Toma & Fosztó, 2018). This article addresses this gap, building on existing debates around return migration and lifecourse. We focus on fieldwork conducted in four localities in Romania, home to the largest Roma population in Europe

(Council of Europe, 2012). In contrast to existing studies on marginalized Roma, which portray a rather pessimistic image of their social mobility (Beluschi-Fabeni et al., 2019; Rostas, 2012; Zamfir & Zamfir, 1993), our study offers a more nuanced picture. In this respect, we develop an approach which focuses on differences between generations of returnees, asking how they reposition upon return and how they express their voice. We regard older adults as those above 50 (see Gualda & Escriva, 2014), distinguishing them from adults between 20 and 50 years of age. In some instances we mention young Roma, here referring to younger adults in their 20s. Our study also examines how ethnicity plays out in return contexts and how local ethnic relations are debated upon in localities still marked by strong social divisions between Roma and non-Roma populations.

## 2. Perspectives on Return Experiences, Positionality, and Age

There are different perspectives within the research on post-return positionality and processes of reintegration. Returnees' reintegration is broadly defined as their participation in economic, social, and political life (Kushminder, 2017) and the literature discusses strategies of reintegration distinguishing different categories of returnees. Some definitions discuss modes of reintegration as individual processes (Kushminder, 2017). However, there is a growing awareness that both age and family relations affect modes and processes of return (Ní Laoire, 2008). Migrants experience shifting "desires and capacities" to return (van Houte, 2019, p. 3), which correspond to different stages in their lifecourse, such as childhood, youth, adulthood, or old age (Cerese, 1974).

So far, much of the literature on return focuses on economically active adults and their agency—with their social adaptation and involvement in the labour market being the main focus. A theoretical perspective informed by Bourdieu's (1984) theory of forms of capital helps approach processes of return migration. During reintegration, migrants possess not only financial resources they utilize for reintegration (Hagan & Wassink, 2020) but also social remittances they acquired during migration, such as new ideas and knowledge (White & Grabowska, 2019). They mobilize their social capital, reconnecting with relatives and friends, and getting acquainted with new people to get jobs and create new opportunities for themselves (De Bree et al., 2010). Meanwhile, the notion of transnational return underscores the mutual relationship between returnees' reintegration and their transnationalism (Fauser & Anghel, 2019; White, 2022). Returnees often remain involved in transnational spaces upon return: They combine local and transnational opportunities and circulate between countries of origin and destination (White, 2022; White & Grabowska, 2019).

Many studies on adult returnees debate the role of return migration on development and social change

(Papademetriou & Martin, 1991). In economics, studies look into issues such as returnees' entrepreneurship, wages and wage premiums, financial remittances, and the aggregate economic effects of migration and return (Constant, 2020; Hagan & Wassink, 2020). Others look at returnees as agents of change beyond economic aspects, examining how they use social remittances (White, 2022; White & Grabowska, 2019) and are able to vernacularize—so that new ideas are accepted by their communities of origin (Kushminder, 2017). While returnees are often in favourable positions (Massey et al., 1994), there are also cases where returning is a challenging process (Lietaert & Kushminder, 2021; Markowitz & Stefansson, 2004). For instance, when migrants do not maintain transnational relations with—or do not visit—their countries of origin, they may experience adaptation difficulties upon return. For instance, some migrants retain romanticized notions of their home country without maintaining contact with the actual situation there (Christou, 2006). Such migrants may feel culturally estranged upon their return and may have fewer friends and relatives on whom to rely (King, 2001; Lietaert, 2020). Returnees may also lack social capital and encounter difficulties when they are regarded negatively, for instance, if they are women facing broken ties, marital conflicts, and stigma (Nisrane et al., 2017), or members of discriminated ethnic minorities, such as the Roma (Duval & Wolff, 2016).

