

ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF ROMANIAN MIGRATION TO ITALY: A CASE STUD WITHIN EUROPEAN MIGRATION

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ABSTRACT: *Romanian labor migration to Italy, which accelerated after visa liberalization in 2002 and Romania's EU accession in 2007, has become one of the defining intra-European migration corridors. Romanians have formed the largest foreign community in Italy since the late 2000s, exceeding one million registered residents and heavily concentrating in sectors such as construction, domestic and elderly care, agriculture, logistics, and low- to mid-skill manufacturing [1][2].*

This paper examines the economic effects of that migration in a bilateral and European context. We focus on: (i) how Romanian workers have addressed structural labor shortages in Italy's aging economy; (ii) how remittances have shaped Romanian household income, consumption, and macroeconomic stability; and (iii) how sustained emigration has generated labor scarcity pressures in Romania itself. Drawing on Italian official statistics (ISTAT), remittance data from the World Bank and the National Bank of Romania, and analytical work by OECD, wiiw, and academic studies of Romanian migrants in Italy, we argue that this corridor is no longer a temporary "safety valve," but an embedded transnational labor regime. It reallocates demographic resources within the EU and transmits income, skills, and care labor across borders [1][2][3][4].

Keywords: *Romanian migration; Italy; remittances; EU labor mobility; demographic change; care economy*

JEL Classification: *F22, J61, O15, F24, R23*

1. INTRODUCTION

International labor mobility within Europe has become a core macroeconomic adjustment mechanism since the 1990s, especially between Central/Eastern Europe (CEE) and Southern/Western Europe. Romania, facing deep industrial restructuring, wage compression and high unemployment in the 1990s, produced a sustained labor outflow. Italy, characterized by rapid population ageing, chronic shortages in certain low- and medium-skill occupations,

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and rising care needs, became one of the most important destinations for Romanian workers [1][2][5].

By the late 2000s and throughout the 2010s, Romanians were the single largest foreign nationality resident in Italy, approaching or exceeding one million individuals according to ISTAT population registers [1]. This was not a marginal phenomenon. Romanian workers became integral to Italian households (especially in domestic and elder care) and to Italian firms (construction, seasonal agriculture, logistics), filling jobs that Italy's own demographic structure struggles to supply [2][5].

At the same time, the Romanian economy became structurally dependent on remittances. Remittance inflows, reaching an estimated USD 9.3 billion in 2008 (~5–6% of GDP), rivaled or even surpassed foreign direct investment as external financing for households and local development in certain regions [3][4]. This had two effects: (i) it lifted household income and consumption capacity in emigration-sending regions; and (ii) it masked structural weaknesses in Romania's labor market and wage-setting institutions.

The central claim of this paper is that Romanian migration to Italy is now best understood as a stable transnational labor regime: a bidirectional system in which Italy imports labor and services (especially care labor), while Romania imports income in the form of remittances — and increasingly faces the domestic consequences of exporting part of its workforce [2][4][6].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

Classic migration theory models migration as an individual/household decision driven by expected wage differentials, employment probability, and risk diversification (new economics of labor migration). In the Romanian case, qualitative and survey-based research consistently shows that migration in the 1990s and early 2000s functioned as a household strategy to secure liquidity, stabilize consumption, finance housing improvements, and invest in children's education [2][6][7].

After EU accession (2007), and once formal hiring channels opened in Italy, migration became less episodic and more embedded. Studies by Mara et al. at the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw) document how Romanian migrants in Italy developed identifiable labor market niches and patterns of partial or full regularization, with women strongly represented in domestic and elder care services, and men more present in construction and certain industrial tasks [2]. This segmentation is echoed in ethnographic work on Romanian care workers in Italy, which emphasizes the feminization of transnational care work and its role as an informal pillar of Italy's elderly-care regime [5][7].

