

Socio-Economic Integration, Identity, and Belonging among Romanians in Austria

Marian Ionel Cutoi¹

Abstract

Intra-EU migration of Romanians to Austria has intensified since Romania's accession to the European Union, influencing both the socio-economic profile of the community and its relationship with the host society. The article analyses the socio-economic integration of Romanians in Austria through a mixed quantitative approach that combines official statistical data with an online survey conducted with 241 respondents from all nine administrative regions. The results point to a relatively robust level of economic integration, reflected in high employment rates, occupational diversification, and strong satisfaction with work and financial circumstances. At the same time, unemployment rates remain higher than those recorded among Austrian citizens, signalling persistent vulnerabilities. Social-educational integration appears more heterogeneous and is contingent upon German language proficiency, social networks, and experiences of discrimination. The survey data support the presence of functional bilingualism, with German predominating in professional contexts and Romanian in the family sphere, while mixed language use is frequently reported within friendship circles. The prevailing pattern is that of a mixed lifestyle and dual belonging, aligned with a transnational interpretation in which structural integration coexists with active and sustained ties to Romania.

Keywords

Migration, socio-economic integration, Romanian community, transnationalism, labour market

1. Introduction

Intra-EU migration within the EU has amplified labour mobility and consolidated relatively stable flows between origin and destination societies. In this context, Austria has experienced a steady increase in migration from Central and Eastern Europe, and the Romanian community has emerged as one of the significant components of this development, with a visible presence in demographic dynamics and the labour market. As of 1 January

¹ Independent Researcher. University of Vienna, PhD in the field of International Relations and European Studies, Babes-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca. E-mail: mcutoi@yahoo.com.

2024, Romanian citizens constituted the second largest community of foreign residents in Austria (153,427 persons), after German citizens (Statistik Austria, 2024: 25). The growth of the Romanian community in Austria reflects two distinct phases of the post-communist transition: the immediate mobility following 1989 and the intensification of flows after Romania's accession to the EU in 2007. The expansion of employment opportunities and the intra-EU mobility framework have reinforced this trend, contributing to long-term settlement and to the increased visibility of Romanians within the resident population and across diverse economic sectors.

Socio-economic integration of migrants is a complex and multidimensional process, shaped by factors such as educational attainment, professional qualifications, language competences, access to services, residential stability, and patterns of interaction with the local population. In the case of the Romanian community, economic integration is generally favourable, supported both by labour demand in specific sectors and by a high degree of professional adaptability. By contrast, social and cultural integration follows a more variable trajectory, being influenced by individual experiences, the gradual development of social relations, and the negotiation of identity positions between the origin and destination societies. A defining aspect of this process is the transnational dimension of belonging, whereby the adoption of host-society practices coexists with the preservation of language, traditions, and social networks connected to the country of origin. Within this framework, analysing the socio-economic integration of the Romanian community in Austria becomes essential for understanding the contributions of this group to the host economy and society, as well as for identifying the persistent challenges of the integration process. This article examines these dimensions through an approach that combines statistical data with sociological evidence, offering insight into the dynamics of Romanian integration in Austria and their role within the broader context of contemporary European mobility.

2. Methodology

The study employs a quantitative research design based on the triangulation of official secondary data with primary survey data, in order to analyse the socio-economic integration of Romanians in Austria through both objective indicators and subjective perceptions.

The first component consists of a descriptive analysis of statistical data provided by institutions such as Statistik Austria, Eurostat, and other relevant public databases, complemented, where appropriate, with comparative benchmarks from Romania (National Institute of Statistics, INS). The analysis draws on demographic indicators, employment and

unemployment rates, occupational structure, educational attainment, and indicators concerning language competences. Data processing focused on identifying longitudinal trends within the Romanian community and comparing its socio-economic profile with the overall Austrian population and with other immigrant groups. The analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical procedures and table-based data processing tools (Excel and Google Sheets).

The second methodological component consists of an online survey administered to members of the Romanian community in Austria, aiming to capture the subjective dimensions of integration, perceptions of economic situation, social relations, cultural belonging, experiences of discrimination, and intentions regarding long-term settlement. The questionnaire was completed by 241 participants aged between 15 and 61, drawn from all nine administrative regions. Dissemination was conducted online, through social networks and digital platforms used by the community. The sample is non-probabilistic and based on self-selection; therefore, the findings do not allow for statistical generalisation, but they provide empirically relevant indications of internal trends and variations across subgroups. The survey included 29 questions organised into five thematic blocks: socio-demographic data; economic integration and occupational satisfaction; language competences and social interactions; identity and cultural belonging; and perceptions of discrimination and quality of life. The analysis comprised descriptive distributions and comparisons between subgroups (age, gender, etc.), and the results were interpreted alongside official indicators in order to assess convergences and to contextualise the differences observed.

The research is temporally delimited to the period 2021–2024, in line with the availability of statistical data and the timing of the survey administration. Spatially, the analysis covers the entire territory of Austria. Methodological limitations include the non-probabilistic nature of the sample, the potential subjectivity of respondents' answers, and the inability to capture all dimensions of integration through a single instrument.

3. Theoretical Framework

The analysis brings together three perspectives: neoclassical migration theory, network theory, and transnationalism. These are complemented by a constructivist approach to identity.

At a general level, the concept of integration is understood in the sense proposed by Esser and Heckmann, as a multidimensional process combining structural integration (labour market, education), cultural integration (language, values), social integration (relationships and

participation), and identificational integration (Esser, 2000: 265; 2006: 7–11; Heckmann, 1997: 1). Schneider and Crul (2010: 1145) emphasise structural components as central indicators of integration, while Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx (2016: 14) distinguish between integration at the legal–political, socio-economic, and cultural–religious levels.

Neoclassical economic migration theory frames the economic dimension of integration. At the macro level, migration is driven by development gaps and the unequal distribution of income and employment opportunities across regions (Lewis, 1954: 189; Hicks, 1963: 76; Castles & Miller, 2009: 199), generating flows from low-wage, labour-surplus areas to higher-wage economies with labour shortages. At the micro level, it is conceptualised as a rational choice that weighs migration costs (financial, social, cultural) against expected long-term returns (Sjaastad, 1962: 82–83; De Haas, 2011: 9). Education, qualifications, and experience function as human capital, yielding context-dependent rewards and shaping destination choice through anticipated productivity and earnings (Schultz, 1961: 2; Becker, 1994: 245; Borjas, 1987: 27). In intra-EU mobility, lower mobility barriers further reduce costs and heighten the salience of wage differentials. This approach informs the interpretation of economic integration indicators such as employment, skills, and entrepreneurship.

Migration network (social capital) theory explains the mechanisms through which migration is sustained and structured over time, beyond individual economic motivations. Ritchey (1976: 389) and Massey et al. (1993: 450) show that, once migratory flows are initiated, networks of family, friendship, and acquaintanceship develop, linking places of origin and destination. Fawcett (1989: 678) distinguishes between family ties, institutional ties, and mass cultural ties, emphasising the role of the family and the immediate social circle as privileged channels of information and support. Stark and Jakubek (2012: 15) describe these networks as forms of informal cooperation, including financial support, which reduce costs and risks for newcomers, while Simon (2019: 3) and Blumenstock et al. (2023: 31) highlight that, once established, they tend to self-reproduce migration. Family ties, informal support, organisational participation, and language practices empirically reflect migrants' social capital.

Transnationalism theory provides the framework for analysing socio-cultural dimensions and the ties maintained with Romania. Schiller, Basch, and Blanc (1995: 48) define transnationalism as the process through which migrants build and sustain social relations that simultaneously connect the country of origin and the country of destination. Portes (1997: 16; 2016: 83) emphasises that transnational migrants lead a dual lifestyle, being integrated into the host economy and society while remaining economically, socially, and symbolically engaged

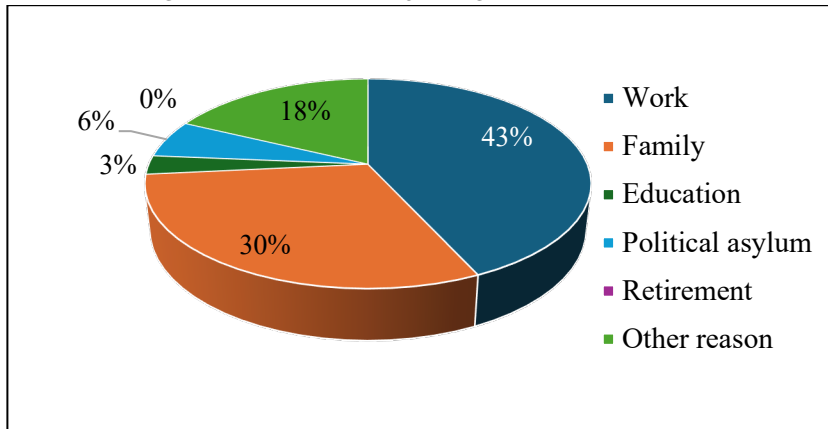
with the origin context through remittances, investments, community participation, and settlement intentions oriented towards the country of origin. In the Romanian context, Sandu (2010: 100) describes the “social worlds of Romanian migration” as networks linking communities at home with those abroad, while Ducu (2018: 68) highlights the dynamics of transnational families and the ways in which they distribute their lives across two social spaces.