The return of elderly people is distinct from that of economically active individuals; for the elderly, purchasing power and quality of life are more important than economic or market opportunities (Klinthäll, 2006; Yaruhin, 2012). As many migrants have a precarious position in the labour market, they may enjoy better living standards if they return at retirement (Yaruhin, 2012). Other studies stress that potential returnees are not among the poorest migrants (Klinthäll, 2006). Family is a decisive factor influencing the return of older migrants. For King et al. (2021), "the location of [adult] children is a critical variable" (King et al., 2021, p. 1210) that determines whether or not pensioners return. When adult children live in countries of destination, older migrants often choose to remain close to them rather than return, while when spouses and children live in countries of origin, older migrants will likely return (Ciobanu & Ramos, 2016). The presence of other relatives in the country of origin, such as parents and siblings, increases the likelihood of commuting between countries rather than returning (Yaruhin, 2012). Finally, the return of the elderly is gendered—while men tend to return (such as in the case of Turkish, Portuguese, and Spanish migrants), women tend to remain in countries of destination and are afraid of losing their independence if they return (Ciobanu & Ramos, 2016).

Studies on post-return experiences show a variety of situations among pensioners (Ciobanu & Ramos, 2016; King et al., 2021). In Spain, Gualda and Escriva (2014) describe the experiences of pensioners returning from

Latin America and other European countries. Their financial situation varied, with men often doing relatively well, some being rich, and women doing less well. Some women returning from Latin America had no pensions and claimed Spanish non-contributory social benefits. Post-return experiences also vary according to return preparedness and how returnees maintained transnational relations over the years. Older returnees to Morocco who had constructed houses and maintained relations with their friends and relatives while they were away enjoyed living there, while adults who had not prepared for their return were in a more precarious situation (De Bree et al., 2010). Nostalgia and a sense of belonging are important “return motivations” for people of age, especially among cultural traditionalists (Razum et al., 2005). This sense of belonging alone does not however assure a secure lifestyle upon return. Migrants that have false images of their countries of origin may complain about diverse issues upon return, including noise, quality of services, and local norms of social conduct (Gualda & Escriva, 2014). They may also become solitary, refraining from participation in social clubs and gatherings (Barrett & Mosca, 2013; Gualda & Escriva, 2014). Finally, health and lifestyle shape the return motivations and experiences of older returnees. People may return for health reasons—especially when they relate the notion of health to a certain lifestyle and pleasant climate (Razum et al., 2005). However, precarious health and severe diseases can also hinder one’s return as people tend to benefit from a better healthcare system in countries of destination (Ciobanu & Ramos, 2016; Razum et al., 2005). One way to combine the benefit of both a better climate (Klinthäll, 2006) and access to quality social services is to maintain mobility during retirement, as is found among Turkish returnees from Germany and the Netherlands, Italians from the UK, and Moroccans from Belgium, France, and the Netherlands (Razum et al., 2005). Mobility is also more important for returnees coming from countries in which entitlement to social services is conditional upon a certain number of months per year lived there (such as France, Switzerland, or the Netherlands; see Ciobanu & Ramos, 2016).

Studies on children and youth reveal other types of post-return experiences. Although we do not analyse child returnees, this type of return is worth mentioning as it further demonstrates the variation of return experiences in different life stages. Children return when families return (Despaigne & Manzano-Munguía, 2020; Hernández-Léon & Zúñiga, 2016; Vathi, 2016). Parents may also justify their return as conducted for the sake of their children—for them to benefit from better educational or professional prospects (Hernández-Léon & Zúñiga, 2016; Lee, 2016), to be in a safer environment, or enjoy an “innocent childhood” (Ní Laoíre, 2011). Families may also return to prevent children from entering into gangs or criminal activities (Zúñiga & Hamman, 2015), or to discipline them (Lee, 2016). Studies focus on children in their teens (Cena et al., 2017), underscoring that they

often experience return as a rupture (Cena et al., 2017; Hernández-Léon & Zúñiga, 2016), especially when they are older than fourteen (Vathi et al., 2016). They go to school in a new country and lose their former friends (Vathi, 2016), as well as the material comforts to which they were accustomed (Cena et al., 2017). School systems usually do not provide for the needs of returned children (Despaigne & Manzano-Munguía, 2020), who have to instead adapt to the existing curricula, while their extra abilities—such as bilingualism—go unrecognized (Despaigne & Manzano-Munguía, 2020; Hernández-Léon & Zúñiga, 2016; Vathi et al., 2016). Not all cases display difficulties though: Sometimes youngsters may consider returning as an opportunity to explore their cultural identities or gain maturity (Lee, 2016). There are also cases in which teens appreciate the chance to pursue tertiary education (Kütük et al., 2018), a certain lifestyle (Kütük et al., 2018), and more freedom (Zúñiga & Hamman, 2015).