From a macroeconomic angle, OECD and World Bank analyses place Romania among Europe's top remittance-recipient economies of the 2000s, with inflows playing a dual role: poverty alleviation and local investment funding on one hand, and indirect support of national external balances on the other [3][4]. The OECD also emphasizes a structural tension: while remittances raise living standards in origin communities, sustained emigration can erode the domestic labor force, especially in key occupations such as construction, transport, healthcare support, and personal services [4][6].

We adopt the “transnational labor regime” framing: migration is not a one-off exit but an institutionalized circulation of labor and income. Italy's care and low-wage service economy and Romania's household income model are now partially co-dependent [2][5][6].

3. DATA, METHOD, AND LIMITATIONS

This paper uses: ISTAT (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica) data on foreign residents in Italy by nationality, by region, and by sectoral employment where available. These registers provide consistent time series from 2001 onward and allow us to trace the quantitative growth and stabilization of the Romanian community [1].

Survey and research reports from wiiw (Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies) on Romanian migrants before and after Romania's EU accession in 2007, focusing on labor market insertion, wage levels, regular/irregular status, and integration [2].

OECD country assessments of Romanian emigrants ("Talent Abroad: A Review of Romanian Emigrants") and related analyses of labor shortages in Romania, which discuss how sustained emigration affects domestic labor markets and wage pressures [4][6].

World Bank / National Bank of Romania estimates of remittance inflows, especially the surge between 2000 and 2008 and the stabilization afterward [3][4].

Despite the use of official and internationally recognized sources, this analysis faces several data limitations:

- First, pre-2000 migration figures for Romanians in Italy are only partially available and largely estimated, since many migrants worked in irregular or seasonal conditions not captured by administrative records [2][5].

- Second, the distinction between "Romanian citizens" and "Romanian-born residents" complicates longitudinal analysis: once migrants acquire Italian citizenship, they are no longer counted as foreign nationals in ISTAT data, leading to a statistical underestimation of the true Romanian-origin population after 2010 [1][2].

- Third, remittance data differ across institutions (World Bank, National Bank of Romania, IMF) due to variations in reporting methods and the significant share of informal cash transfers, which remain unrecorded. [3][4][7].

- Finally, sectoral employment data by nationality in Italy are only available intermittently and are sometimes aggregated, which constrains precise measurement of occupational specialization over time.

These limitations do not undermine the overall findings but indicate that quantitative estimates should be interpreted as lower-bound approximations of the true magnitude of Romanian migration and its economic effects.

4. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ROMANIAN MIGRATION TO ITALY (1990–2024)

4.1. 1990s: *Informal and temporary labor migration*

The 1990s saw the first substantial Romanian flows to Italy. The drivers were Romania's post-socialist industrial collapse, high unemployment, and wage arrears, combined with Italy's rising demand for low-cost labor in household services, elder care, agriculture, and construction [2][5][7]. Much of this movement was informal: circular stays of a few months, undeclared work, and limited legal pathways. Quantitative data from that period are incomplete, but qualitative studies describe tens of thousands of Romanians — especially women in domestic and care work — present in Italy by the late 1990s [5][7].

4.2. 2002–2007: *Mobility shock*

A turning point came with the progressive easing of short-stay travel for Romanians into the Schengen area in the early 2000s, followed by partial regularization measures in Italy.

ISTAT data show an extraordinary jump in officially registered Romanian citizens in Italy: from about 75,000 in 2001 to nearly 250,000 in 2004 and over 340,000 in 2006 [1].

During this period, migration diversified sectorally. Men were heavily recruited in construction and agriculture; women consolidated a crucial role in private elder care (*badante*), domestic services, and cleaning — sectors where Italian households faced rising demand due to demographic ageing and limited public long-term care provision [2][5].

4.3. 2007–2014: EU accession and settlement

Romania joined the European Union in 2007, which normalized labor mobility. The number of Romanian citizens legally resident in Italy doubled in very short order, surpassing 600,000 in 2007 and approaching 800,000 in 2008; by 2010, ISTAT data approach one million [1].