A constructivist perspective on identity complements this framework by providing conceptual tools for analysing processes of belonging and hybrid identities. Wendt (1992: 397) and Checkel (1998: 327–338) argue that actors’ identities and interests are not given but are constructed through interaction with the social environment, dominant norms, and others’ expectations. In the context of European migration, Strey et al. (2018: 35) highlight that mobility decisions and orientations towards the host society are shaped not only by economic factors, but also by perceptions of lifestyle, opportunities, and values. Cormoş (2011: 48), Sandu (2010: 167), and Ducu (2018: 68) argue that migration reshapes identity by combining origin-culture references with host-society elements, especially among the second generation.

In conclusion, the integration of Romanians in Austria is approached here as a multidimensional process, shaped by the interaction between economic motivations, the role of networks and social capital in accessing resources, the maintenance of transnational ties, and the negotiation of identity and belonging within a new socio-cultural context

4. Migration Drivers

Migration motivations are relevant for interpreting integration, as they influence both labour market entry and stabilisation within the host society. Labour migration tends to accelerate economic integration, while family migration supports the consolidation of social networks and residential stability. In this sense, integration indicators are contextualised through respondents stated reasons for migration and their length of residence. The survey data show that most respondents have long-term residence in Austria, with 79% reporting more than ten years, suggesting that the findings on employment, unemployment, and occupational positioning primarily reflect the experiences of individuals with sustained exposure to the labour market and to the institutions of the host society. Accordingly, the distribution of motivations indicates, for a substantial segment of the community, a shift from initial mobility to long-term settlement.

Figure 1: *Main reason for migration to Austria*

(Source: author's own preparations based on the author's survey)

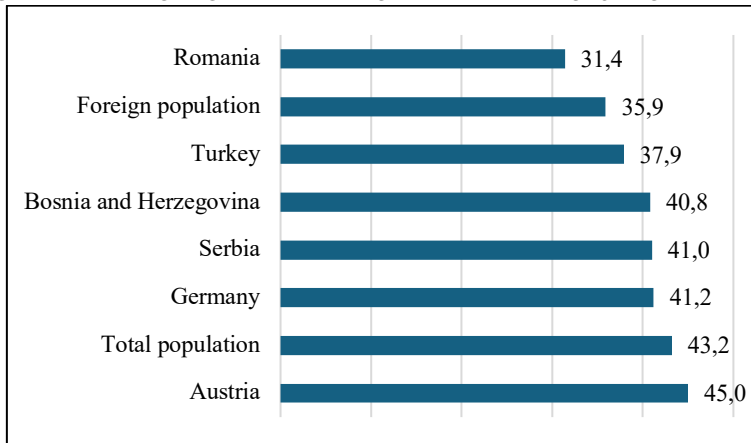
The distribution of motivations indicates a migration profile dominated by economic considerations, complemented by family-related factors. Employment is the primary reason for 43% of respondents, a finding consistent with neoclassical economic interpretations of migration, in which mobility is associated with the expansion of employment opportunities and the reduction of material vulnerabilities. Family constitutes the second most frequent motivation (30%), suggesting the importance of reunification and relational support in the decision to migrate. From the perspective of network theory, this proportion reflects the role of family ties and informal support in reducing the costs and uncertainties associated with relocation. Considered in relation to the long-term residence reported by most respondents, the family dimension can also be interpreted as a factor contributing to the community's long-term consolidation. The category "other reason" accounts for 18%, indicating the diversity of migration determinants that are not fully captured by employment- or family-related factors. Study-related migration appears only marginally (3%), suggesting that Austria is perceived primarily as a destination for work and settlement. Political motives, reported by 6%, point to the persistence of departure reasons linked to the historical contexts of Romanian migration. The "retirement" motive is not reported (0%), which supports the interpretation of a predominantly economically active community and reinforces the relevance of economic indicators in analysing integration. Overall, the combination of largely long-term residence and motivations centred on work and family provides the interpretative framework for the following sections on labour market integration and the occupational profile of the Romanian community in Austria.

5. Economic Integration

Over the past two decades, migration has consistently shaped Austria's demographic structure and labour market. In 2023, the population exceeded 9.1 million, while the number of resident foreign nationals increased from 730,261 (2002) to 1,729,820 (2023), reaching approximately 19% of the total population (Statistik Austria 2024). Within this context, the population holding Romanian citizenship has consolidated as one of the largest communities: in 2023, 147,490 Romanian citizens were registered, and as of 1 January 2024 the resident numbers rose to 153,427, placing Romanians second among foreign nationalities after Germans (Statistik Austria, 2024: 25). To maintain comparability with the available socio-economic indicators, the present analysis draws primarily on data for 2023 and examines the integration of Romanians into the Austrian labour market and the main characteristics of their economic integration.

Age structure is a relevant structural variable for economic integration, as it shapes the size and dynamics of the working-age population. In Austria, the difference between the native-born population and the foreign-origin population is visible in terms of average age: the population without a foreign background has a mean age of 45 years, whereas the foreign population has a mean age of 35.9 years (Statistik Austria, 2023: 27).

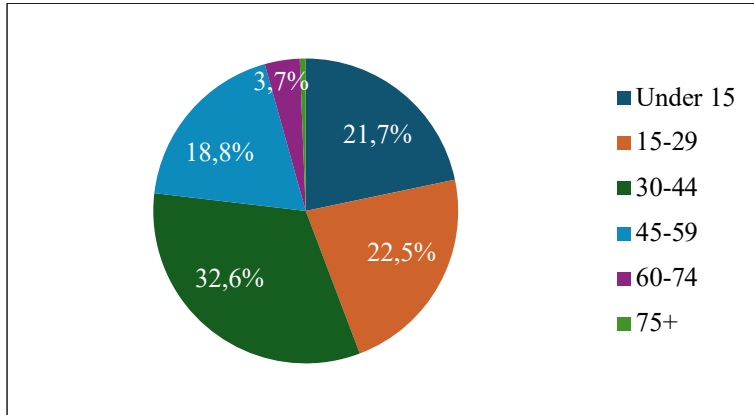
Figure 2: Average age in Austria by selected country of origin (2023)



(Source: author's own preparations based on Statistik Austria, 2023:27)

The Romanian community stands out with a mean age of 31.4 years, placing it among the youngest communities analysed. The contrast with the Austrian population, characterised by pronounced demographic ageing, is relevant for understanding the role of migration in supplementing the labour force. An age-group breakdown indicates that more than 75% of Romanians in Austria are under 44 years of age, suggesting a substantial base of individuals in age ranges with a high likelihood of labour market participation.

Figure 3: Age distribution of Romanians in Austria (2023)

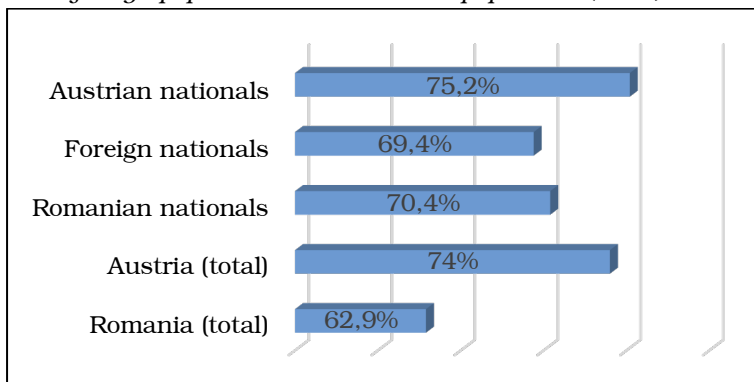


(Source: author’s own preparations based on Statistik Austria, Statistical Database)

From an administrative perspective, labour market participation typically begins at the age of 15 (Business Service Portal, Working Hours for Young People, 2023), provided that the minimum compulsory level of education has been completed, while labour market exit is linked to the statutory retirement age. In the case of the Romanian community, the age structure indicates 21.7% of individuals under 15 and 4.3% aged 60 and over, resulting in a share of 73.9% for the 15–59 age group (based on the available grouping). This demographic profile indicates a broad working-age base, helping explain the employment levels outlined in the following subsections.