Accordingly, looking at return from a lifecourse perspective opens up crucial questions regarding how post-return experiences vary with age. In this article we focus on returnees belonging to an ethnic minority—the Roma—looking at how Roma of different generations (above 50, between 30 and 50, and under 30 years of age) reposition themselves in their society of origin. We use the notion of generation as “life stage” (Kertzer, 1983). We consider this distinction between generations significant for the changes experienced by Roma during the post-socialist period. By focusing on the intersection between return migration and ethnicity, we address an important topic that has so far been less analysed in existing research (Anghel, 2019; Tesăr, 2015b; Toma & Fosztó, 2018). Our approach is informed by Bourdieu’s theory of forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1984). We ask how returnees use their social, cultural, and financial capital upon return and look beyond social and economic positions into ethnic and cultural hierarchies, thus examining returnees’ “positionalities”—how they relate to existing local hierarchies and value their own positions (Faist et al., 2021).

In the following section, we first introduce Romanian Roma migration to contextualize our research and summarize our methodology. We continue by analysing the post-return experiences of Roma returnees and how they impact ethnic relations. We conclude with a discussion on processes of return in multi-ethnic contexts.

### 3. Migration and Return of Romanian Roma

There is a broad consensus that the Romanian Roma population makes up the largest Roma minority in Europe (Council of Europe, 2012) and that censuses underestimate the number of this population. Some estimates suggest there were about 1.8 million Roma in Romania in 1992 (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1993). The mobility of the Roma is a dynamic phenomenon. Quantitative studies conducted in 2012 (Duminică & Ivasiuc, 2013; Tarnovschi,

2012) estimated that the percentage of Roma migrants in the total Romanian Roma population was similar to the percentage of the Romanian migrants in the overall Romanian population, with 19% of households having at least one member abroad. These studies also show that Roma migrants went predominantly to Italy, Spain, and France, and that Roma migration is family-based (Tarnovschi, 2012). They also underscore that Romanian Roma migration is temporary in nature (Tarnovschi, 2012).

Structural discrimination and poverty in the home country are considered important drivers of Roma migration (Duminičă & Ivasiuc, 2013; Tarnovschi, 2012), with migration seen by many Roma as the sole means to escape poverty (Pantea, 2013). Recent studies conducted in countries of destination explore how migration improves family lives and how new generations adapt to the new contexts (Solimene, 2019). However, Roma migrants often have a difficult integration: They remain marginal to labour markets, have educational deficits, lack skills, and encounter discrimination (Tarnovschi, 2012). They tend to remain disempowered (Marcu, 2019), with young Roma depending on family groups living in improvised camps (Persico et al., 2020), or remaining “a lost generation” of low-skilled vulnerable employees when they obtain employment (Beluschi-Fabeni et al., 2019). However, even in such precarious conditions there emerged new attitudes among the youth in destination countries, including defiance of social norms; for example, Roma youth often refuse to adopt the subaltern behaviour of the older generations in their interactions with non-Roma (Persico et al., 2020).

Some studies address the issue of Roma migration and return in the Romanian context (Anghel, 2016, 2019; Tesăr, 2015b; Toma et al., 2018), but do not focus on its impact on the stages of life of returnees. Some studies suggest that migration leads to improvements in families’ financial situations (Duminičă & Ivasiuc, 2013) and success, as they build large “palaces” or construct new houses upon return (Anghel, 2016). They may also arrive back with new foreign cars and spend more time in restaurants, cafés, and bars—behaviours that become noticed by members of the majority, accustomed to the previous deprivation of the Roma. Due to the increased presence of the Roma in these places, members of the majority cease going there, preferring to go elsewhere (Anghel, 2016; Tesăr, 2015b). But other Roma returnees position themselves differently. Some comply with former relations of inequality and accept their marginal positions (Anghel, 2019). In this article, we engage with these studies but focus on how post-return experiences change according to life stage.