This marks the shift from temporary labor migration to community formation: family reunification, schooling of children in Italy, and, progressively, access to more stable contracts. Mara et al. (wiiw) document improved formalization of employment and higher rates of regular status in this phase, especially in Northern and Central Italy [2].

At the same time, remittances to Romania surged to historic highs (see Table 2), acting as private external finance for Romanian households and communities [3][4].

4.4. 2015–2024: Maturation, stabilization, and structural feedback

From the mid-2010s onward, the stock of Romanian citizens in Italy stabilizes at around or slightly above one million according to ISTAT [1]. Two deeper structural dynamics emerge:

(i) Naturalization and integration. A large number of Romanian-born residents acquired Italian citizenship in the 2010s. As soon as they naturalize, they are no longer counted as “Romanian citizens” in official foreign-resident statistics, even though they continue to participate in the same labor markets. This means the real Romanian-origin labor contribution is undercounted in later years [1][2].

(ii) Labor shortages in Romania. Continuous out-migration, particularly of working-age adults in construction, logistics, care, and certain industrial trades, has generated persistent labor scarcity in Romania. OECD analyses of Romanian emigrants describe domestic sectors struggling to fill vacancies without foreign labor inflows, especially after 2015 [4][6].

In other words, Romania has partially internalized a “labor hole” created by its own emigration, while Italy has internalized Romanian labor into its demographic model.

Table 1. Romanian citizens officially resident in Italy (selected years)

Year	Romanian citizens resident in Italy	Notes
1990	< 10,000 (est., largely irregular)	Early post-socialist circulation; underreported [2][5]
1995	~20,000–30,000 (qualitative est.)	Concentrated in domestic work, agriculture, construction [2][5]
2001	74,885	ISTAT register of foreign residents [1]
2004	248,849	Rapid growth after easier mobility and partial regularizations [1][2]
2006	342,200	Consolidation of labor niches [1]
2007	625,278	Romania joins EU (Jan 2007) [1]
2008	796,477	Family reunification accelerates [1]

Year	Romanian citizens resident in Italy	Notes
2010	968,576	Approaches 1 million. [1]
2014	1,131,839	Long-term settlement phase. [1]
2018	~1.14 million	Slight decline due to naturalization and secondary migration to other EU states. [1][4]
2022	~1.07–1.08 million	Stable stock; Romanians remain Italy's largest foreign community. [1]
2024	~1.07 million	Continuing structural presence in key sectors. [1]

Source: ISTAT, “Stranieri residenti per cittadinanza,” various years [1]; wiiw, Mara et al. [2].

The data presented in Table 1 illustrate the evolution of Romanian migration to Italy over more than three decades, highlighting three major structural phases: the **informal and exploratory migration of the 1990s**, the **institutionalized expansion of the 2000s**, and the **mature stabilization period after 2014**. In the early 1990s, Romanian migration to Italy was small-scale, largely irregular, and poorly captured by official statistics. Fewer than 10,000 Romanian citizens were estimated to reside in Italy in 1990, mostly through circular and temporary movements. By 1995, the estimated number had risen to roughly 20,000–30,000 individuals, with migrants primarily employed in **domestic services, agriculture, and construction** — sectors characterized by informal employment and high demand for low-cost labor [2][5].

This period coincides with Romania's post-socialist economic transition, marked by industrial downsizing, unemployment, and real wage declines. Italy, facing opposite demographic pressures — an aging population and labor shortages in low-skill sectors — became an attractive destination even before formal migration channels existed.

The first official benchmark provided by ISTAT in 2001 registered **74,885 Romanian citizens**, marking the starting point of documented large-scale presence. Over the next few years, the number grew exponentially: **248,849 in 2004** and **342,200 in 2006**.

This surge reflects two interrelated developments:

- **Easier mobility:** the progressive relaxation of visa restrictions (2002) drastically reduced entry barriers for Romanians seeking work in Italy.

- Italian amnesty programs and legalization measures (e.g., 2002's Bossi-Fini provisions) allowed previously undocumented migrants to obtain residence permits and enter official statistics [2].