To assess the economic integration of Romanians in Austria, the employment rate serves as a key indicator. Figure 4 compares Austria and Romania and benchmarks Romanians in Austria against the foreign and native-born populations, situating the community relative to the main reference groups.

Figure 4: Employment rate: Romanians in Austria compared with Romania, Austria, the foreign population and the native population (2023)

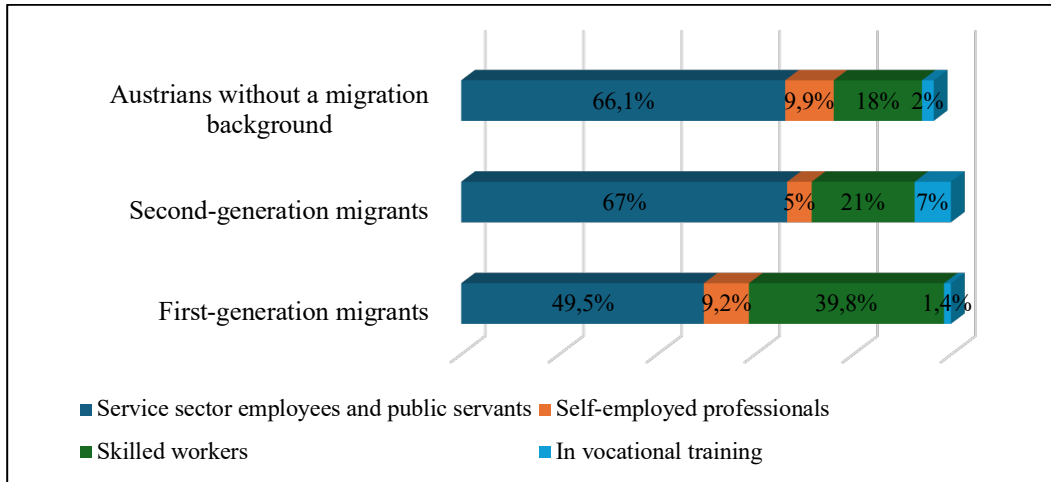


(Source: author’s own preparations based on Statistik Austria and INS, 2023)

The data show that in 2023 the employment rate was significantly higher in Austria (74.0%) than in Romania (62.9%). At the same time, Romanians in Austria recorded an employment rate of 70.4%, i.e. 7.5 percentage points above the level in Romania, indicating more favourable labour market incorporation in the Austrian context. However, relative to Austria's internal benchmarks, Romanians remain below the national average (74.0%) and the native-born rate (75.2%), suggesting a persistent gap relative to the majority population. Relative to the foreign population overall, Romanians display a slightly higher employment rate (70.4% versus 69.4%), placing the community marginally above the migrant average in terms of economic integration as measured by employment.

Beyond the overall level of employment, economic integration can also be examined through occupational structure, as the distribution across occupational categories indicates the relative positioning of different groups within the labour market hierarchy. Figure 5 compares the occupational profiles of first-generation migrants, second-generation migrants, and Austrians without a migrant background across four categories: service-sector employees and civil servants, self-employed professionals, skilled workers, and individuals in vocational training.

Figure 5: Employment domains by migrant generation: first generation, second generation, and Austrians without a migration background



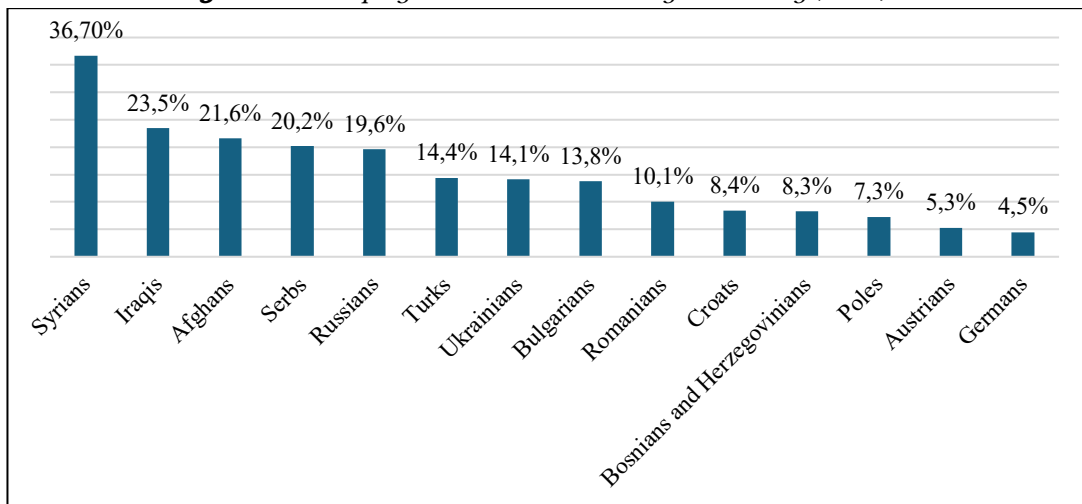
(Source: author's own preparations based on Statistik Austria, 2023: 57)

The data reveal clear intergenerational differences. First-generation migrants are more strongly concentrated in the category of skilled workers (39.8%) and have a lower share in services (49.5%), a profile that suggests predominantly operational labour market insertion. By contrast, the second generation more closely resembles the structure of the native-born population: the share employed in services and the public sector rises to

67%, comparable to that of Austrians without a migrant background (66.1%), while the proportion of skilled workers declines to 21% (compared with 18% among the native-born). A further relevant difference concerns vocational training, where the second generation displays a higher share (7%) than the native-born (2%) and the first generation (1.4%), indicating stronger integration into local educational and occupational pathways. Overall, the shift from the first to the second-generation points to a pattern of intergenerational mobility, whereby younger generations move towards occupational segments with relatively higher status and greater convergence with the profile of the native-born population.

A second key indicator of economic integration is the unemployment rate, as it captures difficulties in accessing and retaining employment, as well as group-specific vulnerabilities within the labour market. In 2023, the national unemployment rate in Austria was 6.4%, while the average among foreign citizens stood at 9.6%, and for Romanian citizens at 10.1%, indicating a gap between the native-born population and a substantial segment of the population with a migrant background. The figure below compares unemployment rates by nationality in order to highlight the positioning of Romanians relative to the main reference groups.

Figure 6: Unemployment rate in Austria by nationality (2023)



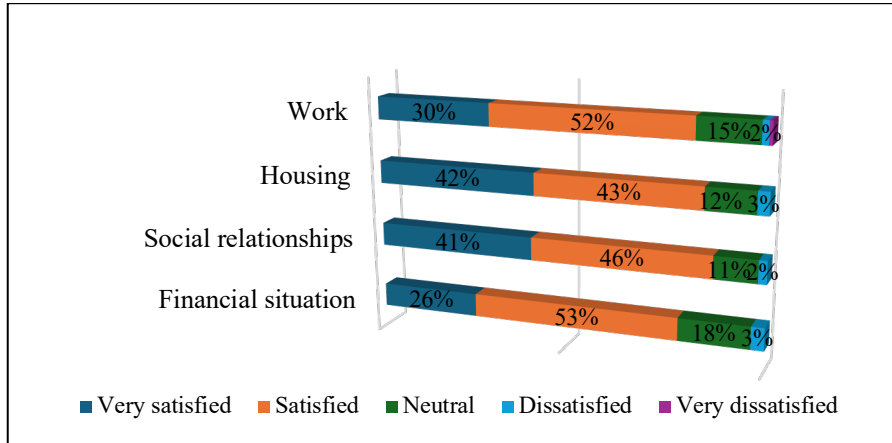
(Source: author's own preparations based on Expert Council on Integration, 2024: 44)

The data show that, apart from the German community, which records an unemployment rate even lower than that of Austrian citizens, all other nationalities analysed display values above the level observed among the Austrian population. When interpreting the comparison with the “average of foreign citizens”, it is important to note that this average is influenced by the German community, which is both the largest group of foreign nationals in Austria and the group with the lowest unemployment

rate. One explanatory factor is the linguistic advantage associated with German as a mother tongue, which reduces the costs of labour market integration and facilitates access to more stable employment. In this context, Romanian citizens register an unemployment rate of 10.1%, above the national average and slightly above the average for the foreign population, yet below the levels recorded for several other migrant communities. Compared with groups more exposed to unemployment risk, Romanians occupy a relatively more favourable position than Bulgarians (13.8%), Ukrainians (14.1%), Turks (14.4%), and Serbs (20.2%). At the same time, the magnitude of variation across nationalities, ranging from 36.7% in the case of Syrians to 4.5% in the case of Germans, suggests the existence of distinct segments of labour market integration, shaped by factors such as time of arrival, residence status, human capital, and access to networks and opportunities.

