THE EFFECTS OF MIGRATION ON COMMUNITY COHESION IN RURAL ROMANIA: ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES

Erika GOLDSCHMIDT,
Center of Research Development and Innovation in Psychology,
Faculty of Educational Sciences Psychology and Social Work, Aurel
Vlaicu University of Arad
erikagoldschmidt00@gmail.com

Dana RAD, Prof. Ph.D.,
Center of Research Development and Innovation in Psychology,
Faculty of Educational Sciences Psychology and Social Work, Aurel
Vlaicu University of Arad
dana@xhouse.ro

Abstract: *This paper examines the effects of migration on community cohesion in rural Romania, with particular emphasis on its antecedents and consequences. Drawing on qualitative thematic analysis, the study integrates insights from rural sociology, social capital theory, and social disorganization theory to situate Romanian migration within broader European and global debates. Findings highlight how economic factors such as unemployment and income disparities intersect with social and institutional drivers, including family expectations, cultural norms, and weak governance, to shape migration flows. Consequences for rural communities are multi-layered: while remittances and return migration can support household economies and even stimulate entrepreneurship, demographic decline, family separation, and challenges for left-behind children erode traditional forms of trust, participation, and solidarity. The paper argues that migration reconfigures social cohesion by transforming networks of reciprocity, altering community identities, and reframing the meaning of belonging across transnational spaces. By integrating theoretical perspectives with empirical evidence from Romania, the study contributes to understanding how rural communities negotiate resilience and vulnerability in the face of sustained out-migration. Implications for rural policy stress the need for long-term strategies that go beyond mitigating economic loss to strengthening social*

cohesion, educational opportunities, and inclusive community development.

Keywords: *migration; rural Romania; community cohesion; social capital; left-behind children.*

Introduction

Migration has profoundly shaped Romania's socio-economic and cultural landscape since the early 1990s, with rural communities bearing the strongest impact of this phenomenon. After the fall of communism and especially following Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007, the country experienced one of the largest migration flows in Eastern Europe. Entire villages have been marked by the departure of working-age adults, altering demographic structures, family arrangements, and community dynamics (Hărăguș & Földes, 2020). The exodus has left behind not only empty houses and declining populations, but also vulnerable social groups whose well-being is closely tied to the evolving phenomenon of migration.

The culture of migration itself has become embedded in rural Romanian life. As Horváth (2008) shows, for many young people from villages, emigration has evolved from an exceptional event into a normative life strategy, shaping their expectations for economic success, social status, and even family life. This "culture of migration" has created both opportunities—through remittances, new investments, or the exposure to different cultural models—and challenges, particularly in terms of community cohesion and the sustainability of rural development.

At the same time, migration is not experienced uniformly across rural Romania. As Anghel (2016) demonstrates, localities differ in how they negotiate migration, with ethnic composition, historical legacies, and local power structures shaping the impact of departures and returns. In multi-ethnic areas of Transylvania, migration has influenced not only economic status but also interethnic relations, producing shifts in how communities perceive belonging and cooperation. Similarly, internal migration, often overlooked in favor of international mobility, has played an important role in shaping community perceptions, with research in Banat highlighting patterns of stigmatization directed at newcomers and returnees (O'Brien, Crețan, Jucu, & Covaci, 2023).

The social consequences of migration are perhaps most visible in the phenomenon of left-behind children, a topic that has generated extensive attention both in research and in public discourse. The absence of one or both parents due to labor migration has been linked to psychosocial difficulties, educational vulnerabilities, and altered

family dynamics (Botezat & Pfeiffer, 2020; Constantinescu, Sandnes, & Bacro, 2025). Studies indicate heightened risks of anxiety (Tomşa & Jenaro, 2015), feelings of rejection (Adumitroaie & Dafinoiu, 2013), and challenges in identity formation (Bezzi, 2013). While family solidarity may act as a protective factor (Matei & Bobârnat, 2022), migration nonetheless places pressure on traditional support systems. Gheaus (2013) introduces the concept of "care drain" to describe how the responsibility for children's upbringing often falls on grandparents or extended kin, raising questions about intergenerational justice and the sustainability of informal care arrangements.

In addition to children, the elderly are significantly affected. As Thelen (2015) points out, rural migration disrupts the traditional patterns of care for older family members, leading to situations where aging parents are left with limited support, both emotional and practical. Migration thus creates new vulnerabilities at both ends of the life course, reshaping the intergenerational fabric that once ensured continuity and cohesion in rural communities.

Materially, migration has left visible traces in rural spaces. Case studies such as Larionescu's (2012) analysis of Marginea reveal how remittances have been invested in housing, producing villages marked by striking contrasts: modern, often uninhabited houses alongside deteriorating social infrastructure. While these investments may symbolize success and upward mobility, they also highlight the ambivalent relationship between individual gains and collective decline. The proliferation of "migrant houses" raises questions about the sustainability of community life in contexts where economic capital is decoupled from everyday presence.

The educational system has also been called to respond to the effects of migration. Costin (2021) and Mara, Mara, Andrei, and Danciu (2011) show that schools are often the first institutions to register the challenges faced by left-behind children, whether through declining performance, absenteeism, or psychosocial difficulties. Teachers, together with parents and local authorities, are compelled to develop new forms of cooperation to mitigate the consequences of parental absence. Pancu and Bocoș (2016) argue for strategies to strengthen school–family partnerships, while Hatos and Bălțătescu (2013) demonstrate empirically that family structure strongly correlates with school outcomes, underscoring the interdependence of family well-being and educational success.

Altogether, migration emerges as a multidimensional process that reshapes rural communities beyond economic parameters. It affects demographic composition, family solidarity, generational relations, educational pathways, and cultural identities. As Bezzi (2013) notes,

children and families in transnational contexts develop hybrid forms of belonging, navigating between presence and absence, between the homeland and abroad. These dynamics profoundly influence the sense of trust, reciprocity, and shared identity that underpin community cohesion.