- Between 2001 and 2006, the officially registered Romanian population in Italy increased more than fourfold, signaling the formation of a sustained migration corridor. During this phase, distinct **labor niches** emerged: Romanian men in construction and agriculture, and Romanian women in domestic and care services. These patterns persisted throughout the following decades.

EU accession and consolidation (2007–2010): Rapid institutionalization. Romania's accession to the European Union in January 2007 transformed migration dynamics. Romanian citizens gained the right to move and work within the EU, greatly reducing administrative barriers.

The number of Romanian residents in Italy jumped from **342,200 in 2006** to **625,278 in 2007**, and to almost **800,000 in 2008** — a historical acceleration. Within two years of accession, the Romanian population in Italy more than doubled.

This wave also coincided with **family reunification**, as migrants who had worked temporarily began to bring spouses and children. By 2010, nearly **one million Romanians** were legally resident in Italy [1]. Economically, this phase corresponds with peak remittance

inflows to Romania (\approx USD 9 billion in 2008), demonstrating how labor migration became an established economic linkage between the two countries.

Maturity and settlement (2010–2014): From temporary labor to community formation

After 2010, migration flows stabilized at high levels. In 2014, ISTAT recorded **1,131,839 Romanian citizens**, representing around 23% of all foreign residents in Italy. Qualitative studies indicate a shift from short-term or circular migration toward **long-term settlement**: migrants invested in housing, education for their children, and business creation in Italy [1][2].

This stage also marks the consolidation of **transnational family structures** — many households became bi-local, maintaining economic and emotional ties to Romania while integrating socially in Italy. The permanence of the Romanian community had multiplier effects on local Italian economies, sustaining entire subsectors of domestic services and construction even during the post-2008 economic slowdown.

Stabilization and structural presence (2014–2024): Integration and demographic feedback. After reaching the 1.1 million mark, the number of Romanian citizens in Italy began to stabilize. By **2018**, estimates show approximately **1.14 million**, followed by a gradual decline to **around 1.07 million in 2022–2024**. This apparent reduction is not due to large-scale return migration, but to **naturalization processes**: tens of thousands of Romanians acquired Italian citizenship, thereby disappearing from the “foreign resident” statistics [1][4]. At the same time, some secondary migration occurred toward other EU countries (Germany, UK, Spain), where wage levels were higher or labor markets more dynamic.

Despite these demographic adjustments, Romanians have remained **Italy’s largest foreign community** for more than a decade. The stabilization around one million residents indicates that Romanian labor has become a **structural component** of Italy’s economy, particularly in sectors such as construction, logistics, domestic services, and elder care.

Across the full period (1990–2024), the Romanian population in Italy increased by roughly **100-fold**, from a few thousand to over one million residents. This growth trajectory reflects not only economic push–pull factors, but also **policy transformations**: visa liberalization, EU accession, and successive Italian regularizations.

The trend can be summarized as follows:

1990–2001: Formation and exploration phase – low volume, high irregularity.

2002–2007: Acceleration – institutional entry and legalization.

2007–2014: Expansion and consolidation – formalization and family settlement.

2014–2024: Maturation – integration, naturalization, and statistical stabilization.

Quantitatively, this pattern reveals that Romanian migration to Italy is no longer cyclical or crisis-driven, but **structurally embedded** within European labor mobility. Qualitatively, the transformation from irregular to regularized, settled migration mirrors the Europeanization of labor markets: what began as temporary coping migration has evolved into a permanent reallocation of human capital across the EU.