#### **4. Methodology: Researching Processes of Return Migration in Roma Segregated Settlements**

The article relies on fieldwork conducted in four multi-ethnic localities in Romania, where the Roma repre-

sent a sizeable ethnic minority: These were two towns (Campeni and Mica) and two villages (Rurea and Crucea), all located in the Transylvania region of Romania. In these localities, the Roma population lives in segregated neighbourhoods. The research was conducted within the framework of different projects where we looked at practices of mobility, remittances, and the social change associated with migration to Western Europe and the return of the Roma. The fieldwork in Campeni was carried out between 2013 and 2021. It was organized in five research periods with a pause between 2018 and 2020. Fieldwork in Mica and the Rurea was carried out between 2015 and 2017. Finally, the fieldwork in Crucea was carried out in the summer of 2021 and January 2022. In all cases, interviews were preceded by establishing rapport and building trust with the research participants (Devault, 1995). This was crucial as we are dealing with many people who have experienced exclusion and discrimination. Key informants were essential in all localities and we established personal relations with them. Interviewees were selected using the snowball technique (Parker et al., 2019). The first author was conducting fieldwork in Campeni together with his toddler and his wife, while the second author is a speaker of Romani. These factors—along with the fact that we never refused an offer of coffee in someone’s house—helped facilitate communication. Interviews were semi-structured and we also relied on participant observation. We assured the anonymity of the interviewees. The main topics addressed were respondents’ pre-migration situation, their migration experiences, remittances and their uses, and ethnic relations. We also asked questions about their relations with the authorities and interviews often covered issues related to local contexts.

We have conducted 74 interviews in total: 27 in Campeni, seven in Crucea, 20 in Mica, and 20 in Rurea. Most (62) interviewees were married; 34 were women and 40 were men. The age structure for women was the following: Nine women were in their 20s, nine were in their 30s, six were in their 40s, six more in their 50s, and four were in their 60s. For men it was the following: one was aged 19, 11 were in their 20s, five were in their 30s, 13 were in their 40s, nine were in their 50s, and one was in his 60s. Although we also talked with children and youth, we do not count them in the sample.

We interviewed 20 persons above the age of 50. In line with other studies (Gualda & Escriva, 2014), we regard those above 50 as old adults. This age distinction represents a divide within the Roma groups as it determines how Roma experienced the post-communist period—those older than 50 had regular employment during socialism, whereas those under 50 were too young. We have also accounted for migration destinations, where five migrants had multiple destinations (towards Germany, Spain, Greece, and France), while others went predominantly towards one destination: UK (19), Germany (18), France (7), Austria (6), Hungary (6), Spain (6), Italy (4), and Switzerland (1). Two

were non-migrants. In terms of education, only two persons in Campeni had attended high school. The rest had attended a maximum of eight classes. Only six persons in Campeni had regular employment in Romania, two were entrepreneurs, and one was a pensioner. All the others had no regular employment in Romania. Having this differentiated sample and conducting long-term research in three of these localities (Campeni, Mica, and Rurea) enabled us to grasp the longer-term effects of migration and return.

### **5. Four Localities: Roma Groups and Ethnic Inequality in a Transition Society**

The largest locality in which we carried out research was Campeni. It has about 27,000 people, with a Roma minority of 4,000 and a small German minority of 400 people. Mica has around 10,000 people, with about 56% Romanians, 30% Hungarians, and 14% Roma; Rurea has around 3,100 people, half of which are Roma, 1,000 of which are Hungarian, and the rest are Romanian. Finally, Crucea is a village of about 1,500 people, with a Romanian majority alongside about 300 Roma and 100 Germans and Hungarians. All the localities went through a dramatic post-socialist transformation. During state socialism, most people in towns worked in the local industry, while in villages they had mixed employment in industry in nearby cities and agriculture in the socialist cooperatives.

The Roma were among the first to lose their jobs in the years after 1989 when socialism collapsed and later became dependent on the work offered by the non-Roma. They also obtained casual and poorly paid employment in agriculture, construction, and other informal activities, including gathering scrap iron, plastic, or glass. Campeni is the only locality that developed significantly after 2000 and reindustrialized. There, the employment situation improved due to massive foreign investments. Some of the Roma found employment in the new textile and leather factories, but they were poorly paid. Most of them lived in a segregated quarter that grew in size over the years. In Mica, the formal employment of Roma is very low, with most living in two areas on the outskirts of the town: one is near the garbage dump, while the other is a mixed neighbourhood with social housing blocks for the poor Roma. In the villages of Crucea and Rurea, Roma usually work in agriculture as daily labourers for their Romanian or Hungarian neighbours. In both places, they have no land property and lived in small segregated settlements. Roma settlements in these localities offer improper living conditions, and, with the exception of Mica, have no paved roads. Roma also complained about discrimination in the labour market and concerning the authorities, including in local social services, schools, and hospitals. Only in Crucea do authorities and the non-Roma consider the Roma as equal local residents, aware that they form the majority of the local youth.