The present study seeks to explore these complexities by conducting a qualitative thematic analysis of the antecedents and consequences of migration for community cohesion in rural Romania. By focusing on local voices and lived experiences, the study aims to capture how communities understand and negotiate migration as both a source of opportunity and a challenge to social cohesion. The goal is not only to document the vulnerabilities generated by migration but also to identify forms of resilience and adaptation that may inform policies and practices in rural development, education, and social work.

Theoretical framework

Migration, particularly in rural contexts, has long been recognized as a dynamic force reshaping demographic structures, economic practices, and social relations. Rural sociology offers valuable insights into the interconnectedness of mobility and community change, framing migration as more than the mechanical relocation of individuals but as a deeply embedded social process with long-term implications (Rao, 1981; Berry, 2000). As Berry (2000) emphasized, rural sociology has historically positioned migration as a catalyst of community transformation, with each migratory wave producing shifts in local economies, altering power relations, and generating new social identities. The distinctiveness of rural settings lies in their relative vulnerability to these changes: when even modest levels of migration occur, they reverberate across all dimensions of community life.

Bell and Osti (2010) introduced the concept of "mobilities and ruralities," underlining that rural areas should not be seen as static, isolated entities but as fluid spaces shaped by continuous flows of people, capital, and ideas. This aligns with Milbourne's (2007) argument that migration has redefined the very foundations of rural studies, necessitating a paradigm shift from viewing rural communities as closed systems toward understanding them as nodes in broader mobility networks. Johnson and Fuguitt (2000) further demonstrate, through their longitudinal study of U.S. migration, how continuity and change intersect: rural areas both lose and attract populations, and these patterns have profound consequences for social cohesion and sustainability. In many cases, out-migration of youth combines with selective in-migration of retirees or returnees, producing contradictory pressures on local communities.

The Romanian case is emblematic of these dynamics. As Horváth (2008) argued, rural youth are often immersed in a "culture of migration," where leaving is not a deviation but a widely shared expectation. Migration thus becomes institutionalized as a rite of passage, creating what Rye (2011) conceptualizes through a Bourdieusian lens as a classed practice, tied to aspirations for mobility and modernity. Yet, as Jamieson (2000) observed, such movements are never divorced from place: young people's decisions to leave, stay, or return are embedded in specific rural attachments and experiences. Cook and Cuervo (2020) reinforce this point, showing how staying, leaving, and returning reflect reflexivity and motility, expressions of agency shaped by broader structural conditions. Harney (2024) pushes this further, highlighting the role of immobility—not merely as absence of movement but as an active condition shaping those who remain behind.

These varied trajectories of mobility produce profound transformations in rural Romania. Some communities become "poverty catchments" marked by chronic depopulation and economic stagnation, a process described by Foulkes and Newbold (2008) in the U.S. but highly relevant in Eastern European contexts. Golding (2014) extends this analysis by linking migration to inequality, stressing that rural communities are deeply affected by global hierarchies in which their labor and resources are often extracted without proportional return. Bhandari and Ghimire (2016) illustrate the close relationship between agricultural restructuring and migration in Nepal, which resonates with Romania's rural economy, where subsistence farming, land fragmentation, and structural underemployment push individuals to seek opportunities abroad. As Diken (2018) contends, migration must be analyzed through a critical sociology of mobility that situates these local patterns within global power relations, emphasizing how regimes of movement and restriction shape people's opportunities and life chances.

These transformations cannot be understood in isolation from the concept of community cohesion. Cohesion refers to the capacity of communities to maintain trust, solidarity, and collective efficacy despite social change. Fonseca, Lukosch, and Brazier (2019) revisited this concept, providing a multidimensional definition that integrates trust, social networks, and shared identity. Earlier, Kawachi and Berkman (2000) framed social cohesion as a determinant of population health, linking it to social capital and the distribution of resources. Forrest and Kearns (2001) likewise highlighted its role in fostering neighborhood-level solidarity, while Cloete (2014) argued for its significance in promoting the common good.

Community cohesion is both challenged and reconstituted through migration. Blake et al. (2008) emphasized that community engagement is essential for cohesion, yet migration often disrupts established forms of engagement by altering demographics and redistributing resources. Oxoby (2009) clarified that social inclusion and social capital must be considered alongside cohesion to fully capture how communities integrate newcomers and cope with departures. Cheong et al. (2007) further warned that immigration and emigration can produce both bonding and bridging effects: while migration can strengthen internal solidarities among those left behind, it can also erode trust between groups and exacerbate divisions. Green and Janmaat (2011) stressed that definitions of cohesion vary across societies but consistently revolve around balancing diversity and unity, while Harell and Stolle (2011) examined how cohesion operates in diverse democracies, showing that pluralism can either strengthen or weaken communal ties depending on institutional arrangements.

At the theoretical level, social disorganization theory offers a compelling lens for analyzing how migration affects cohesion. Originally developed to explain urban crime, it emphasizes how high levels of population turnover, heterogeneity, and mobility undermine informal social control (Kubrin, 2009). Applied to rural Romania, the departure of working-age adults and the return of retirees can be seen as producing precisely the conditions of disorganization that weaken local institutions. Charis and Ronald (2017) trace the evolution of the theory, showing its relevance beyond crime studies to broader questions of community stability. Lowenkamp, Cullen, and Pratt (2003) empirically demonstrated that social disorganization is not only about structural disadvantage but also about the weakening of networks that sustain trust and cooperation. Weisburd, Groff, and Yang (2014) argue that opportunity structures must be integrated with disorganization, underscoring the interplay between mobility, resource access, and cohesion.

Closely related is social capital theory, most famously articulated by Putnam, but extended in multiple directions. Kreuter and Lezin (2002) framed it as a resource for health promotion, while Dubos (2017) and Claridge (2018) provided detailed conceptual frameworks for its application. Schmid and Robison (1995) demonstrated its utility in agricultural and rural contexts, linking social ties to economic outcomes. Akdere (2005) argued that social capital has direct implications for human resource development, while Schmid and Robison (1995) showed how networks underpin collective economic action. The emphasis across these works is that migration reshapes the stock of social capital by disrupting existing ties, creating new

transnational linkages, and redefining the balance between bonding and bridging capital.