Economic integration is not expressed solely through employment and the reduction of unemployment risk, but also through active participation in the local economy as initiators of economic activities. Beyond their incorporation as a labour force, the Romanian community in Austria also emerges as an economic actor through entrepreneurial initiatives, with direct effects on employment and on the diversification of the local economy. According to a report by the Vienna Chamber of Commerce, in 2022 foreign nationals played an important role in the Austrian economy, with the number of newly established firms reaching 9,051, an estimated market value of €2.4 billion, and an impact of approximately 17,200 jobs. At the same time, 46% of these firms were founded by a foreign national, and Romanians were the best-represented group in this context (press release, 5 August 2023). This entrepreneurial dynamic points to the community's capacity to adapt and to consolidate its socio-economic position through initiatives that generate employment and strengthen economic connectivity between the origin and destination contexts.

In addition to objective indicators of economic integration (employment, unemployment, and occupational positioning), the subjective dimension is relevant for understanding long-term stabilisation. Satisfaction functions as an indicator of the intention to remain and of the continuity of the integration process, as it reflects individuals' assessments of their lived experience in the host society. In this respect, the survey examined four areas relevant to integration, with particular emphasis on two dimensions directly linked to economic integration, namely satisfaction with one's job and satisfaction with one's financial situation, complemented by assessments of the housing environment and social relations.

Figure 7: Self-reported satisfaction across key life domains

(Source: author's own preparations based on author's survey)

Regarding job satisfaction, 82% of Romanian respondents report being satisfied or very satisfied, indicating a positive assessment of their professional experience in Austria. In comparative terms, this finding stands out relative to the relevant benchmarks (Arbeitsklima Index 2024), exceeding both the national average level of job satisfaction (72.5%) and the values reported for the foreign population (67.5%) and for individuals without a migrant background (74%). The gap relative to these reference points suggests that, for Romanian citizens, professional integration is perceived as functional and associated with meaningful benefits, such as a more favourable workplace climate, opportunities for development, and positive interpersonal relations at work.

Satisfaction with one's financial situation points to the same positive orientation. In the survey conducted within the Romanian community, 79% of respondents report being satisfied or very satisfied, while the share of those dissatisfied is 3%. By comparison, in Statistik Austria benchmark data, the proportion of dissatisfied respondents is considerably higher (24.9%), indicating a gap between the sample investigated here and the population captured by official surveys. This difference may be related to compositional characteristics of the group under study and to the fact that financial satisfaction is closely associated with occupational status and labour market stability.

With respect to housing conditions, 85% of respondents report being satisfied or very satisfied, a result that converges with the general trend observed in Statistik Austria (Zahlen, Daten und Indikatoren der Wohnstatistik 2022: 40) data regarding high levels of housing satisfaction. In terms of social relations, 87% of respondents indicate high levels of satisfaction, substantially above the available national benchmark (65.3%),

which may reflect the density of intra-community ties and the capacity to build support networks in the destination context (Monika Mühlböck et al., 2022: 28). Overall, high levels of professional and financial satisfaction, supported by favourable assessments of housing and social relations, outline a profile of stabilisation within the Romanian community.

In addition to classical indicators of economic integration, such as employment and unemployment, a further dimension relevant to economic stability and to the linkage between the destination and origin contexts is that of transnational economic practices. Remittances function as a contextual indicator of the capacity to provide financial support to households outside Austria and, implicitly, of the existence of active economic ties with the country of origin.

Table 1: *Remittance Flows from Austria by country of destination (2021)*

(EUR million)	Remittances from Austria
Total remittances	5.859,57
Germany	1.356,7
Serbia	742,8
Hungary	408,31
Romania	294,01
Bosnia and Herzegovina	255,7
Croatia	252,71
Slovakia	245,05
Czechia	149,53
France	145,85
Egypt	135,5
Kosovo	119,48
Slovenia	116,45

(Source: author's elaboration based on data provided by Statista)

Data for 2021 indicate that Romania ranks among the main destinations of remittances sent from Austria, amounting to approximately €294 million and placing fourth within the set of countries presented. This positioning suggests the existence of a substantial financial flow between Austria and Romania and is consistent with the interpretation that a segment of migrants maintain economic commitments in their country of origin. From the perspective of economic integration, remittances can be understood as an expression of stabilisation, insofar as financial transfers presuppose labour market integration and a degree of income predictability.

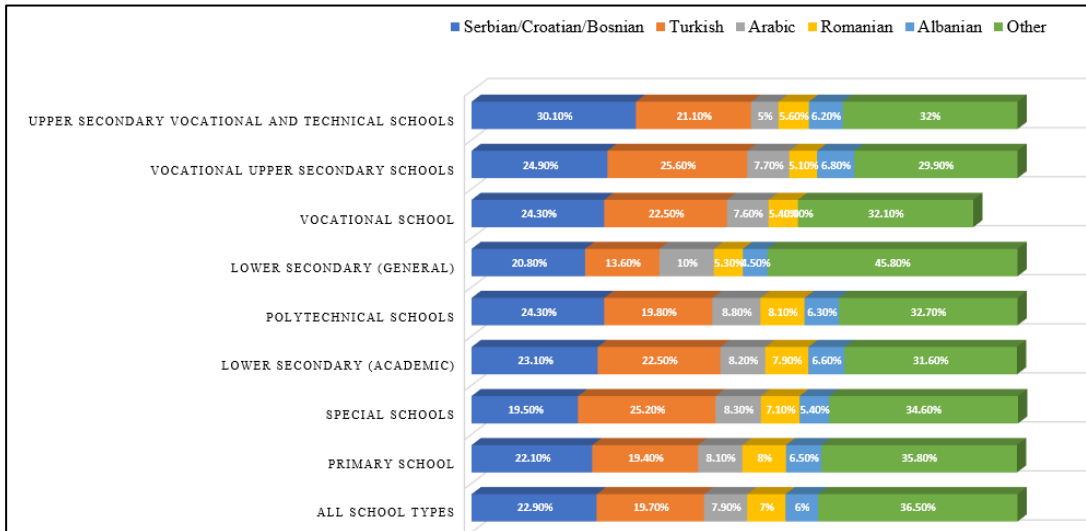
6. Social-Educational Integration

Social-educational integration complements the economic dimension of integration by capturing mechanisms of institutional socialisation and the resources that facilitate participation in the host society. While employment and economic stability indicate structural integration, this dimension more directly reflects the quality of everyday interactions, access to educational

settings, and the capacity to build social relations beyond the community of origin. In this section, the educational component is analysed through indicators relating to the school environment and language competences, while the social component is examined through patterns of language use in everyday contexts and the structure of social networks, including inter-ethnic contacts and associational participation. The indicators are organised across three complementary levels: linguistic diversity in the school environment, language competences and linguistic practices in daily life, and, respectively, inter-ethnic interaction and associational participation as forms of social integration.

A relevant benchmark for social-educational integration is the school environment, where processes of institutional socialisation, the development of language competences, and inter-ethnic contacts are concentrated. The distribution of mother tongues in schools provides an overview of cultural diversity and of the presence of the main communities within the education system.

Figure 8: Mother tongues in schools by school type



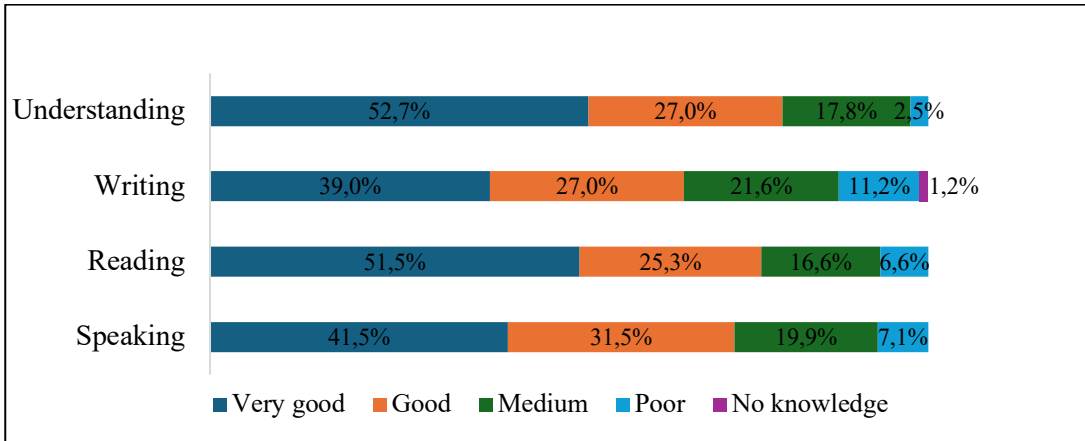
(Source: author’s own preparations based on Expert Council on Integration, 2023: 20)

The data indicate a pronounced multilingual profile within the education system. Across all school types, the most frequent mother tongues are Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian (22.9%) and Turkish (19.7%), followed by Arabic (7.9%), Romanian (7.0%), and Albanian (6.0%), while the category “other languages” accounts for 36.5%. Romanian remains within a relatively stable range across different educational pathways, at around 5.1–8.1%, with higher levels in primary school (8.0%) and in polytechnical schools (8.1%). The fact that Romanian ranks below historically established communities such as the Turkish community or those originating from the

former Yugoslav space may be explained by differences in community maturity: earlier-established groups have benefited from stronger intergenerational continuity, whereas the Romanian community, consolidated more recently, is still in a process of stabilisation and intergenerational transmission.