Beyond this general picture, there is a variation in how adults and older Roma experienced the post-socialist transformation. Many older Roma, who in the 1990s were in their 20s and older, had some degree of socialisation in the socialist labour markets. For these generations, the previous regime offered some sort of stability and assured a clearer transition from youth to adulthood by incorporating them in larger numbers into poorly paid but stable jobs. For younger generations, who were in their teens when socialism collapsed, this was no longer the case. The post-socialist period brought about massive unemployment and high uncertainty among the Romanian youth in the first two decades after 1989 (Horváth, 2008). For the young Roma in our study, this period most often meant poverty and enhanced marginalization. Most of them had limited formal education and hardly any opportunities in the labour market.

Patron–client relationships were found in all localities. In Campeni, Rurea, and Crucea, Romanians and Hungarians developed patron–client relationships with older Roma that offered some economic and symbolic advantages to the Roma. In this way, the Roma families could access informal work and credit from non-Roma, while the latter could count on their workforce. For instance, Anca, a Romani woman from Campeni, lost her job in the textile industry just after 1989 and had no formal employment afterwards. Neither did her husband, Petre, who was employed randomly. Having to provide for four children, Anca would go and beg for food and clothes in town, but when she was employed by Romanians, she was able to obtain money to buy these things for her family. In some cases in Crucea, Roma recollect doing agricultural labour for Romanians, often, according to interviewee Dumitru, “only to receive food for their work.”

Even in cases when the Roma had formal employment, they often also entered into informal labour relations with Romanians. For instance, Ioana worked in the textile industry and one day her employer asked her to clean her home. Ioana felt compelled to accept, so she started working regularly for her boss. Similar situations were common in all localities in which we conducted research. Non-Roma either interpret their use of Roma work as charity towards them (“they give them work to do out of pity”) or suggest that they give food or used goods to the Roma without demanding anything in return—completely obliterating from their accounts the services performed for them by the Roma. These arrangements were always informal and involved many other kinds of transfers (material and symbolic) between the families. In several instances, these patron–client relations engendered more contact between Roma and non-Roma and were thus not only forms of exploitation, but also rapprochements. For Roma youth and adults who do not have a long history of dependence and who can access labour opportunities abroad, such relations are called into question. As Ecaterina, one of our Roma

interviewees in Campeni, argued: “It does not matter if I am a Roma or not; if I want to work why do they treat me like that?” In less economically developed places, such as Crucea, young and adult Roma continue working for Romanian households, although much less than a few years ago: Many have started working abroad in agriculture instead.

## 6. A Generational Divide: Return Migration and Changing Ethnic Relations

In this section, we analyse how migration and return migration developed in these Roma settlements and unpack the changes that these processes produced for the Roma in terms of ethnic relations. In the context of Romania’s accession to the EU, migration developed in all localities. In Campeni and Mica, the Roma went to many European countries: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the UK. They employed temporary and long-term migration practices. One main difference between adult and older generations is in their migratory practices. While older Roma tend to employ more temporary practices and keep their employment relations in Romania, adult and young Roma tend to rely more on employment abroad. Part of the Campeni Roma settled abroad, especially in France. The Roma from Rurea and Crucea started to work seasonally in agriculture in Germany. Both these processes of mobility offered better-rewarded working opportunities than could be found at home. Thus, our fieldwork sites underwent two major transformations: (a) the broad processes of social and economic transformation from communism to capitalism leading to Roma impoverishment and their growing dependence on the non-Roma population, and (b) the development of international migration that had opposite effects. A series of changes in ethnic relations were brought about by migration. We have identified new patterns of consumption where the Roma display their wealth, changes in local styles of communication, and finally changes in Roma positionality and more claims for equality.