Taken together, these frameworks allow for a conceptual model in which migration is both an antecedent and a consequence of community cohesion. Migration erodes cohesion by disrupting trust, weakening participation, and fragmenting identities, but it also produces new forms of cohesion through remittance economies, transnational solidarity, and return migration. The challenge, as Cook and Cuervo (2020) note, is to understand how agency and reflexivity mediate these processes, allowing some communities to transform migration into a resource while others experience it primarily as a loss. By situating rural Romanian migration within this broader theoretical landscape—drawing on rural sociology, social disorganization, social capital, and cohesion studies—it becomes possible to analyze its complex antecedents and consequences with greater conceptual clarity.

Community cohesion, as a concept, provides one of the most useful lenses through which the effects of migration in rural Romania can be examined. At its core, cohesion refers to the bonds that hold communities together: trust, shared norms, mutual obligations, and a sense of belonging. Yet, despite its intuitive appeal, the concept has proven elusive to define consistently. Cloete (2014) frames cohesion as integrally connected to the common good, emphasizing that communities thrive not merely on the basis of functional arrangements but through shared values and reciprocal commitments. Kawachi and Berkman (2000), from the perspective of social epidemiology, argue that social cohesion should be measured through indicators such as trust, civic participation, and mutual support, all of which directly affect well-being and health outcomes. Their work demonstrates that cohesion is not only a sociological construct but also a determinant of broader social resilience.

Forrest and Kearns (2001) advanced this argument by situating cohesion at the neighborhood level, suggesting that social capital, trust, and inclusion are the building blocks of stable localities. Their framework highlights that cohesion is not static but constantly negotiated, particularly in contexts of demographic change such as migration. Blake and colleagues (2008) added a crucial dimension by linking community engagement to cohesion: only through active participation and shared projects can cohesion be sustained in the face of diversity and turnover. Similarly, Oxoby (2009) warned that cohesion cannot be fully understood without reference to inclusion and capital, because the absence of inclusion—even in apparently "cohesive" groups—can conceal forms of exclusion that undermine long-term solidarity.

These insights are particularly relevant in rural Romania, where migration produces both inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics. On one hand, remittances and return migration can strengthen local engagement, funding community projects and revitalizing networks. On the other, the departure of young adults may erode participation in local associations, weaken informal support networks, and shift community responsibilities to aging populations. Cheong et al. (2007) underscore this duality, noting that migration may produce bonding cohesion among established groups while simultaneously straining bridging cohesion across social divides. Their critical review suggests that the effects of migration on cohesion cannot be assumed but must be empirically investigated.

This multidimensional perspective resonates with Fonseca, Lukosch, and Brazier's (2019) attempt to reconceptualize cohesion in light of contemporary challenges. They propose a definition that integrates trust, social networks, and shared identity into a single model, thereby capturing the complexity of cohesion in diverse and mobile societies. Green and Janmaat (2011) also underline the diversity of definitions, but they converge on the idea that cohesion reflects societies' capacity to balance unity and diversity, a balance increasingly tested in the context of globalization and transnational migration. Harell and Stolle (2011) build on this point by exploring cohesion in diverse democracies, where inclusion of difference must be reconciled with demands for solidarity. For rural Romanian communities, this implies that cohesion is not only about sustaining traditional solidarities but also about managing new pluralities brought about by mobility, both internal and international.

At the same time, theories of community instability shed light on the mechanisms by which cohesion is undermined. Social disorganization theory, originating in the Chicago School, provides a foundational framework for analyzing how demographic change affects community control. Kubrin (2009) summarizes the theory's core claim: high levels of mobility, heterogeneity, and poverty reduce the ability of communities to regulate themselves, leading to disorganization and, in its original formulation, higher crime rates. While developed in urban contexts, its logic applies to rural areas undergoing rapid migratory turnover. In Romanian villages where entire age cohorts migrate abroad, leaving behind elderly populations and children, the ability to maintain informal controls is similarly weakened.

Charis and Ronald (2017) trace the evolution of the theory, showing that it has broadened to encompass not only crime but broader community processes such as civic participation and collective efficacy. Lowenkamp, Cullen, and Pratt (2003) provide empirical

evidence that the weakening of networks is a key mechanism: it is not merely poverty or diversity per se that matters, but the erosion of the ties that make cooperation possible. Weisburd, Groff, and Yang (2014) argue for integrating opportunity structures into this framework, suggesting that communities are vulnerable when disorganization is coupled with limited access to economic or institutional resources. For rural Romania, this means that migration is not disruptive only because people leave, but because departures coincide with fragile local economies, limited institutional support, and declining agricultural viability. The disorganization that follows migration, then, is not only social but also economic and institutional, compounding the erosion of cohesion.

Literature review methodology
The study of migration in Eastern Europe has been strongly shaped by the profound transformations following the fall of communism, the restructuring of agrarian economies, and the enlargement of the European Union. Empirical research in this region has consistently highlighted rural areas as both epicenters of migratory flows and spaces of acute vulnerability. Romania, in particular, represents one of the most striking cases, given its persistent out-migration since the early 1990s and its dual role as a country of origin and transit. Rural communities, which historically relied on stable demographic structures and strong kinship networks, have been disproportionately affected by this phenomenon.

Empirical contributions from scholars such as Horváth (2008), Larionescu (2012), and Thelen (2015) provide a nuanced understanding of how migration reshapes village life. Horváth's (2008) ethnographic work described the "culture of migration" among Romanian rural youth, capturing how leaving becomes not only an economic strategy but also a normative expectation embedded in community life. This perspective is crucial, as it frames migration less as an individual act and more as a collective orientation deeply tied to rural aspirations and frustrations. Similarly, Larionescu (2012) examined the visible material transformations produced by remittances in Marginea, showing how investments in housing altered the social fabric and hierarchies of the village. Thelen (2015) turned attention to intergenerational dynamics, particularly the care of the elderly left behind, which revealed the emotional and social costs borne by communities in the absence of younger cohorts.