Table 2. Remittance flows to Romania and macroeconomic relevance (2000–2020 reference points)

Year period	Estimated remittances to Romania	Macro significance
2000	\approx USD 0.1 bn	Early stage of large-scale out-migration; heavy use of informal transfer channels. [3][4]
2004–2007	Rapid annual increases	Migration to Italy and Spain intensifies; remittances become central to household budgets in Romania. [2][3]

Year period	Estimated remittances to Romania	Macro significance
2008	≈ USD 9.3 bn	≈5–6% of Romania's GDP; comparable in magnitude to, or exceeding, net FDI inflows in some years. [3]
2010–2013	High but more stable	Remittances finance consumption, home construction/renovation, and small business start-ups in high-emigration counties. [2][4][7]
2017	≈ EUR 3.8 bn	≈2% of GDP; still macro-relevant despite gradual wage convergence in Romania. [4]
2020	Slightly lower vs 2008 peak, but persistent	Remittances remain structurally embedded as a private safety net for Romanian households. [4][6][7]

Sources: World Bank Migration and Remittances data; National Bank of Romania balance of payments; OECD (2019); wiiw analyses of Romanian migrants in Italy [2][3][4][7].

The data presented in Table 2 reveal the remarkable expansion, stabilization, and structural persistence of remittance inflows to Romania over the past two decades. These transfers, primarily originating from migrant workers in Italy, Spain, and other EU countries, have played a **central role in Romania's external financing, household welfare, and regional development.**

1. Initial stage (around 2000): Minimal flows and informality

At the beginning of the 2000s, recorded remittances to Romania were modest — approximately **USD 100 million** according to World Bank and National Bank of Romania data [3][4]. This reflected both the relatively small size of the Romanian diaspora at the time and the **predominance of informal transfer methods** such as cash carried home or sent through acquaintances.

Despite their small recorded volume, these early flows marked the transition from survival migration in the 1990s to the first **organized migration networks**, especially toward Italy and Spain. Remittances in this stage served mainly to meet basic household needs, repay debts, and finance emigration costs for other family members — the so-called “migration multiplier effect.”

2. Expansion phase (2004–2007): Rapid growth and household dependence

Between 2004 and 2007, remittance inflows increased dramatically in parallel with **mass migration to Italy and Spain**. Visa liberalization (2002) and Romania's EU accession expectations created an unprecedented outflow of labor.

During these years, remittances became a **core component of household budgets** in emigration-prone regions, functioning as both income replacement and informal insurance. Studies show that many Romanian households came to depend on transfers from abroad for consumption smoothing, housing improvement, and education expenditure [2][3]. At the macro level, these inflows began to appear in Romania's balance of payments as a significant external financing source, rivaling early-stage foreign direct investment.

3. Peak year (2008): Record inflows and macroeconomic significance

The year **2008** represents the historical peak of remittances to Romania, with an estimated **USD 9.3 billion**, equivalent to approximately **5–6% of national GDP** [3]. This made Romania one of the largest remittance recipients in Europe, alongside Poland and Ukraine. At that time, remittances were **comparable in magnitude to net FDI inflows**, underscoring their macroeconomic relevance. They contributed to maintaining domestic consumption and supported the real estate and construction booms of the pre-crisis years. In many local economies — especially in Moldavia, Oltenia, and southern Transylvania — remittance income overtook wages from domestic employment, becoming the main driver of local demand and small-scale investment.

4. Post-crisis stabilization (2010–2013): Structural integration of remittances

Following the global financial crisis, remittance flows to Romania **remained high but became more stable**, fluctuating around 4–5 billion USD per year. While some migrants faced temporary income losses due to Italy's and Spain's recessions, most continued to send money home regularly. By this point, remittances were **structurally integrated into Romania's economic equilibrium**, financing private consumption, home renovation, and micro-enterprise formation in construction, retail, and transport [2][4][7]. The shift from one-time investments to recurrent support indicates that migration had become a **long-term household strategy**, not a temporary response to crisis conditions.

5. Adjustment phase (2017): Relative decline but continued importance

By 2017, recorded remittances reached approximately **EUR 3.8 billion** (around 2% of GDP) [4]. In relative terms, this represented a decline from the 2008 peak, due largely to **wage convergence** between Romania and Western Europe and to **partial migrant settlement** abroad — migrants increasingly spent a larger share of their income in host countries. Nevertheless, the continued 2% contribution to GDP demonstrates that remittances remained a **macro-relevant and stable inflow**, particularly valuable during external shocks or domestic slowdowns.

