

The Romanian Legislative Reform in the Field of Integration for Beneficiaries of International Protection

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Abstract: Migration, as a social-economic phenomenon, has existed from the dawn of humanity, in different forms and in different contexts. Although studied from different perspectives, in the modern and contemporary period, this branch of international law is rather new in comparison to other fields of the same category. Indisputably, war, social unrest and natural catastrophes of the XIXth and XXth Century has determined mostly Western countries to establish new policies and international law, like the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees and the creation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As part of new relations with UNHCR, and later the membership to the European Union and NATO, post-communist Romania has developed asylum procedures and assumed responsibility to integrate refugees in our society. Although the development of standardized integration law, policy and practice has been a result of a 20 years struggle, today we see that there is an increased interest from the competent authorities to adapt the services provided to the needs of refugees. Such is the modification of the integration legislation that occurred in the last two years, which can be considered a “Reform in the field of integration for refugees”.

Keywords: refugee; asylum; migration; humanitarian; protection

Terms and Concepts

The present article enfranchises on the integration process of beneficiaries of international protection in Romania (refugees or persons with subsidiary protection, as described by *Law no 122 / 2006 related to asylum*). As a general note, the term refugee will be used to describe both categories as the other category (holder of subsidiary protection), beneficiate from the same rights as persons with refugee

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status under the law. To avoid mistaking certain concepts, a list of definitions is necessary¹:

Based on the 1951 Geneva Convention, a refugee is “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (Article 1).

A holder of subsidiary protection is a persons that does not qualify for the refugee status based on the definition below but if returned to the country of origin, risks to be in danger or there are considerable reasons for his/her rights to be respected.

An asylum seeker is a migrant or stateless person that expresses his will to apply for international protection in Romania, maintaining this status until the asylum procedures have been finalized

A migrant or foreigner is a person that doesn't have Romanian citizenship, or the citizenship of another European Union member state, Economic European Area or of the Swiss Confederation.

In the same time, we should take into consideration that the Romanian legislation related to integration is applicable to both migrants and refugees, with the second category extended rights. For the purpose of clarifying their rights, this article will mention if the legislative amendments apply for both refugees and migrants, but keep in mind that the focus of the article is based on refugee integration.

Introduction

Migration, as a social-economic phenomenon, has always been present and can be considered one of the earliest signs of civilization. From the first tribal contacts, the settlement of Indo-Europeans on the continent to the so-called “Balkan refugee crisis” in the first part of the 2010s, populations have moved quite a lot across the world, from different reasons, ranging from pleasure, to economic development and safety.

Today terms such as migration, refugees, asylum seekers, migrant or foreigner are more present in the public space like ever before. The fact that behind them are actual

¹ The definitions are extracted from the Romanian legislation on migration, asylum and integration, mainly Law no 122 / 2006 related to asylum, Law no 194/2002 on the status of migrants and Government Order no 44 / 2004 related to integration.

people and not just numbers has been at the core of a new approach in terms of law, policy and practice that influence our society and has an impact on our daily lives.

In the European Union alone there are 22.4 million non-EU migrants, estimated at approximately 4.4%¹ of the total population as of 2018. Shocking as it is, the number is relatively low in comparison to what the media sometimes present. In this respect, EU policy makers have long agreed that migration has both positive and negative aspects. It was concurred that both migration and integration are not a problem, but a social phenomenon that needs to be properly managed.

Romania is one of the countries with a relatively new tradition in the field of migration.

Romania had a rather unique approach to foreigners in the past 30 years. During the communist era, the number of migrants in Romania was one of the lowest in the world, as the authorities were highly suspicious of any citizen coming by visa from a non-Warsaw pact state. Back then, the only migrants were foreign tourists, students and a small number of workers who came to the country under bilateral agreements. All the foreigners were strictly monitored by the special services (the *Securitate*) but had a generally good reputation.

In the 1990s, the situation changed as the existing post-communist governments tried to keep foreign investments out of the country, thinking that an independent, national based economy would prevail over the economic crisis that Romania was facing. This vision, although it started as economic, had an impact on the new migrants that were seen as economical saboteurs. In this period, the slogan “we will not sell our country” arose.

From 1996 to 2011, the field of migration has not been a common subject on the public agenda as the focus was diverted to other more pressing matters, like the NATO and UE membership, economic reforms and political debates (some of them leading to social unrest, like the 1999 Miner’s strikes).