The antecedents of migration in Romania have been consistently documented in terms of push–pull dynamics. On the one hand, economic stagnation, lack of rural employment, and the decline of

traditional agricultural livelihoods act as powerful push factors. Hărăguș and Földes (2020) documented the demographic vulnerabilities of Romanian rural areas, underlining how shrinking populations and limited economic diversification created fertile ground for sustained out-migration. On the other hand, pull factors associated with European integration — such as access to labor markets in Italy, Spain, or Germany — facilitated the establishment of transnational family networks that further reinforced migratory intentions (Anghel, 2016). These networks function as channels of information, support, and opportunity, lowering the risks of migration and embedding it as a recurring strategy within households.

The consequences of migration, however, are complex and multifaceted. Demographic aging is perhaps the most visible impact, as villages witness the steady departure of working-age adults. Thelen's (2015) analysis showed that this leads to increasing burdens on older residents, both as caregivers for left-behind children and as custodians of community traditions. Family separation represents another critical dimension. A vast body of literature on "left-behind children" has emphasized the psychological, educational, and emotional toll of parental absence. Studies such as Botezat and Pfeiffer (2020), Tomșa and Jenaro (2015), and Adumitroaie and Dafinoiu (2013) confirm heightened risks of anxiety, perception of rejection, and lower educational attainment among children in migrant families. Costin (2021) and Matei and Bobârnat (2022) add that although family solidarity and extended kin support can mitigate some of these effects, the structural absence of parents leaves profound gaps in emotional development. Constantinescu, Sandnes, and Bacro (2025) extend this by synthesizing recent psychological research, concluding that parental migration is strongly associated with attachment insecurity and compromised well-being among Romanian children.

At the community level, migration produces both gains and losses. Remittances are frequently celebrated as a stabilizing resource, providing funding for household consumption, new housing, and sometimes local public goods (Larionescu, 2012). Yet these financial inflows do not automatically translate into cohesive social outcomes. Bezzi (2013) and Gheaus (2013) highlight that while remittances may improve material conditions, they do not replace the social presence of parents or the communal vitality lost when large numbers emigrate. Moreover, as O'Brien, Crețan, Jucu, and Covaci (2023) demonstrate in the rural Banat region, internal migration within Romania can itself generate stigmatization and social boundaries, showing that migration's consequences extend beyond transnational mobility to intra-national contexts of inequality and identity. Return migration

further complicates the picture: while some returnees invest in local enterprises or civic initiatives, others face difficulties reintegrating into local structures, leading to tensions between those who stayed and those who left (Anghel, 2016).

Despite the richness of this literature, important gaps remain. Much of the Romanian research has focused on children left behind and the psychosocial consequences of parental absence (Botezat & Pfeiffer, 2020; Tomșa & Jenaro, 2015; Adumitroaie & Dafinoiu, 2013; Constantinescu et al., 2025). While indispensable, these studies often examine migration's effects at the level of individuals or households, rather than at the broader community level where cohesion is enacted and sustained. Similarly, economic analyses of remittances and demographic studies of rural depopulation (Hărăguș & Földes, 2020) rarely integrate sociological perspectives on trust, participation, and shared identity. Furthermore, while European comparative studies provide useful macro insights, there is limited qualitative work that explores the lived experiences of cohesion in Romanian rural villages—how migration reconfigures social norms, reshapes the meaning of belonging, or generates both solidarity and fracture in community life.

This study addresses these gaps by adopting a qualitative thematic analysis of migration's antecedents and consequences for community cohesion in rural Romania. By focusing on the narratives and experiences of rural residents, it seeks to capture not only the structural transformations induced by migration but also the subtle, everyday negotiations of trust, solidarity, and collective identity.

Findings for antecedents of migration in rural Romania

Migration from rural Romania has deep structural antecedents that combine economic hardship, social expectations, institutional weaknesses, and regional disparities. These factors intersect to produce a complex environment in which leaving becomes not only an individual choice but also a socially reinforced trajectory.

Economic explanations dominate much of the literature, as rural areas remain marked by poverty, unemployment, and underdeveloped infrastructure. Sandu and De Jong (1996), in one of the earliest systematic analyses of post-communist migration intentions, demonstrated that economic instability and the lack of labor market opportunities acted as powerful push factors in the 1990s. These structural pressures have not disappeared but rather evolved in the context of EU integration, as rural households continue to face limited employment diversification and income disparities compared with urban centers. The agricultural sector, once the backbone of rural

livelihoods, remains fragmented. Ionescu et al. (2021) show that small agricultural holdings constrain productivity and reinforce subsistence models, leaving rural households vulnerable and more inclined to seek external income sources through migration.

At the same time, migration is not driven by economic scarcity alone but is also embedded in social and cultural logics. Horváth (2008) described the emergence of a "culture of migration" among rural youth, where leaving the village is framed not only as a financial strategy but as a rite of passage and a model of success. This orientation is reinforced by family networks, which provide logistical support, reduce uncertainty, and create normative pressure to follow the path of peers and relatives. Marcu (2014) added that these social dynamics persist across borders, with Romanian migrants in Spain negotiating new identities while maintaining strong transnational ties to their home villages, thereby sustaining the cultural legitimacy of migration as a preferred life course.

Social drivers intersect with institutional deficits, particularly in governance, education, and anti-corruption measures. Crisan, Crisan-Mitra, and Dragos (2019) demonstrated that perceived corruption at both organizational and national levels significantly heightens migration intentions, revealing how distrust in institutions fuels out-migration. Similarly, Caroleo et al. (2022), through a comparative analysis of NEETs in Romania, Italy, and Bulgaria, showed that weak transitions from school to the labor market leave young people particularly vulnerable to considering migration as their primary strategy for upward mobility. In rural contexts, where educational and vocational infrastructures are less developed, the lack of institutional support exacerbates feelings of marginalization.

Regional disparities further complicate the picture. Bădescu, Angi, Benedek, and Constantinescu (2025) underline how historical legacies of uneven development have produced stark contrasts between regions, influencing both human capital formation and migratory patterns. For example, Western regions with a legacy of stronger institutional infrastructures and cross-border connections often facilitate temporary or circular migration, while more disadvantaged regions, such as the North-East, witness higher levels of long-term family separation. Balaban and Huțuleac (2021), in their study of Suceava County, emphasize that while public measures exist to mitigate the negative effects of migration, they often fail to address the root causes, leaving communities exposed to the structural drain of their active workforce.