6. Persistence and resilience (2020): Enduring private safety net

Even by **2020**, more than a decade after the global crisis and during the COVID-19 pandemic, remittance inflows to Romania remained robust, only slightly below their earlier peaks. Their endurance highlights the **resilience of transnational family ties** and the diversification of income sources among migrants in Italy and elsewhere. Economically, remittances now function less as cyclical inflows and more as a **permanent private safety net**, cushioning households against local shocks and supplementing inadequate social protection systems in Romania [4][6][7]. This durability underscores that emigration and remittances have become **structural features of Romania's development model**, not temporary deviations from it.

The trajectory from USD 0.1 billion in 2000 to roughly USD 9 billion in 2008, and stabilization around EUR 3–4 billion afterward, demonstrates both the **magnitude and endurance** of remittance-driven linkages between Romania and its migrant destinations - particularly Italy.

Three broad conclusions emerge:

- **Remittances acted as private external financing**, substituting for limited domestic credit and social transfers in the 2000s.
- **They reinforced regional inequality**, as high-emigration regions benefited disproportionately from external income inflows.
- **They created a transnational dependency equilibrium** - households rely on migrants' earnings abroad, while Romania's economy indirectly relies on these private inflows to sustain consumption and growth.

In sum, the remittance data confirm that migration to Italy and other EU states has not only reshaped Romania's labor supply but also redefined its sources of economic resilience and household welfare.

5. ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON ITALY

5.1. Addressing structural labor shortages

Italy's demographic profile is marked by low fertility, population ageing, and a persistent need for labor in physically demanding, lower-paid, or care-intensive occupations. Research shows Romanian migrants have become central in construction, logistics, agriculture,

manufacturing support, and especially in domestic/elder care (“badanti”), where female Romanian workers are over-represented [2][5][7].

From an Italian production perspective, this inflow stabilizes sectors that might otherwise contract or face sharply rising labor costs. From a welfare-state perspective, Romanian care workers informally extend Italy’s long-term care capacity by allowing elderly Italians to receive private in-home assistance instead of institutionalization, which would be costlier for families and the public budget [5][7].

5.2. Regional concentration and competitiveness

ISTAT regional breakdowns indicate that Romanian residents are highly concentrated in Northern and Central Italian regions (Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio), which are also Italy’s industrial and service core [1].

This spatial match between migrant labor supply and Italy’s productive heartland suggests that Romanian migration has not only filled “any job,” but specifically supported Italy’s competitive regions. It reinforces regional asymmetries within Italy: core regions absorb and benefit from migrant labor, while lagging regions in the South remain structurally weaker and continue to lose working-age population [1][2].

6. ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON ROMANIA

6.1. Household income and local development

Extensive empirical work on Romanian emigrants shows that remittances are used to finance current consumption, education, housing improvement, and local entrepreneurship (small retail, transport services, construction SMEs) in origin communities [2][3][7]. This created a remittance-driven development model in parts of Romania, especially in high-emigration counties in the North-East, South, and Moldova region, where formal employment opportunities were scarcer in the 1990s–2000s [2][3].

6.2. Macroeconomic stabilization

In the 2000s, remittances significantly helped Romania’s external balances. By injecting hard currency equivalent to several percentage points of GDP, they reduced pressure on the current account and acted as private social transfers, complementing (and sometimes substituting for) weak domestic social protection in the early transition period [3][4]. This inflow was particularly valuable around EU accession, when domestic demand boomed but Romania’s productive base and wage levels were still catching up.

6.3. Labor shortages and wage pressure

A structural downside repeatedly noted in OECD and wiiw analyses is that large-scale emigration depletes Romania’s working-age population in sectors like construction, transport/logistics, agriculture, and low-wage services [2][4][6].