In today’s Romania the public and political interest in the field of migration, asylum and integration remains low. This issue can be explained by at least four factors.

1. First of all, the number of migrants in Romania is still very low. As we already know, both actual numbers and percentage is well below most of the Western countries. According to the data provided by the General Inspectorate for

¹ According to the Eurostat Statistics 2018.

Immigration for 2019, in Romania we have 84228 migrants, out of which only 5467 are beneficiaries of international protection (refugees or persons with subsidiary protection). As refugees have the right to travel and set up residence in other EU countries, their actual number can be lower¹.

2.Secondary, Romania is still perceived as a “transit country”, both by public authorities and by the local population. In their view, migrants who request asylum in Romania have the sole purpose of obtaining documents (including the travel documents) in order to travel to more developed countries in Europe, such as Germany.

3.Thirdly, migrants in Romania have limited political rights. For example, according to the law, they do not have the right to vote nor to be elected in a public seat. As such, the this category is often not represented in public bodies and the political interest remains low, with the exception with the public discourse of conservatory groups that are using the “Keep migrants out!” line to enforce their electorate.

4.Fourthly, the way the general population views this category of persons. As a recent study shows, “refugees are represented, however, more favorably, a majority of the population agreeing they need help, but with a balance share of those willing and those unwilling to accept refugees” (Voicu, Deliu, Tomescu & Neguț, 2018).

In addition, we should take into consideration that the term “refugee” itself has somewhat a negative perception attached to it. As many would think, a refugee is a person in need of permanent social assistance and benefits from the state. Their economic, social and cultural contribution to the society is almost completely overlooked and the idea that refugees could be a part of the social-economic life is often ignored. There is an objective indicator that shows that refugees in Romania are not a financial burden: as far as the non-reimbursable financial aid for refugees goes, there was no instance recorded when the state was forced to supplement the budget in the way to assure this type of benefit for refugees.

In recent years however, we see that the interest for the field of refugee integration as begun to rise. The opening of the “Balkan route” close to the Romanian border, the potential for a new migrant route coming from the Black Sea, the challenges by

¹ The actual number of refugees in Romania is unknown as the General Inspectorate for Immigration can only offer statistics based on how many refugees have a valid residence permit at the time of the database report. It is fair to say that a number of refugees have valid documents issued by Romanian authorities but have left the country.

the future Schengen Area admission and the need of foreign workers as an alternative to domestic labor force has reopened the subject for debate.

In 2015, when the EU member states were discussing and negotiating the intra-EU resettlement programs from Italy and Greece, vice-prime minister Gabriel Oprea was declaring that “The EU must take into consideration the capacity of migrants’ reception and integration when negotiating the mandatory quotas”¹. The speech does not seem out of the ordinary as the Romanian position against the quotation system was already made public, but it is the first time that a high ranking public official recognizes that Romania has a low capacity in the field of integration.

This moment marks the start of a reform in the field of integration of refugees in Romania by amending the law and developing new procedures that would facilitate integration.

The present article will firstly analyze the view of the integration concept in the eyes of decision makers and the recent modifications made in the legislation as part of the reform which directly impact the refugees’ integration process.

The Process of Integration: Legislation, Public Policies and Instructional Practice

The concept of integration has been debated by academia, practitioners and stakeholders in the field of migration for decades. Today there is a lack of common consensus on the subject as researchers have concluded that it is contently evolving.

Even if we do not have a strict definition and understand of the concept itself, we have some guidelines of that integration of refugees refers to provide by international organizations. Last but not least, countries from around the globe have integrated in their national legislation this concept, including Romania.

The definition put forward by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is considered by many acceptable.

The integration of refugees is a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process which requires efforts by all parties concerned, including a preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public

¹ JAI Discourse of Vice-Prime minister Mr Gabriel Oprea.

institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse population. The process of integration is complex and gradual, comprising distinct but inter-related legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions, all of which are important for refugees' ability to integrate successfully as fully included members of the host society (2005 UNHCR Executive committee).

Another definition, this time coming from academia, defined integration as a “multi-dimensional process that refers to the adaptation of the migrant’s socio-economic characteristics (education, work experience, culture) to the host country norms” (Vermeulen & Penninx, 2000)

The third definition to be put forward reflects the views of the Romanian state on the issues. In accordance with the national legislation:

“Social integration represents the process of active participation of migrants who were granted a form of international protection or the right to reside in Romania and for those having the citizenship of an EU member state, Swiss Confederacy and European Economic Area to the economic, social and cultural life of Romanian society, to prevent or avoid social marginalization and adapt to the conditions put forward by the Romanian society” (Art. 2 of GO 44 / 2004)

If we analyze together the definitions above, we observe that there are certain common particularities. All agree that integration is a complex process that implies the will of refugees and that of the host community to integrate them. More importantly, it must ensure that refugees continue their lives in similar, if not better, conditions than that of their country of origin.