At the same time, migration antecedents are not solely deficits; they also intersect with aspirations for entrepreneurship and sustainable rural development. Croitoru (2020) found that return migrants often

channel remittances and experiences into entrepreneurial activities, raising local expectations for socio-economic change. Similarly, Coroș et al. (2021), analyzing the Mărginimea Sibiului region, revealed how rural tourism and cultural heritage can offer alternative livelihoods that reduce the need for permanent migration while sustaining community identity. Yet, such examples remain unevenly distributed, tied to regions with stronger cultural capital and visibility, thereby reinforcing disparities across the rural landscape.

The antecedents of migration in rural Romania reflect a synergy between economic vulnerability, social networks and norms, institutional deficiencies, and historical regional inequalities. These drivers not only explain the persistence of out-migration but also reveal how migration has become a deeply normalized strategy within rural households. For many communities, migration functions as both an escape from structural stagnation and a means of negotiating status, identity, and belonging in an increasingly interconnected Europe.

Findings for consequences of migration for rural Romania community cohesion

The consequences of migration on rural community cohesion in Romania are multiple and layered, cutting across demographic, economic, social, educational, and cultural dimensions. They reflect not only the material changes brought about by labor mobility but also deeper transformations in how communities define solidarity, belonging, and resilience in the face of global mobility.

Demographically, migration has altered the population structures of rural Romania through depopulation, aging, and shifts in family dynamics. Horváth and Anghel (2009) provide a comprehensive overview of how sustained out-migration has hollowed out villages, with young and working-age populations leaving in large numbers while elderly relatives remain behind. This "care gap," as Thelen (2015) has highlighted, reshapes kinship and caregiving structures, with elderly residents increasingly dependent on neighbors, relatives, or informal arrangements rather than immediate family. The demographic vacuum is also reflected in an erosion of school enrollments and local vitality, leaving behind what Andrews (2015) described in a British context as "communities under demographic stress," where cohesion is undermined not only by diversity but by absence.

Economically, migration has functioned as both a lifeline and a dependency trap for rural communities. Remittances represent a critical source of income, financing housing improvements, education, and in some cases small businesses. Breaz, Trif, Ciolomic, Jaradat, and Cilan

(2024) show how labor migration boosts local consumption and occasionally entrepreneurial activity, yet these flows rarely substitute for sustainable local development. In regions like Suceava, studied by Balaban and Huțuleac (2021), remittances became central to household strategies but also created dependency, weakening incentives for local labor force participation. Crowley and Hickman (2008) argue more broadly that migration reshapes social capital itself, reinforcing some networks through financial transfers while eroding others through prolonged absence.

The social consequences are among the most profound, as migration disrupts traditional norms of trust, reciprocity, and community participation. Markova and Black (2007), examining East European immigration in the UK, warned that cohesion can be fragile when migration reshuffles community structures, and similar processes are evident in rural Romania. O'Brien et al. (2023), in their analysis of internal migration and stigmatization in Banat, reveal how mobility often introduces new cleavages between "migrants" and "non-migrants," with the latter sometimes resenting those who leave or return with altered lifestyles. Cheong, Edwards, Goulbourne, and Solomos (2007) stress that immigration and internal migration alike complicate the traditional relationship between social cohesion and social capital, raising questions about whether networks that stretch across borders can replace those embedded locally. This resonates with Burnett's (2004) critical discussion of "community cohesion" as a state-driven discourse that often ignores lived inequalities and the structural causes of social fragmentation.

Educational consequences are equally significant, as children left behind by migrating parents often experience emotional strain, academic disengagement, and disrupted aspirations. A growing body of research documents these effects: Botezat and Pfeiffer (2020) find that parental migration negatively impacts educational outcomes and psychosocial wellbeing, while Tomșa and Jenaro (2015) demonstrate heightened levels of anxiety among left-behind children. Costin (2021) and Matei and Bobârnat (2022) emphasize that family solidarity and school support can mitigate some of these risks, but the broader picture remains concerning. Constantinescu, Sandnes, and Bacro (2025) synthesize evidence of long-term psychological effects, showing how children's attachment and developmental trajectories are reshaped by prolonged parental absence. These dynamics weaken the community's role as an educational and socializing agent, especially when local schools are unable to compensate for absent parental involvement.

The psychological and cultural dimensions of migration deepen the challenges for community cohesion. Identity itself becomes fluid,

stretched between local belonging and transnational life. Marcu (2014) describes how Romanian migrants in Spain negotiate hybrid identities, sustaining ties to their home villages while embracing new cultural frames, thereby transforming what it means to "belong" to a community. Bezzi (2013) and Adumitroaie and Dafinoiu (2013) illustrate how children in transnational families often experience rejection, loneliness, and ambivalent identities, shaping a generation whose sense of home is fragmented. Holtug (2021) situates these struggles within broader debates about social cohesion, arguing that immigration and migration compel communities to rethink justice, inclusion, and mutual responsibility in increasingly diverse and mobile contexts.

At a theoretical level, these consequences align with international debates on cohesion and diversity. Stolle, Petermann, Schoenwaelder, Schmitt, and Heywood (2011) argue that contact can mitigate negative consequences of diversity, but when contact is disrupted by physical absence, as in Romanian villages, trust and cooperation deteriorate. Ozcurumez and Hoxha (2020) emphasize that social cohesion is often "practiced in the dark," with informal strategies compensating for missing formal structures. Attri (2023) proposes that post-migration coexistence depends on mobilizing resilience and new forms of community solidarity, a process also visible in Romanian villages where churches, NGOs, and extended families assume roles once held by nuclear households.

The consequences of migration for community cohesion in rural Romania cannot be reduced to a simple narrative of loss or gain. Instead, they reveal a double-edged dynamic in which remittances and transnational networks provide economic and cultural lifelines, while depopulation, educational disruption, and erosion of trust undermine the very foundations of rural solidarity. As Husband and Alam (2011) point out, cohesion policies and interventions often underestimate these tensions, overlooking the ways in which migration redefines what it means to be a community in the first place. In Romania's rural areas, cohesion today is both sustained and destabilized by migration: sustained by the flows of money, care, and ideas that return home, yet destabilized by the persistent absence of people whose presence once anchored the everyday life of villages.