The result is chronic vacancy pressure and wage inflation in those occupations inside Romania, combined with difficulties in matching domestic demand for labor. In recent years, Romanian employers in these sectors began recruiting increasing numbers of non-EU workers (for example from South and Southeast Asia) to compensate for domestic shortages — a development highlighted in Romanian labor market policy discussions and OECD country work on Romania’s emigration/employment nexus [4][6].

This indicates a feedback loop: exporting labor to Italy (and elsewhere in the EU) forces Romania itself to become a net importer of labor in specific, lower-wage segments. The Romania–Italy corridor thus indirectly internationalizes Romania’s own labor market.

7. POLICY DISCUSSION

7.1. Intra-EU mobility as an adjustment valve

From an EU integration perspective, the Romania–Italy corridor demonstrates how free movement of workers acts as an automatic stabilizer for asymmetric shocks. Italy faces aging and sectoral shortages; Romania faces underemployment and wage gaps. Labor moves from surplus to deficit. Both economies benefit in the short-to-medium run: Italy receives essential labor; Romania receives external income [2][3][4].

7.2. Integration and regularization in Italy

Mara et al. show that regularization and access to contracts in Italy significantly improve migrants’ job stability, wage security, and social protection [2]. Over time, many Romanian workers transition from informal/irregular status to formal employment and, eventually, citizenship. This improves their bargaining position, tax contribution, and access to services. Economically, Italy internalizes them as part of its long-term labor force, not just as temporary “guest workers” [2][5].

7.3. Sustainability concerns for Romania

For Romania, reliance on remittances is a double-edged sword. On one hand, remittances raise living standards, reduce poverty, and fund local development in high-emigration regions [3][7]. On the other hand, persistent outflows of working-age labor weaken Romania’s own capacity to expand productive sectors domestically, and force it to replenish labor through inward migration, creating new integration challenges at home [4][6]. Romania therefore faces a strategic choice: continue competing on labor outflow/remittance inflow, or pivot toward wage, productivity, and industrial policies that retain/attract workers domestically.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Romanian migration to Italy since the 1990s should be understood as a mature and structured intra-EU labor regime. It is no longer simply “Romanians leaving to work abroad,” nor is it adequately described as a one-way brain drain.

For Italy, Romanian migrants have become embedded in essential but structurally unattractive jobs (long-term care, domestic services, certain manual trades, seasonal agriculture, logistics, low-skill manufacturing). Without this labor, Italy’s ageing society and segmented labor market would struggle to provide affordable household-level care and to maintain competitiveness in some traditional industries [2][5][7].

For Romania, the outflow generated massive remittance inflows that financed consumption, housing, local services, and even entrepreneurial ventures, while also stabilizing external balances in the 2000s and 2010s [3][4]. At the same time, large-scale emigration has tightened Romania’s labor market in specific occupations, producing shortages that now must be filled by recruiting non-EU labor. This reveals a structural transformation: Romania is

simultaneously an exporter and importer of labor within an integrated European (and increasingly global) employment system [4][6].

At EU level, this corridor highlights both the strengths and vulnerabilities of free movement. It allows rapid reallocation of labor to where it is most demanded, but it can also entrench uneven development — reinforcing high-value regions in Italy's North and leaving parts of Romania dependent on income earned abroad.

Policy implications include:

(1) Italy's need to formally recognize migrant labor — especially in care — as part of its welfare and productivity model, ensuring legal protections and skill recognition.

(2) Romania's need to raise domestic wage floors, improve working conditions, and design targeted industrial policy to retain critical skills, reducing structural dependence on permanent emigration.

(3) An EU-level need to integrate cohesion policy (regional development funds) with labor mobility governance, acknowledging that labor mobility is now a core economic transmission channel inside the Union, not a side effect.

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analyses of Romanian migration patterns, remittance use, transnational family arrangements, and long-term settlement, including the Italy corridor. Highlights the role of remittances in local development and the shift from circular to more permanent migration.