However, we can agree that more important than the stand-alone concept is the impact of the process both on the person and on the host society. The practical approach has an extensive variety of views, ranging from the idea that we can never know if a migrant (regardless of the status) is integrated or not, to those who quantify integration by measuring certain aspects, such as employment, language learning or formal education.

In the back scene of the theoretical component, refugees have similar opportunities and impediments as migrants in the integration process. Their situation is slightly different due to their needs and lack of protection by the country of origin, their experiences or traumas suffered on their route to safety and by their reception in the host country. This represents one of the reasons why UNHCR states that integration

starts from the first contact of the refugees' with the host country: from the border to accommodation standards in the Reception Centers.

As a conclusion, it's safe to say that in a world that is increasingly becoming more mobile and in which migration is being a phenomenon on the rise, integration should become a priority for decision makers and for citizens in general. The integration process influences a wide range of fields from public health to education and economy. We can also look at issues of national security as this is one of the most recent concerns linked to migration in general and formulate the following hypothesis: the higher the level of refugee integration, the lower the chances of acts of social deviance and delinquency.

From the signing of the 1951 Geneva Convention in 1991, Romania has developed legislation, created responsible institutions in the fields and developed a National Migration Strategy that includes aspects related to integration. The legislation applicable is the following:

- a. Law no 471 / 1991 on the signing of the 1951 Geneva Convention
- b. Law no 122 / 2006 related to asylum in Romania
- c. Law no 194 / 2002 on the status of foreigners
- d. Government Ordinance no 44 / 2004 related on integration (...)
- e. Secondary laws and procedures from the field of education, healthcare, labor, social services and benefits, housing, etc.

We should also look at the institutional practice and context. In Romania, the responsible institution in the field of migration, asylum and integration is the General Inspectorate for Immigration (GII), subordinated under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The GII has two main branches, the Migration Office (and local branches) and the Directorate for Asylum and Integration. According to the law "the GII exercises its attributes, based on the law, and implements Romania's policies in the field of migration, asylum and integration of foreigners and those from other relevant fields"¹. This includes undertaking asylum procedures, coordinating integration, resettlement and granting residence for migrants.

¹ Article 16 of the Regulation regarding the establishment and function of the General Inspectorate for Immigration (updated in 2017).

In order to fulfill its purpose, the GII collaborated with different institutions, under different ministries, some in the field of social assistance, other in the field of national security.

In addition to the GII's responsibilities, there the Romanian government has established an inter-ministerial body that will facilitate a better institutional response in the field of integration: The Inter-ministerial Committee "National Coalition for the integration of refugees". By Government decision no 312 / 2015, the Committee has the following attributes:

- a) to facilitate integration of refugees in the Romanian society, in order for the state to fulfill the objectives and responsibilities assumed at the European level;
- b) to correctly and comprehensive identify the needs of refugees, select optimal solutions, assure the implementation of measures and coordinate to reach the desired objectives¹.

The Committee has started to function under the Ministry of Labor in 2015 by organizing consultations with public instructions, NGOs and academia working in the field of integration. Soon after the demise of the Ponta Government, the activity of the Committee has drastically decreased as its coordination was established under the Prime-Minister's Cabinet. Again, the context had a huge impact as the discussions at the EU level concerning the resettlements scheme de-tested and the number of asylum seekers slowly decreased.

In parallel, civil society active in the field of integration pushed forward and became more organized. The experience of NGOs within the Committee has shown that individual advocacy activities are less effective and that collaboration on different aspects of integration is possible. As a result, the need of bolstering advocacy efforts has led to the formation of the Coalition for Migrant and Refugees' Rights (CDMIR).

According to their manifesto, the coalition has three main objectives:

- 1. Improving the image of migrants and refugees in the public space through a unitary communication strategy;*
- 2. Correction of contradictory / unfounded provisions on principles of law / social justice from the legislation in force;*

¹ As states by Article 1 of the Government decision no 312 / 2015.