Discussions and conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that migration in rural Romania should be understood not only as a demographic or economic process but as a phenomenon that reshapes the very foundations of community cohesion. When considered through the perspectives of social capital

and social disorganization theories, migration reveals a double face: it can strengthen certain networks while simultaneously eroding others. Social capital theory highlights trust, reciprocity, and shared norms as essential to community life (Kawachi & Berkman, 2000; Schmid & Robison, 1995; Akdere, 2005; Claridge, 2018). Yet, in many Romanian villages, these mechanisms are increasingly tested by the realities of migration. Remittances sustain households and sometimes community institutions, but face-to-face reciprocity and mutual aid—traditionally embedded in rural life—are weakened when so many members are absent. As Cloete (2014) and Oxoby (2009) remind us, cohesion requires both inclusion and a sense of the common good. In rural Romania, these elements are often mediated across borders, reframed by distance, and complicated by unequal access to opportunities.

Social disorganization theory offers another lens to interpret these dynamics. Although developed in urban contexts, the theory's central insights about the weakening of informal social control (Kubrin, 2009) resonate with rural settings undergoing depopulation, economic uncertainty, and family separation. As Charis and Ronald (2017) argue, the theory has evolved to incorporate the interaction between opportunity structures and disorganization (Weisburd, Groff, & Yang, 2014). In Romania, access to labor markets abroad creates opportunities for families, but these opportunities often dismantle the social networks that hold rural communities together. Horváth and Anghel (2009) describe this as a "hollowing out" of villages, where migration becomes not just a necessity but a cultural expectation (Horváth, 2008). Classic tests of the theory (Lowenkamp, Cullen, & Pratt, 2003) suggest that weakened collective efficacy leads to diminished trust and civic participation, a pattern also observed in many Romanian localities.

Within this framework, rural communities emerge as both resilient and vulnerable. On the one hand, migration generates resilience by channeling remittances into household economies, financing education, and, in some cases, supporting local businesses and entrepreneurship (Croitoru, 2020; Balaban & Huțuleac, 2021). In regions such as Mărginimea Sibiului, migration has been incorporated into sustainable strategies for cultural heritage and tourism (Coroș et al., 2021), allowing cohesion to be maintained through shared identity and collective memory. On the other hand, vulnerabilities are stark. Population decline continues (Hărăguș & Földes, 2020), elderly care becomes precarious (Thelen, 2015), and children are left behind in fragile family arrangements (Botezat & Pfeiffer, 2020; Constantinescu, Sandnes, & Bacro, 2025; Matei & Bobârnat, 2022). Gheaus's (2013)

notion of "care drain" captures this ethical tension well: financial stability is purchased at the cost of reduced parental presence. For many children, the result is a heightened sense of anxiety, perceived rejection, and altered educational aspirations (Tomșa & Jenaro, 2015; Adumitroaie & Dafinoiu, 2013; Bezzi, 2013; Costin, 2021).

The Romanian case can also be situated within broader Eastern European and global contexts. As Milbourne (2007) and Bell and Osti (2010) note, migration and mobility are now at the heart of rural sociology, with communities shaped by both arrivals and departures. In Romania, historical legacies and uneven regional development play a decisive role in shaping these processes (Bădescu et al., 2025). Similar patterns are visible elsewhere, such as in rural Illinois "poverty catchments" (Foulkes & Newbold, 2008) or Nepalese villages marked by agricultural out-migration (Bhandari & Ghimire, 2016). Yet Romanian localities also display unique dynamics, such as the reshaping of ethnic hierarchies and social statuses in multi-ethnic Transylvanian communities (Anghel, 2016).

Migration also alters cultural identity and belonging. As Marcu (2014) illustrates in her study of Romanian migrants in Spain, transnational identities complicate conventional notions of home and community. For those who remain behind, particularly children, migration may create feelings of rejection or ambivalence (Bezzi, 2013; Costin, 2021). Schools in such contexts often face higher dropout rates and shifting aspirations (O'Brien et al., 2023). These experiences mirror findings in other rural contexts, where migration becomes a reflexive strategy for negotiating class and opportunity (Jamieson, 2000; Rye, 2011; Cook & Cuervo, 2020). What distinguishes Romania is the convergence of systemic corruption (Crisan, Crisan-Mitra, & Dragoș, 2019), fragile governance (Ionescu et al., 2021), and integration into EU labor markets (Sandu & De Jong, 1996), which together intensify the ambivalent nature of migration as both resource and risk.

For policy and practice, these findings carry significant implications. Cohesion, defined by Fonseca, Lukosch, and Brazier (2019) as both structural and identity-based, requires more than remittance flows or symbolic references to community. It requires institutional support, meaningful participation, and opportunities for inclusion (Green & Janmaat, 2011; Harell & Stolle, 2011). Yet Romanian communities often rely on NGOs, churches, or informal leaders to compensate for weak state engagement (Blake et al., 2008; Husband & Alam, 2011). Policy responses, such as those documented in Suceava County (Balaban & Huțuleac, 2021), tend to mitigate short-term migration effects rather than foster long-term community resilience. Comparative cases from England (Andrews, 2015), other parts of Eastern Europe

(Markova & Black, 2007), or global debates on social cohesion (Holtug, 2021; Ozcurumez & Hoxha, 2020; Crowley & Hickman, 2008) show that policies often struggle when migration transforms not only who belongs to the community but what community itself signifies.

Taken together, the antecedents and consequences of migration in rural Romania point to several central conclusions. Economic necessity remains a primary driver (Horváth, 2008; Breaz et al., 2024), but migration is equally shaped by family expectations, cultural models, and institutional weaknesses (Rao, 1981; Berry, 2000). The consequences, meanwhile, are multi-layered: remittances and entrepreneurship coexist with fractured families and diminished trust. As Crowley and Hickman (2008) observe, social capital itself is reconfigured in contexts of globalization and postindustrial change.