### 6.1. *New Consumption Patterns and the Display of Wealth*

When migration developed, many Roma living in poor and segregated settlements were able to afford more, including better food, electric appliances, new cars, and better living conditions. A large part of remittances went into refurbishing or constructing houses. In Crucea, Mica, and Campeni, some Roma families decided to move outside the Roma settlements into non-Roma neighbourhoods. In Rurea, some moved into the central part of the village acquiring old peasant houses and renovating them. The style, colour, and materials used for the exterior differ from the traditional style of the village. The internal decorations and household appliances display middle-class aspirations and are often commented on approvingly by members of the local majority. A sim-

ilar but less visible process of residential desegregation has also occurred in Campeni.

The construction of new houses is more salient in Mica, where some mobile Roma families have bought old houses and plots in the centre and built three- or four-storey buildings with shiny roofs that the locals call “Gypsy palaces.” These big houses signal successful mobility but also challenge local social hierarchies that historically deemed Roma marginality as natural. While in some cases these “palaces” remain unfinished (or even unfurnished) constructions that are uninhabited for most of the year, they still signal the presence of mobile Roma that cannot be ignored and marginalized anymore.

Due to the increase in purchasing power, a couple of local shops and bars were opened within the segregated community in Rurea, while in Campeni, Mica, and Crucea the Roma began to frequent more pubs and shops outside their settlements. In Campeni, Roma youngsters and young adults would go gaming in local pubs. With the onset of migration, some went there more often than before. Gaming flourished and Roma thus became more visible. Young and adult returnees to Campeni had also acquired new cars that were in stark discrepancy with their previous poverty. These consumption patterns are similar to those mentioned by other researchers (Anghel, 2016, 2019; Tesăr, 2015b; Toma et al., 2018) and signal the new status of some adult Roma. Older returnees instead invest their funds in housing interiors, which is not such a visible display of wealth. It is important to note that social distance between Roma and non-Roma is not necessarily diminished by Roma’s success and mobility: Its display often receives moral critique and accusations of various forms of criminal activity, trafficking, or defiance of the law. In contrast to many other cases in migration studies where migrants gain social status and prestige by showing their success—as is the case with Romanian migrants in other contexts in Romania (Anghel, 2008)—the continued segregation and disparagement of Roma returnees demonstrates the ongoing salience of ethnicity in relations between Roma and non-Roma.

### 6.2. *New Styles of Communication*

Another change occurs in patterns of communication. During a conversation in Rurea, an elderly Hungarian woman said that “foreign Gypsy youth” are on the streets. She did not fear them or object to their presence, but she complained they did not know how to greet her. These were young Roma returnees to the Romani settlement who went to the UK and returned after a couple of years. In everyday interactions, they were perceived as being from outside the village due to their new style of clothing and behaviour. This type of perception of “foreign youth” among the local majority indicates that the older patterns of local relations, everyday exchanges, and communicational styles are under transformation. The example of linguistic skills and language use is a

good indicator of this process of change. In the same village of Rurea, the older Roma have good competence in Hungarian, the language of the former local majority. They are also well-versed in polite Hungarian forms of greetings and addressing the different age-graded categories between the locals. In the village, proficiency in Hungarian was previously seen as a way to be regarded more positively by the former Hungarian majority. While widespread among older generations, the knowledge of the Hungarian language is only present in exceptional cases among the younger generation, who instead grew up abroad and are more often proud of being able to speak good English or Spanish.

### 6.3. *Changing Positionality and Claims for Equality*

Roma population change their social positioning upon return. They may challenge inequality, comply with it, or try alternative strategies to cross ethnic boundaries (Anghel, 2019). We found direct challenges in the case of the adult returnees, especially when they openly complain about discrimination. In one case, Costel had migrated to Germany and, after a few years, opened business activities in construction and got involved in local politics. He became a local councillor and was struggling, with partial success, to improve the living conditions in the Roma settlement. Bitterly arguing against discrimination in a relatively rich town, he claimed that the majority was not interested in the Roma. Other examples of challenges include Roma being able to construct houses in the centre of their localities, or when they complain strongly about prevailing negative stereotypes. Ion, a Roma man returning from the UK, bitterly recalled his encounter with one clerk of the local municipality:

I went to the office to renew my ID and went from one office to another....I asked to talk to the person in charge....One came and shouted at me....When they talk to us they don't talk nicely, as we are Roma.