3. Improving practices / legislation with an impact on the fundamental rights of refugees and migrants¹.

Last but not least, we should take into conservation a few aspects related to the context of the reform.

During the 1990s and the first half of 2000s, the profile of the “standard asylum seeker” has been relative constant: single men, between the age of 18 and 35, from none to secondary education graduates, coming from Northern Africa countries or from south-eastern Asia. Starting from 2011 and the Arab Spring events that took place, the profile changed considerably. The majority of asylum seekers and refugees have come to Romania as a family, having 2 – 3 minor children, having already graduated at least secondary education and some work experience in different fields.

This shifting in profile and context has contributed without a doubt to the need for legislative amendments. The reform is a product of the tripartite effort coming from the General Inspectorate for Immigration (that initiated the process), with the support of UNHCR and NGOs from the field of migration.

In the following chapters we will take analyze each field impacted by the legislative reform in the field of integration and the potential outcome.

I. The Integration Program

The Integration Program is the main tool that EU member states, including Romania, developed for refugees. At the EU level, there is no standardized program as there are different views and practices when it comes to integration. Of course, there are many aspects in common, like the languages courses. Although many activities put forward by the state are made available for all migrants, refugees have more opportunities in comparison with other categories.

In the case of Romania, the first complex and coherent integration program has been introduced in 2004, when the number of asylum seekers and refugees slowly increased².

¹ The Migration manifesto 2016.

² We have to take into consideration that Romania was preparing to join the EU and issues like migration, asylum and integration were on the agenda.

The integration program implemented today consists of a package of services provided by the state, individualized on the need of each applicant. The package includes:

- Accommodation in the Reception Centres under the GII while the integration program is on-going. This housing option is subject to refusal if the accommodation capacity is at full and the inhabitant must pay the utility bills per month
- Romanian language courses for a period of up to one year
- Cultural accommodation sessions, organized by the GII with the support of NGOs
- Counseling and assistance in the integration process
- The possibility to request a non-reimbursable financial aid¹
- Other specific services, depending on needs

The legislative reform in the field of integration modifies some aspects of the integration program.

Until the Reform, GII and NGO representatives were developing and implementing the individualized integration plan for each person, in accordance with his/her wishes, profile and needs. Now, members of local public institutions with responsibilities in the field of integration are encouraged to offer their expertise. This model of cooperation is implemented in Western European countries, where “local authorities, while coordinating with all levels of government and other local partners, play a key role in integrating newcomers and empowering them to contribute to their new communities” (OECD 2018 Report - *Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees*).

Secondly, the length of the integration program is also being modified, from a maximum of 12 to 18 months, if necessary. Romania adopted one of the two EU views on integration: a longer integration program, with activities organized rather more apart, in opposition with a shorter integration program with intensive day-to-day activities.

¹ This type of financial benefits is destined only for refugees with little or no income

II. Strengthening the Cooperation with Local Public Authorities and Enforcing the Assistance Capacity on the Local Level

By law, the GII is *the coordinator* of the integration program, which implies a strong cooperation with other local and central authorities from other fields. Between the GII and these institutions, there is no subordination relation, rather a coordination of the integration for each refugee. This type of coordination is vital for the integration process and access to rights.

Furthermore, almost the entire refugee rights that they benefit from, according to Art. 20 from the 122/2006 law regarding asylum in Romania, are closely connected to local institutions (the City Hall, the Local Council, etc.) or to other groups subordinated to them. In our daily practice, the coordination between the General Inspectorate for Immigration (IGI) and these local institutions has two tightly-connected parts: a practical one and a law-making one.

The practical part consists of the way GII and the public authorities work together to make sure that the laws regarding refugees are properly enforced.

The law making one consists mainly of the limitations that the existing law has for the counseling process and the ways in which the special legislation regarding asylum is correlated to other existing fields. The law-making coordination can be best summarized by using the following syllogism:

All Romanian citizens have the right to receive unemployment benefits.

All refugees have the same rights as Romanian citizens regarding social services.

All refugees have the right to receive unemployment benefits.

At a first glance, things seem to be quite clear, but, in our daily practice, there are many downfalls. Following a careful analysis, most disparities seem to be caused by the correlation between the law regarding asylum/integration and the ones for every specific field of action.

For a better local coordination, through the amendments to *GO 44/2004 regarding integration (...)*, local support committees for integration will be established, as suggested by GII-DAI and managed by the County Council (by the Deputy Prefect, to be more specific). We should mention the fact that this type of measures existed before, as stated by Government decision no. 417 / 1991, but have never been put in practice until now.