This study has certain limitations. As a qualitative synthesis, it cannot generalize to all rural contexts or fully capture the diversity of migrant experiences. Reliance on existing literature also risks obscuring local variations in resilience or vulnerability. Nonetheless, by combining perspectives from rural sociology (Johnson & Fuguitt, 2000; Harney, 2024; Diken, 2018), theories of social cohesion and capital (Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Cloete, 2014; Cheong et al., 2007), and transnational identity (Marcu, 2014), this paper contributes to migration studies by articulating a conceptual model that links migration's antecedents to its community-level consequences.

Future research should extend this work through comparative and longitudinal designs, paying closer attention to the trajectories of left-behind children and the capacity of rural communities to regenerate cohesion over time. As Weisburd, Groff, and Yang (2014) suggest, advancing theoretical understanding requires integrating place-based insights with broader frameworks of mobility and opportunity.

Ultimately, migration in rural Romania highlights the fragile balance between resilience and vulnerability. Villages may survive economically through remittances and transnational ties, but they also risk losing their social glue, their demographic vitality, and their cultural continuity. Far from being peripheral, these issues go to the heart of how communities understand themselves, sustain their traditions, and prepare for the future. In this sense, community cohesion should be seen not as a static condition, but as an ongoing process continually reshaped by mobility, absence, and return.

References

Adumitroaie, E., & Dafinoiu, I. (2013). Perception of parental rejection in children left behind by migrant parents. Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala, 42, 191.

Akdere, M. (2005). Social capital theory and implications for human resource development. Singapore Management Review, 27(2), 1-25.

Andrews, R. (2015). Labour migration, communities and perceptions of social cohesion in England. European Urban and Regional Studies, 22(1), 77-91.

Anghel, R. G. (2016). Migration in differentiated localities: changing statuses and ethnic relations in a multi-ethnic locality in Transylvania, Romania. Population, Space and Place, 22(4), 356-366.

Attri, S. (2023). Migrants and Resettlement: Mobilising Co-existence Through Social Cohesion. In Rebuilding Communities After Displacement: Sustainable and Resilience Approaches (pp. 479-498). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Bădescu, G., Angi, D., Benedek, J., & Constantinescu, S. (2025). Historical legacies and their impact on human capital: Comparing regions within Romania. East European Politics and Societies, 39(1), 3-26.

Balaban, D. C., & Huțuleac, V. (2021). Public Measures to Deal with the Negative Effects of Intra-EU Migration. Case Study: Suceava County, Romania. Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences, 17(62), 5-21.

Bell, M. M., & Osti, G. (2010). Mobilities and ruralities: An introduction. Sociologia Ruralis, 50(3), 199-204.

Berry, E. H. (2000). Rural Sociology, Migration, and Community Change. Schwarzweller and Mullan:" Research in Rural Sociology and Development: Focus on Migration". Rural Sociology, 65(4), 658.

Bezzi, C. (2013). Romanian'left Behind'children? Experiences of transnational childhood and families in Europe. Martor. Revue d'Anthropologie du Musée du Paysan Roumain, (18), 57-74.

Bhandari, P., & Ghimire, D. (2016). Rural agricultural change and individual out-migration. Rural Sociology, 81(4), 572-600.

Blake, G., Diamond, J., Foot, J., Gidley, B., Mayo, M., Shukra, K., & Yarnit, M. (2008). Community engagement and community cohesion. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York.

Botezat, A., & Pfeiffer, F. (2020). The impact of parental labour migration on left-behind children's educational and psychosocial outcomes: Evidence from Romania. Population, Space and Place, 26(2), e2277.

Breaz, T. O., Trif, G., Ciolomic, I. A., Jaradat, M., & Cilan, T. F. (2024). The Socio-Economic Effects Of Labor Migration In Romania. In Proceedings of the International Management Conference (Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 56-63). Faculty of Management, Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania.

Burnett, J. (2004). Community, cohesion and the state. Race & Class, 45(3), 1-18.

Caroleo, F. E., Rocca, A., Neagu, G., & Keranova, D. (2022). NEETs and the process of transition from school to the labor market: A comparative analysis of Italy, Romania, and Bulgaria. Youth & Society, 54(2_suppl), 109S-129S.

Charis, E. K., & Ronald, W. (2017). New directions in social disorganization theory. In Recent developments in criminological theory (pp. 265-294). Routledge.

Cheong, P. H., Edwards, R., Goulbourne, H., & Solomos, J. (2007). Immigration, social cohesion and social capital: A critical review. Critical social policy, 27(1), 24-49.

Claridge, T. (2018). Introduction to social capital theory. Social Capital Research, 1(4), 1-44.

Cloete, A. (2014). Social cohesion and social capital: Possible implications for the common good. Verbum et Ecclesia, 35(3), 1-6.

Constantinescu, N., Sandnes, R., & Bacro, F. (2025). The psychological impact of parental work migration on left-behind children in Romania: a literature review. Attachment & Human Development, 27(5), 684-714.

Cook, J., & Cuervo, H. (2020). Staying, leaving and returning: Rurality and the development of reflexivity and motility. Current sociology, 68(1), 60-76.

Coroș, M. M., Privitera, D., Păunescu, L. M., Nedelcu, A., Lupu, C., & Ganușceac, A. (2021). Mărginimea Sibiului tells its story: Sustainability, cultural heritage and rural tourism—A supply-side perspective. Sustainability, 13(9), 5309.

Costin, A. T. (2021). A literature review on left-behind children. Educația Plus, 28(1), 89-98.

Crisan, E. L., Crisan-Mitra, C., & Dragos, C. (2019). The impact on migration intentions of perceived corruption at the organizational and country level in Romania. Eastern European Economics, 57(5), 430-455.

Croitoru, A. (2020). Great expectations: A regional study of entrepreneurship among Romanian return migrants. Sage Open, 10(2), 2158244020921149.

Crowley, H., & Hickman, M. J. (2008). Migration, postindustrialism and the globalized nation state: social capital and social cohesion re-examined. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 31(7), 1222-1244.

Diken, B. (2018). Migration, the sociology of mobility, and critical theory. In Mobilities and Complexities (pp. 19-25). Routledge.