German language competences constitute a central mechanism of social-educational integration, as they condition access to institutions, educational performance, and the quality of social interactions. In this respect, the survey examined respondents' self-assessed German proficiency across four functional dimensions: understanding, writing, reading, and speaking. The results indicate a high level of language competences among respondents, particularly in dimensions associated with everyday communication.

Figure 9: Self-assessed German language proficiency among Romanian respondents

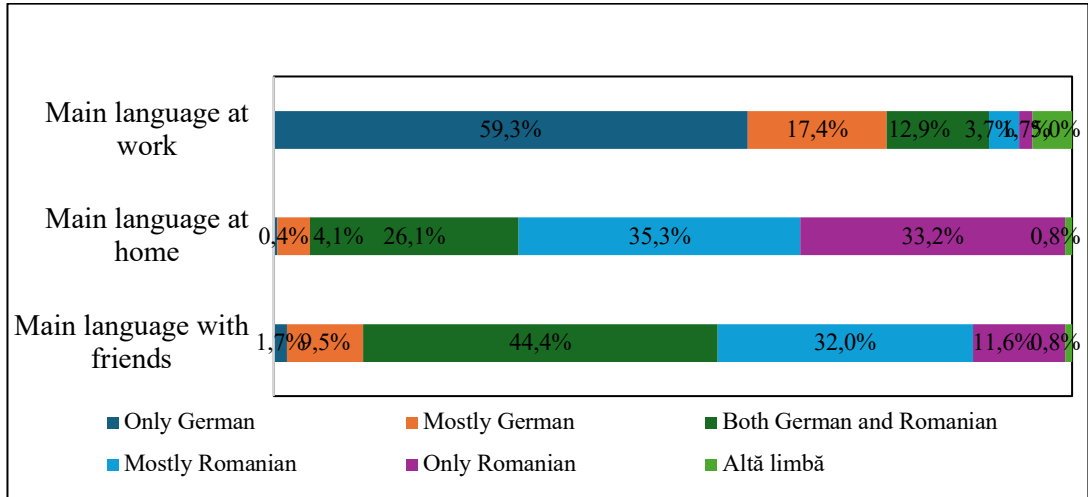


(Source: author's own preparations based on the author's survey)

Regarding understanding, 79.7% rate their skills as good or very good, while for reading the corresponding proportion is 76.8%. For speaking, 73.0% report a good or very good level. Writing remains the relatively more vulnerable dimension: 66.0% indicate a good or very good level, whereas 11.2% report a low level and 1.2% report having no writing skills. In comparative terms, where benchmark data from Statistik Austria surveys are available, the distributions in the sample under study are similar or more favourable (for example, 79.7% versus 73.7% for understanding; 66.0% versus 51.0% for writing; 76.8% versus 64.0% for reading; and 73.0% versus 60.9% for speaking). This profile supports an interpretation of functional linguistic integration within the community, while recognising that the observed differences may also be shaped by the composition of the sample.

Beyond proficiency, linguistic integration is reflected in the actual use of languages across different contexts. In order to capture this practical dimension, the survey examined the predominant language of communication at work, within the family, and among friends.

Figure 10: Main language of communication by context among Romanian respondents



(Source: author's own preparations based on the author's survey)

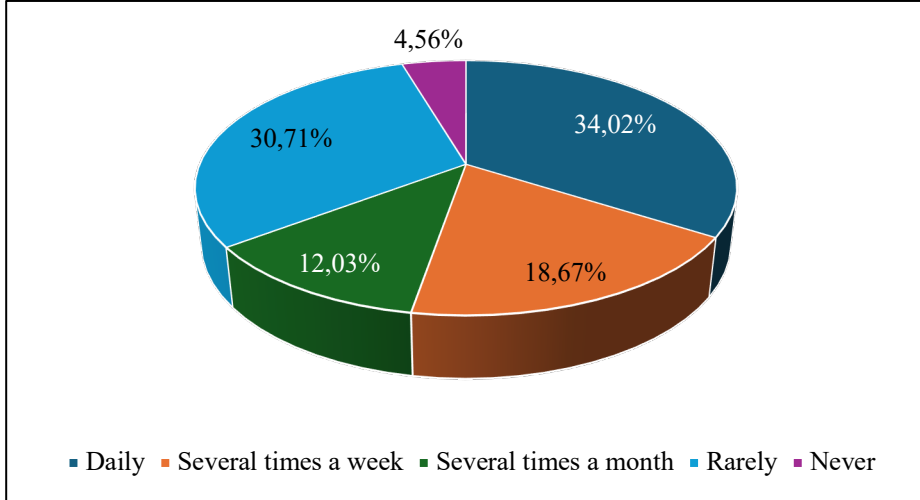
In the workplace, the use of German is dominant: 76.7% report speaking only German or mostly German, and 12.9% use both German and Romanian. Predominant or exclusive use of Romanian in the professional environment is limited (5.4%), while 5.0% report using another language, which also reflects the multilingual character of certain occupational settings. Within the family, Romanian remains predominant: 68.5% report speaking mostly or only Romanian; bilingual use accounts for 26.1%, and predominant or exclusive use of German is marginal at 4.5%. This distribution differs from Statistik Austria benchmark data, where the share reporting predominant use of German in the family is higher (23.3%), suggesting differences between the sample under study and the population captured in official surveys.

Among friends, bilingualism becomes the dominant pattern (44.4%), while 43.6% communicate mostly or only in Romanian and 11.2% mostly or only in German. Compared with Statistik Austria data, the share reporting the use of German in friendship circles is lower in the present survey (11.2% versus 32.3%), which may indicate social networks more densely anchored within the community in the sample under study, alongside the presence of a substantial sphere of bilingual sociability. Overall, the configuration points to contextual adaptation: German predominates in public and professional settings, Romanian remains central within the family, and informal

relational contexts are characterised by bilingual practices that function as a bridge between origin-based identity and integration into the host society.

To assess social integration beyond the institutional setting, the frequency of contact with people of other nationalities outside shared programmes (work, school) is a relevant indicator. This measure captures the extent to which social networks extend beyond the community of origin and develop in a multicultural register.

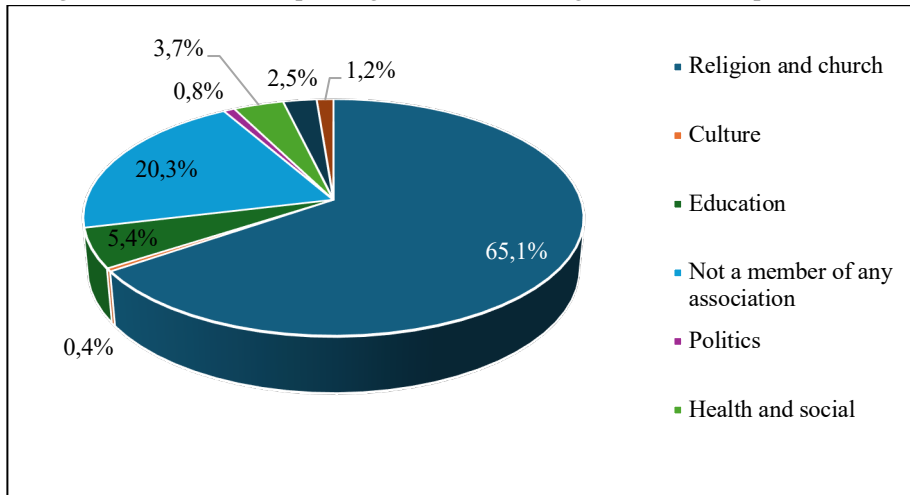
Figure 11: Frequency of contact with people of other nationalities outside shared settings



(Source: author's own preparations based on the author's survey)

The results suggest a high level of inter-ethnic interaction: 34.02% of respondents report daily contact, and 18.67% report contact several times a week. Thus, more than half of respondents indicate frequent interactions with people outside the Romanian community. A further 12.03% report interactions several times a month, while 30.71% report rarer contact. The share reporting no contact is small (4.56%), which limits the plausibility of generalised social segregation and instead points to a pattern of social integration that is compatible with the maintenance of intra-community networks while remaining open to inter-ethnic relations.