Moreover, establishing local support groups will hopefully lead not only to a unitary practice, but also of our daily practice with the ones in other European Union state members that use a decentralized system like, for example, Sweden, Norway, Finland, France or Germany. In these countries, as well as in others, the field of integration is managed by central Work and Social Services institutions.

III. Improving our Romanian Language Learning Programs and our Cultural Adaptation Sessions

Learning Romanian is one of the most important parts of the integration process for all foreigners with legal residence in Romania, no matter what their legal status is. Using your host country language has a huge impact on the independence a refugee can have on the labor market as well as in the whole integration process.

This is why the Romanian integration program has focused on language learning program since the very beginning. While for the foreigners with legal residence in Romania the language courses are optional and surcharge, for refugees is mandatory they take part in these language courses if they want to receive some financial aid from the Government. Moreover, what's different in these programs offered by the NGOs through the Migration, Asylum and Integration Fund in comparison with the ones offered by the Department of Education is that they have a very strong liaison with the cultural adaptation sessions.

The reform in the field of integration brings some important changes, some of them stated below.

The first one is a quantitative change. Until the changes brought to us by the GO no.44/2004, the integration program had only 4 hours destined for each refugee for learning Romanian. Now it comprises up to 6 hours, with 50% more than before. What is more, the NGOs working with GII can use more hours if they see it appropriate, keeping in mind their financing and their project responsibility. Also, through these changes, the courses will be organized in such way as to match the students' profile (level of education, prior language knowledge, gender, etc.)

The second point to take into consideration would be the way students are enrolled and tested in these courses, a task which has proved to be a very difficult for many refugee-oriented education program in Europe. As it has been stated in the first chapter, the persons who ask for asylum in Romania arrive in our country irregularly¹⁵, hence the term "irregular migration" used by the European

Commission. Since they can arrive in our country and then obtain the refugee status at any time during their stay makes almost impossible limiting the enrollment period in these courses. Until the new rules were instated, all refugees had to enroll in a language program before the beginning of the school year, meaning in August and September. Now, they can enroll at any time during the whole school year. If a person receives the refugee status in May, for example, they will undergo a part of the program during the current school year and then continue the rest of it in the next school year in September.

When it comes to testing, there is another important change that might seem unimportant for some, but, in fact, has a high impact on the ones that are already fluent in Romanian. In these cases, although a very few, the refugees can take the language test without having to take on a course.

Some of these changes come in kind of contradiction with two decrees given by the Secretary for Education (no 5924 and 5925 from 2009), which will also have to be modified accordingly.

Last, another modification is represented by the introduction of a specialized curriculum and of a National and European accepted diploma. Until these law alterations were put in place, all students received a diploma with no actual value and which was not related whatsoever with the European Foreign Language Levels. However, now, the diploma received at the end of a course will have more relevance.

IV. Refugees' Access to Social Housing

No matter the social group we are talking about, housing is often a largely debated subject in our society. When it comes to refugees, housing is a big part in the integration process as it strongly influences the chances to be part of a community, but also the way they are received by the new society in which they are looking for shelter. Moreover, we have to take into consideration their cultural space. In the Islamic culture, the place you live in has many uses on which many Islamic groups have developed real living rules. Hanna Ibrahim, the sociologist, describes very well how housing is seen by people in the Islamic culture:

"The house is considered a typology in Islamic architecture because it has always been strongly marked by religion and, therefore, it has been built as to fulfill the need for space for the daily prayers that could be made at home. It has been built on

religious rules regarding hospitality, spirituality, family and intimacy.”(Ibrahim, 2012)

Even if today housing is influenced by architectural and design tendencies of the Western world, many of the Islamic rules have been preserved and continue to have a huge impact on what a home, not just a house, means.

In Romania, refugees have different options when it comes to housing, with no restrictions when it comes to decide the place of residence¹⁵.

Refugees have the right to live in the housing centers dedicated for asylum applicants, centers administered by GII-DAI, during the time that they are registered in the integration program, as far as there are places available, paying only for the utilities. Vulnerable cases can stay in these Centers an indefinite time and without paying for anything.

However, problems surge when refugees can no longer stay in these Centers and are forced to look by themselves for rentals. There are three types of situations that need to be taken into account in order to have a clear image of the refugee housing problem.