Dubos, R. (2017). Social capital: Theory and research. Routledge.

Fonseca, X., Lukosch, S., & Brazier, F. (2019). Social cohesion revisited: a new definition and how to characterize it. Innovation: The European journal of social science research, 32(2), 231-253.

Forrest, R., & Kearns, A. (2001). Social cohesion, social capital and the neighbourhood. Urban studies, 38(12), 2125-2143.

Foulkes, M., & Newbold, K. B. (2008). Poverty catchments: Migration, residential mobility, and population turnover in impoverished rural Illinois communities. Rural Sociology, 73(3), 440-462.

Gheaus, A. (2013). Care drain: who should provide for the children left behind?. Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy, 16(1), 1-23.

Golding, S. A. (2014). Migration and inequality in the rural United States: Connecting urban to rural and local to global. Sociology Compass, 8(3), 324-335.

Green, A., & Janmaat, J. G. (2011). Defining social cohesion. In Regimes of Social Cohesion: Societies and the Crisis of Globalization (pp. 6-20). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Hărăguș, M., & Földes, I. (2020). The demographic profile of rural areas in Romania. Calitatea vieții, 31(4), 289-317.

Harell, A., & Stolle, D. (2011). Reconciling diversity and community? Defining social cohesion in diverse democracies. Contemporary theoretical perspectives on the study of social cohesion and social capital, 15-59.

Harney, N. D. (2024). Mobility, immobility, and migration. In Research Handbook on the Sociology of Migration (pp. 12-22). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Holtug, N. (2021). The politics of social cohesion: Immigration, community, and justice. Oxford University Press.

Horváth, I. (2008). The culture of migration of rural Romanian youth. Journal of ethnic and migration studies, 34(5), 771-786.

Horváth, I., & Anghel, R. G. (2009). Migration and its consequences for Romania. Comparative Southeast European Studies, 57(4), 386-403.

Husband, C., & Alam, Y. (2011). Community cohesion: Its development and limitations. In Social cohesion and counter-terrorism (pp. 16-58). Policy Press.

Ionescu, R. V., Zlati, M. L., Antohi, V. M., Florea, A. M., Bercu, F., & Buhociu, F. M. (2021). Agricultural holdings' impact on the rural development. Case study: Romania. Agronomy, 11(11), 2231.

Jamieson, L. (2000). Migration, place and class: youth in a rural area. The sociological review, 48(2), 203-223.

Johnson, K. M., & Fuguitt, G. V. (2000). Continuity and change in rural migration patterns, 1950–1995. Rural Sociology, 65(1), 27-49.

Kawachi, I., & Berkman, L. (2000). Social cohesion, social capital, and health. Social epidemiology, 174(7), 290-319.

Kreuter, M. W., & Lezin, N. (2002). Social capital theory. Emerging theories in health promotion practice and research: Strategies for improving public health, 15(1), 228.

Kubrin, C. E. (2009). Social disorganization theory: Then, now, and in the future. In Handbook on crime and deviance (pp. 225-236). New York, NY: Springer New York.

Larionescu, A. L. (2012). Migrants' housing in the homeland. A case study of the impact of migration on a rural community: the village of Marginea, Romania. Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology, 3(02), 81-95.

Lowenkamp, C. T., Cullen, F. T., & Pratt, T. C. (2003). Replicating Sampson and Groves's test of social disorganization theory: Revisiting a criminological classic. Journal of research in crime and delinquency, 40(4), 351-373.

Marcu, S. (2014). Mobility and identity in a wider European Union: Experiences of Romanian migrants in Spain. European societies, 16(1), 136-156.

Markova, E., & Black, R. (2007). East European immigration and community cohesion. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Matei, A., & Bobârnat, E. S. (2022). Effects of the family solidarity on Romanian left behind children. International journal of environmental research and public health, 19(10), 5820.

Milbourne, P. (2007). Re-populating rural studies: Migrations, movements and mobilities. Journal of rural studies, 23(3), 381-386.

O'Brien, T., Creţan, R., Jucu, I. S., & Covaci, R. N. (2023). Internal migration and stigmatization in the rural Banat region of Romania. Identities, 30(5), 704-724.

Oxoby, R. (2009). Understanding social inclusion, social cohesion, and social capital. International Journal of social economics, 36(12), 1133-1152.

Ozcurumez, S., & Hoxha, J. (2020). Practicing social cohesion in the dark: Diverse processes and missing indicators in forced migration contexts. Frontiers in Human Dynamics, 2, 569682.

Rao, M. S. A. (1981). Some aspects of sociology of migration. Sociological Bulletin, 30(1), 21-38.

Rye, J. F. (2011). Youth migration, rurality and class: a Bourdieusian approach. European Urban and Regional Studies, 18(2), 170-183.

Sandu, D., & De Jong, G. F. (1996). Migration in market and democracy transition: Migration intentions and behavior in Romania. Population Research and Policy Review, 15(5), 437-457.

Schmid, A. A., & Robison, L. J. (1995). Applications of social capital theory. Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics, 27(1), 59-66.

Stolle, D., Petermann, S., Schoenwaelder, K., Schmitt, T., & Heywood, J. (2011). Consequences of Immigration-Related Diversity on Social Integration and Social Cohesion–Bringing Contact Back. In General ECPR Conferences in Reykjavik.

Thelen, T. (2015). Care of the elderly, migration, community: explorations from rural Romania. In Anthropological perspectives on care: Work, kinship, and the life-course (pp. 137-155). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Tomşa, R., & Jenaro, C. (2015). Children left behind in Romania: anxiety and predictor variables. Psychological reports, 116(2), 485-512.

Weisburd, D., Groff, E. R., & Yang, S. M. (2014). The importance of both opportunity and social disorganization theory in a future research agenda to advance criminological theory and crime prevention at places. Journal of research in crime and delinquency, 51(4), 499-508.

Wickes, R., Zahnow, R., White, G., & Mazerolle, L. (2014). Ethnic diversity and its impact on community social cohesion and neighborly exchange. Journal of Urban Affairs, 36(1), 51-7