Associational participation captures a more institutionalised form of social integration, as it entails membership in stable collective settings, regular interaction, and access to resources such as information, support, and socialisation. The types of organisations in which respondents engage can also be interpreted as expressions of migrants' social capital, through which the community strengthens its internal cohesion and extends its connections within the host society.

Figure 12: Membership in organisations among Romanian respondents

(Source: author's own preparations based on the author's survey)

The distribution indicates a high level of associational participation: 79.7% of respondents report being members of an organisation, while 20.3% indicate that they do not belong to any association. The dominant form of association is religion and the church (65.1%), followed at some distance by education (5.4%), health and social organisations (3.7%), and sport (2.5%). The categories of culture (0.4%), politics (0.8%), and charitable organisations (1.2%) account for small shares. The predominance of religious organisations suggests their role as community infrastructure through functions of support and socialisation, while the presence of educational and social associations points to a diversification of participation and the potential for integration through frequent interactions beyond informal networks.

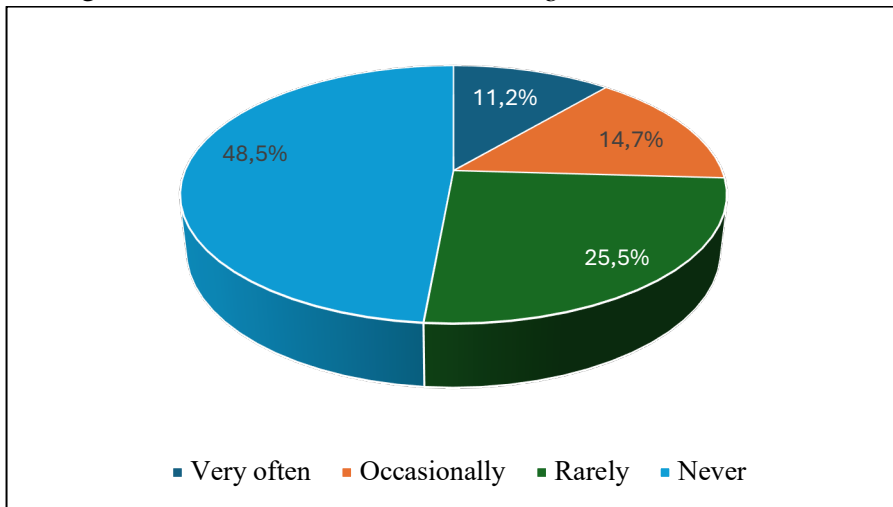
Overall, the selected indicators outline a robust pattern of social-educational integration, characterised by high levels of German language skills, the predominant use of German in professional contexts, the maintenance of Romanian within the family, and frequent bilingual practices among friends. At the relational level, the frequency of contact with people of other nationalities indicates openness towards mixed social networks, while associational participation, particularly through religious and educational organisations, suggests the presence of community social capital that can support stabilisation and the continuity of integration. At the same time, the differences observed relative to Statistik Austria benchmarks, especially about the use of German within the family and in friendship circles, point to community heterogeneity and to the fact that linguistic and social integration is configured differently depending on migration networks and living contexts.

7. Social-Cultural Integration and belonging

Social-cultural integration captures the subjective dimension of integration, namely the extent to which community members feel accepted, negotiate their identity between the society of origin and the host society, and settle in Austria over the long term. Unlike structural integration, this dimension depends more strongly on everyday interactions, social recognition, and the adoption of practices and values associated with the host society. From the perspective of the theoretical framework employed, the findings can be interpreted through the lens of transnationalism as an expression of multiple belonging, and through a constructivist perspective on identity, which conceptualises belonging as a dynamic process of negotiation shaped by experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

Perceived discrimination constitutes a central indicator of affective integration. Even under conditions of favourable economic incorporation, experiences of discrimination can erode social trust, constrain inter-ethnic relations, and indirectly influence the sense of belonging. In this respect, measuring perceived discrimination is relevant for establishing whether integration is limited to the structural functioning of socio-economic mechanisms or is accompanied by social acceptance.

Figure 13: *Perceived discrimination among Romanians in Austria*



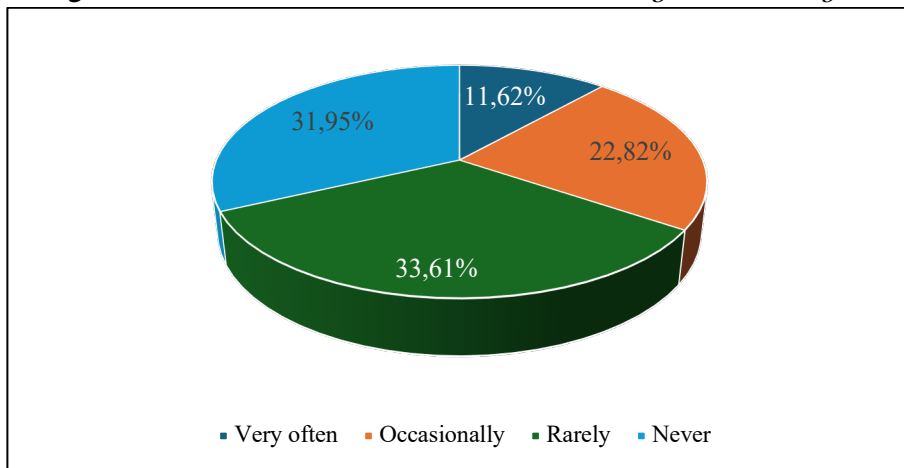
(Source: author's own preparations based on Statistik Austria, 2023: 101)

Interpretation of the data indicates that most respondents of Romanian origin report not experiencing discrimination at all or only very rarely, suggesting a relatively favourable social environment. Nevertheless, there is a segment that reports frequent experiences, with 11.2% stating that they felt discriminated against “very often”. Although numerically small, this group is sociologically significant, as repeated exposure to such situations

can substantially affect trust in institutions and may encourage an orientation towards predominantly intra-community relations.

To assess whether this tendency is also reflected in the community-based data, a comparable indicator was included in the present survey. Here, 65.56% of respondents report that they have never or very rarely felt discriminated against, and 22.82% indicate occasional experiences. Compared with Statistik Austria, the “never/very rarely” category is lower in the present survey (65.56% versus 74%), while the “occasional” category is higher (22.82% versus 14.7%), whereas the segment reporting frequent experiences remains similar (approximately 11% in both sources). These results suggest that the two datasets converge in identifying a relatively small group exposed to recurring discrimination, while the main difference concerns the prevalence of occasional experiences. Overall, the pattern points to broadly comparable distributions, with the strongest alignment occurring at the level of frequent experiences.

Figure 14: Perceived discrimination due to ethnic origin (own survey)



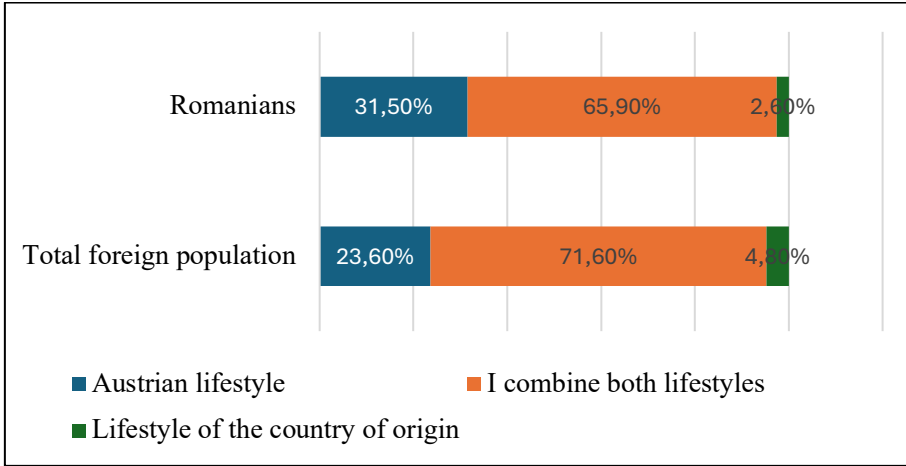
(Source: author's own preparations based on the author's survey)

These differences may reflect both sample characteristics (age structure, occupational profile, and exposure to educational and institutional settings) and the fact that self-reported discrimination is sensitive to norms, expectations, and everyday interaction contexts. Overall, the convergence between the two sources supports the interpretation that discrimination is unlikely to constitute a systemic barrier for the Romanian community.