The first one is the one of the people living in Centers and whom, financially, cannot afford to rent a house. It is obvious for all of us the Romania doesn't have the financial strength to build houses dedicated to this group. Meanwhile, this type of positive discrimination could bring up political and social conflicts such as inflaming the already existing tensions between locals and refugees. However, there are other available measures.

According to Article 20 from the 122/2006 Law regarding asylum, all refugees have the same rights as Romanian citizens to benefit from the social services available in their community. Social housing is part of these services. Going through the existing legislation, we have found that there are at least two drawbacks: citizenship and domicile.

Citizenship: The legal difference between the various groups of foreigners is stated in the current legislation. The term "asylum seeker", beneficiary of international protection, and the one of "migrant" is clearly stated by the specific immigration legislation, but totally missing in the laws made for other fields. To limit all possible wrong interpretations of the law and to avoid all types of confusion, stating the differences very clearly in all legislation is necessary.

Domicile: The Romanian laws set a distinctive mark between residence and domicile. According to Article 84 in the Civil Code “a person’s domicile, used for carrying on their civil rights, is where they chose to have their permanent home”. The residence, however, according to the same article, is secondary and optional.

For refugees, the concept of “domicile” and the way this is described limits their access to proper housing. If we were to follow these definitions, the refugee domicile should be in the country of origin which, legally, it is not possible, since they have given up the protection of their home country and the Romanian state has agreed to offer them international protection. In this context, the distinction between domicile and residence should be made through the legislation regarding asylum¹⁵.

The reform in the field of integration, through the alterations brought GO 44/2004, underlines the things stated above and it brings into discussion a new article meant to clarify any wrong interpretations: *granting social housing is made in the same conditions as the ones in use of Romanian citizens, according to law no. 114/1996 for housing, republished with the alterations and additions that have followed since.*

The second situation takes into discussion the refugees that have financial means, of their own or received from the Government or NGOs) to live in cities. Despite the general belief that refugees are, the majority of them socially assisted and on the border of poverty, most of them live outside Locative Centers, usually in rented apartments. Although being financially independent and living inside in the community are two things that should be encouraged, there are a lot of obstacles to overcome.

Taking aside students that have a better image overall inside the community, apartment owners are usually very reserved when it comes to renting their properties to foreigners and even more when it comes to refugees. If we take a look at the report on Romanians’ perception of the refugee’ crisis, put together by the ”Pro-Democracy” association, we can observe that, although there is a high degree of acceptance of these minority, 52% of the ones interviewed think that refugees should be housed in spaces specially built for this purpose only¹⁵. Therefore, finding a place to live in can be very problematic. In the same time, other factors should be taken into consideration such as high rent prices or the fluctuation of the Euro exchange rate.

In the case of those who need financial support, there are two main solutions, one of them being a novelty brought to us by this reform.

The first solution is financial help for paying rent through NGOs, especially those which get financing through AMIF.

The second solution is the one of recovering the money paid on rent from the Romanian through GII. The legislation in the field of integration used to state that at the end of the integration program there is the possibility that the state, through GII-DAI, to co-pay 50% of the rent on a fixed period of time. Through the reform, refugees can now ask for this option during the integration program also, not only at the end. In other words, by broadening the specter, more refugees may benefit from this system.

In our daily practice, however, co-paying the rent has its issues. For example, in the beginning the refugee has to pay the rent on its own, following later on to receive back the money from the state or from the NGOs. This is an important financial effort for them and not all of them can afford it. Another example is the way renting contracts are made.

According to data received by the Romanian National Refugee Council, 80% of the rental contracts state the minimum sum needed. The large amount of contracts registered at the National Anti-Fraud Association with the minimum rent required is another indicator of the fact that the rents that the owners declare on paper are a lot smaller than in real life, therefore helping them to pay less taxes. All these make receiving the money back from the state or from NGOs still problematic.

Closing Remarks and Recommendations

Without a doubt, the reform of legislation represents an improvement and a step forward in Romania's commitment to facilitate the integration of refugees into our society. Starting from the initiatives of public institutions, such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and having constant support from UNHCR and NGOs, the reform described and analysed above is likely to suffer new modifications.

In the near future, aspects like Romanian's members of the Schengen Area and the full implementation of the European Common Asylum System (SECA) will change the context of migration and asylum. Both policy makers, public institutions implementing the law and NGOs must prepare for a more diverse spectrum of profiles of asylum seekers and adapt accordingly if real integration is to be achieved, starting with viewing refugees as persons of resource.

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