We found similar statements and attitudes among the adult returnees, most of whom no longer follow local patterns of dependency vis-à-vis Romanians and Hungarians, preferring to remain mobile and migrate temporarily instead of accepting subaltern and low-paid positions.

Roma adults returning home were also vocal when comparing the attitude of Romanian and West European authorities. Like Ion, many expressed disappointment at how Romanian authorities treated them. In another interview in Campeni, Ana remembered that she was pregnant in France and she recalled that she was treated nicely. She regrets that she did not remain there to give birth. Meanwhile, Carla was proud when her son was nominated among the best at the school in the UK. She thought that nothing of the sort could have happened in Romania. In other cases, adult returnees remember the solidarity and support they received in their countries of destination. This inspired some to

attempt to change the situation at home, but others expressed no hope for change, instead opting for permanent migration—as it was with Nicu who returned temporarily from Spain a few years ago. He decided to leave Romania altogether, remembering that in Madrid he had many friends and their relations were very good.

As we have described, adult returnees to Campeni were keen to voice their discontent and attempted, through various means, to improve their social position. They reacted more openly to discrimination and complained about prevailing racism. They were also more inclined to continue migrating temporarily or to leave Romania for good. In other localities, such as Crucea, where anti-Roma attitudes were not so strong and the Roma youth and adults migrated seasonally, they complained less about racism and more about lacking well-paid jobs at home. In contrast to the youth and adults, who often tended to remain abroad for longer periods, older returnees usually employed temporary migration practices and many of them retained employment in Romania. For them, open criticism was not an option and they instead attempted to facilitate a smoother change in their relationships with the non-Roma. Maria and Ion are two older Roma persons who work temporarily abroad, Maria in Germany and Ion in Spain. They forged new relations with Romanians, as in the case of Maria, who developed new ties with her acquaintances at the school she works at. In both cases they are not open challengers but try to cross ethnic divides by maintaining and multiplying ties to non-Roma, being known as reliable persons. The same occurs with Roma who are able to move outside the segregated areas and who establish relations with non-Roma neighbours or casual employers. Finally, some Roma can obtain formal employment and establish new relations with non-Roma colleagues.

## 7. Conclusion

In this article we built on the growing scholarship on post-return experiences (Kushminder, 2017; White, 2022), specifically focusing on the relationship between post-return experiences and stages of life. While much of the literature is on the return of adult, economically active individuals, increasingly studies look at the differing ways in which return is experienced by people of different ages: children, adults, and older returnees. This article builds on this emerging scholarship and addresses a less researched topic, namely how the return is experienced by ethnic minority returnees of different ages. Even though there is growing literature on the topic of Roma migration and returning (Anghel, 2016, 2019; Beluschi-Fabeni, 2018; Benarrosh-Orsoni, 2019; Pantea, 2013; Tesăr, 2015a, 2015b; Toma et al., 2018), less attention has been paid to how post-return experiences vary with life stage. Similar to other cases of return examined by other studies, mobility remains essential for adult and older Roma. However, in contrast to other case studies with older pensioners—but similar to other

East Europeans (Lulle, 2021)—older Roma migrate and return, needing to work in order to secure decent living conditions in a neoliberal and discriminating context. The post-return experiences of the Roma are shaped by ethnic negotiations and changing relations. We have identified three such changes: (a) new consumption practices, (b) new forms of communication, and (c) open claims for equality. Members of the adult and older generations of Roma embarked differently on these processes. This echoes the findings of existing studies that stress the variation of return experiences with life stage (King et al., 2021; Vathi et al., 2016). Adult Roma are involved in continuous forms of migration and no longer depend on local resources, meaning that they are in a better position to improve their economic standing and consume more than older ones. Young adults also use more foreign languages as they are socialized abroad. And finally, adult Roma challenge more openly anti-Roma discriminatory attitudes. In turn, the older ones do not enter such processes of open challenge and either accept their situation or opt for smoother forms of change, such as establishing new contacts with non-Roma and attempting to cross existing ethnic boundaries. In multi-ethnic settings, it is not just one's life stage but also ethnicity that determines and shapes the modes and processes of migrant return.

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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