Another indicator of socio-cultural integration is the lifestyle individuals adopt, referring to the way they combine cultural elements from their country of origin with those of the host society. In the context of mobility within the EU, cultural integration does not usually mean

completely abandoning one’s cultural background. Rather, it tends to involve a process of hybridisation, in which individuals selectively blend practices, norms, and personal preferences from both environments.

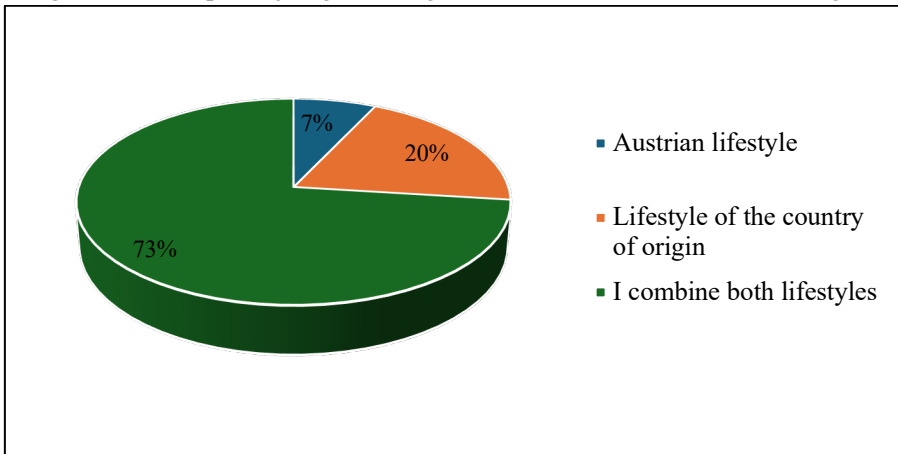
Figure 15: Adopted lifestyle among Romanians in Austria



(Source: author’s own preparations based on Statistik Austria, 2023: 105)

Institutional data indicate that the dominant pattern is the combination of the two lifestyles, while the proportion of those who report exclusively the lifestyle of the country of origin is very small (2.6%). At the same time, approximately one third report a clearer orientation towards the lifestyle of the host society, suggesting significant cultural adaptation that is compatible with the structural integration described in the preceding chapters. The present survey likewise identifies the “mixed lifestyle” as the majority pattern, albeit with a different distribution, which is informative for interpreting identity-related dynamics.

Figure 16: Adopted lifestyle among Romanians in Austria (own survey)

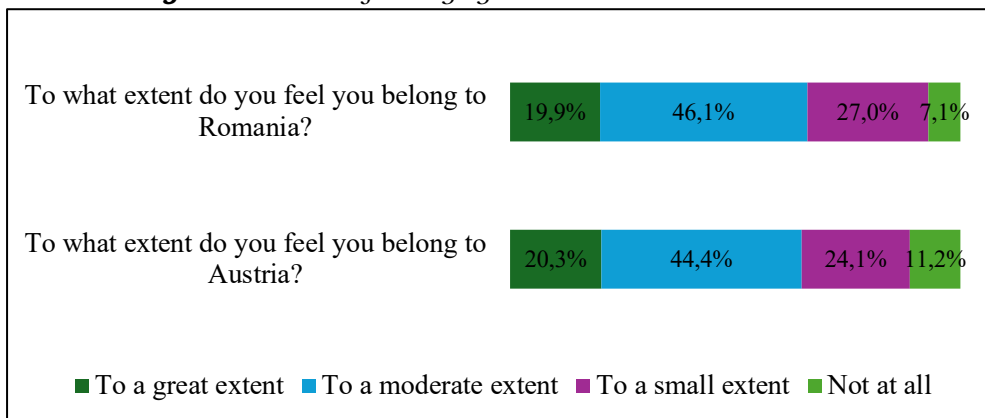


(Source: author’s own preparations based on the author’s survey)

In the sample under study, 73% report a combined lifestyle, yet the share indicating a predominantly Romanian lifestyle is higher (20%) and the share indicating a predominantly Austrian lifestyle is lower (7%) than in the Statistik Austria survey (31.5% Austrian lifestyle and 2.6% Romanian lifestyle). This difference suggests that, within the community, cultural integration tends to occur through coexistence and selective adoption rather than through a complete substitution of values. To capture generational differences more precisely, a separate analysis was conducted for the second generation (individuals born in Austria). Within this sub-sample, the mixed lifestyle remains dominant (71%), but orientation towards an Austrian lifestyle increases to 14% (compared with 7% in the overall sample), while a predominantly Romanian lifestyle declines to 14% (compared with 20%). This profile indicates a more pronounced orientation towards host-society values among those born in Austria, alongside the maintenance of dual cultural belonging. This configuration is compatible with transnationalism: origin-related practices can coexist with integration and may support community cohesion.

Belonging is the indicator that most directly captures integration at the level of identification. It does not automatically overlap with citizenship or with economic integration: migrants may enjoy rights and institutional stability without developing a strong affective identification with the host society, particularly when they maintain active networks and identity reference points in the country of origin. To capture this dimension, the present survey analysed separately the sense of belonging to Romania and to Austria, to identify possible configurations of multiple belonging and differences between identification with the country of origin and with the host society. The results indicate a structure of belonging that is compatible with a transnational interpretation. Regarding Romania, the largest category reports feeling a sense of belonging to some extent, and 19.9% consider themselves to belong fully, while 7.1% state that they do not feel any sense of belonging.

Figure 17: *Sense of belonging to Romania and Austria*

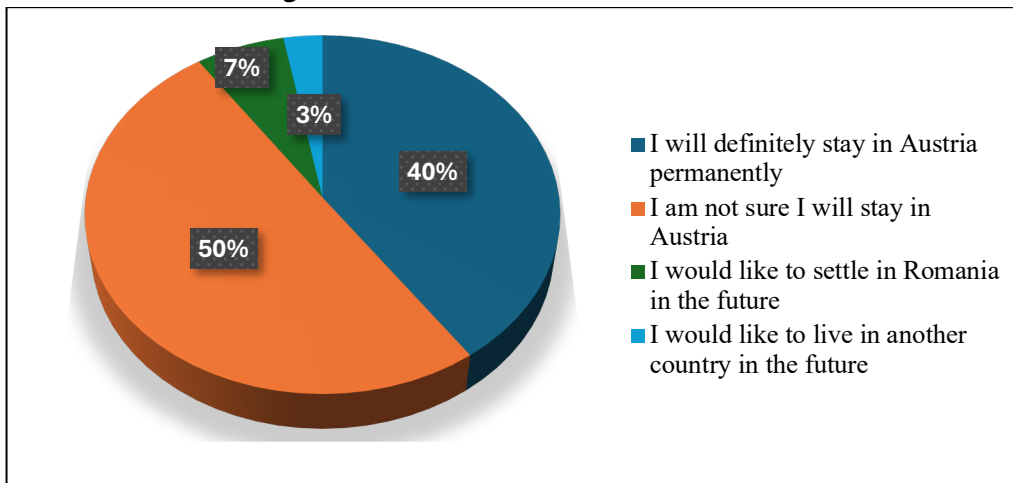


(Source: author's own preparations based on the author's survey)

Compared with the Statistik Austria survey, the share reporting strong belonging to Romania is lower in the present survey (19.9% versus 45.4%), while the proportion of weak attachment is higher. These differences may be explained by the characteristics of the sample under study, including age structure, length of residence, and educational and occupational profile, as well as by the fact that community-level and population-level measurements often capture populations with different degrees of stabilisation and institutional exposure. Regarding Austria, the present survey likewise suggests a lower intensity of belonging than that indicated by the Statistik Austria survey, where 73.5% report feeling a sense of belonging. This indicates that the identity-related dimension of integration is more variable and less uniform than structural integration, and that the distribution of responses points more towards gradual or multiple forms of belonging rather than exclusive identification with a single context.

Within a bidirectional perspective on integration, the sense of belonging and perceptions of social acceptance shape settlement plans by influencing intentions to remain, investments in integration, and the transition from residence to long-term settlement. For this reason, intentions to return or to stay constitute an indicator of stabilisation.

Figure 18: Return intentions to Romania



(Source: author's own preparations based on the author's survey)

The results indicate a clear orientation towards stabilisation in Austria: 40% report an intention to remain permanently, while only 7% express a firm intention to return to Romania. At the same time, the high share of undecided respondents suggests that, for a substantial segment of the community, settlement remains an open option and is contingent upon family trajectories, occupational opportunities, and the institutional context. In the analysis conducted, this openness is more frequent among the first

generation, whereas the second generation is more strongly oriented towards settlement, which supports the link between social integration in Austria and the consolidation of long-term stabilisation.

Overall, socio-cultural integration emerges as a favourable yet differentiated process. For most respondents, perceived discrimination is low, and the mixed lifestyle remains dominant, consistent with dual belonging. At the same time, settlement intentions indicate an orientation towards staying, alongside a substantial undecided segment that is characteristic of intra-EU mobility.

8. Conclusions

The results of the analysis indicate a generally solid level of structural integration of the Romanian community in Austria, reflected in high employment rates, occupational diversification, and positive subjective assessments of work and financial situation. At the same time, the persistence of unemployment rates above those of the native-born population suggests the presence of group-specific vulnerabilities in the labour market, consistent with mechanisms such as occupational segmentation, language barriers, or unequal recognition of qualifications.

On the social-educational dimension, the data indicate functional linguistic integration and a contextual adaptation of communication practices: German predominates in professional and institutional settings, while Romanian remains central within the family, and bilingual practices frequently emerge within friendship circles. Inter-ethnic contacts and associational participation suggest a relatively robust level of social integration, albeit with internal variation shaped by networks, language skills, and individual experiences.

At the socio-cultural level, the predominance of a mixed lifestyle, the structure of dual belonging, and the maintenance of ties with Romania support a transnational interpretation of integration: adaptation to the host society coexists with identity reference points and social practices associated with the origin context. The generational analysis shows that individuals born in Austria tend to identify more strongly with the cultural practices and norms of the host society, while still maintaining a dual sense of belonging rather than shifting to a single cultural identity. Settlement intentions suggest a predominantly stay-oriented trajectory, alongside the presence of an undecided segment that is characteristic of intra-EU mobility and of decisions shaped by family circumstances and occupational opportunities.

The findings are consistent with the theoretical framework employed and allow for an integrated reading of integration as a multidimensional process. On the economic dimension, high employment levels and

predominantly work-related motivations support the expectations of neoclassical theory, according to which intra-EU mobility is driven by differences in opportunities and the returns to human capital. The share of family migration and the role of community networks, reflected in intra-community sociability and associational participation, are compatible with network and social capital theory, which explains stabilisation and risk reduction through informal support. At the same time, the predominance of a mixed lifestyle, remittances, bilingualism, and dual belonging support a transnational perspective in which structural integration can coexist with active ties to the society of origin. The generational differences observed, particularly the stronger orientation towards host-society values among those born in Austria, are consistent with a constructivist approach that treats identity as an outcome of socialisation and of experiences of inclusion or exclusion.

In terms of its contribution, the article combines official statistical indicators with primary data collected within the community and explicitly distinguishes between structural integration and transnational belonging, while also highlighting intergenerational differences that are relevant to the dynamics of settlement. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations, in particular the non-probabilistic nature of the sample, the potential effects of self-selection, and the sensitivity of responses to subjective assessments. Future research could strengthen these conclusions through probabilistic sampling, longitudinal analyses, and systematic comparisons with other intra-EU communities, in order to identify more precisely the institutional and social mechanisms of integration.

Bibliography

- Bakewell, Oliver (2014), *Relaunching migration systems*, in *Migration Studies*, Vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 300–318.
- Becker, Gary S. (1994), *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Blumenstock, Joshua, Guanghua Chi and Xu Tan (2023), *Migration and the Value of Social Networks*, in *The Review of Economic Studies*.
- Borjas, George J. (1987), *Self-Selection and the Earnings of Immigrants*, Working Paper No. 2248, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge.
- Castles, Stephen and Mark J. Miller (2009), *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

- Chamber of Labour Austria (Arbeiterkammer Oberösterreich), “Arbeitsklima Index Database.” Accessed February 24, 2024. https://ooe.arbeiterkammer.at/beratung/arbeitundgesundheit/arbeitsklima/Arbeitsklima_Index_Datenbank_-_jetzt_neu.html
- Checkel, Jeffrey T. (1998), *The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory*, in *World Politics*, Vol. 50, no. 2, 324–348.
- Cormoș, Viorica-Cristina (2011), *Migrație și Identitate*, Suceava, Editura Universității „Ștefan cel Mare” din Suceava.
- De Haas, Hein (2011), *The determinants of international migration*, Working Paper 32, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford.
- Ducu, Viorela (2018), *Romanian Transnational Families*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Esser, Hartmut (2000), *Soziologie. Spezielle Grundlagen: Die Konstruktion der Gesellschaft*, Band 2, Frankfurt am Main.
- Esser, Hartmut (2006), *Migration, Sprache und Integration*, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, Arbeitspapiere, Berlin.
- European Commission (2011), *European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals*, COM(2011) 455 final, Bruxelles.
- European Commission (2016), *European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals*, Bruxelles.
- Expert Council on Integration (2023), *Integration Report 2023*, accessed November 20, 2024, <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/service/publikationen-aus-dem-bundeskanzleramt/publikationen-zu-integration/integrationsberichte.html>.
- Expert Council on Integration (2024), *Integration Report 2024*, accessed September, 2025, <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/service/publikationen-aus-dem-bundeskanzleramt/publikationen-zu-integration/integrationsberichte.html>.
- Fawcett, James T. (1989), *Networks, linkages, and migration systems*, in *International Migration Review*, Vol. 23, pp. 671–680.
- Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection Austria (2023) “Old-Age Pension (Alterspension) – Easy-to-Read Information.” Accessed October 20, 2023. <https://www.sozialministerium.at/Services/Leichter-Lesen/Soziales/Pensionsarten/Alterspension.html>.
- Garcés-Mascareñas, Blanca and Rinus Penninx (2016), *Integration Processes and Policies in Europe. Contexts, Levels and Actors*, IMISCOE Research Series, Cham, Springer Nature.
- Heckmann, Friedrich (1997), *Integration und Integrationspolitik in Deutschland*, EFMS Paper Nr. 11, Roma.

- Hicks, John R. (1963), *The Theory of Wages*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Institutul Național de Statistică (2023) "Press Release No. 154 / June 16, 2023." Bucharest: INS.
- Lewis, W. Arthur (1954), *Economic development with unlimited supplies of labor*, in The Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies, Vol. 22.
- Mabogunje, Akin L. (1970), Systems Approach to a Theory of Rural-Urban Migration, in Geographical Analysis, Vol. 2.
- Massey, Douglas S. et al. (1993), Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal, in Population and Development Review, Vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 431–466.
- Monika Mühlböck et al. (2022), *So geht's uns heute: Die sozialen Folgen der Corona-Krise*, Federal Ministry for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection; Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS).
- Portes, Alejandro (1997), *Globalization from Below: The Rise of Transnational Communities*, Princeton University.
- Portes, Alejandro (2016), *International Migration and National Development. From Orthodox Equilibrium to Transnationalism*, in Sociology of Development, Vol. 2, pp. 73–92.
- Ritchey, Neal P. (1976), *Explanations of Migration*, in Annual Review of Sociology, Vol. 2, pp. 363–404.
- Sandu, Dumitru (2010), *Lumile sociale ale migrației românești în străinătate*, Iași, Polirom.
- Schiller, Nina Glick, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1995), *From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration*, in Anthropological Quarterly, Vol. 68, no. 1, pp. 48–63.
- Schneider, Jens and Maurice Crul (2010), *New insights into assimilation and integration theory: Introduction to the special issue*, in Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol. 33, p. 1144.
- Schultz, T.W. (1961), *Investment in Human Capital*, in The American Economic Review, Vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 1–17.
- Simon, Miranda (2019), *Path Dependency and Adaptation: The Effects of Policy on Migration Systems*, in Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation, Vol. 22, no. 2.
- Sjaastad, Larry A. (1962), *The Costs and Returns of Human Migration*, in Journal of Political Economy, Vol. 70, S80–S93.
- Stark, Oded and Marcin M. Jakubek (2012), *Migration networks as a response to financial constraints: Onset and endogenous dynamics*, in ZEF-Discussion Papers on Development Policy, No. 168, Bonn.
- Statista, "Value of Remittances Sent from and to Austria, by Partner Country or Territory Worldwide, 2021." Accessed December 25, 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1411915/bilateral-remittances-austria/>.

- Statistik Austria (2022) *Wohnen. Zahlen, Daten und Indikatoren der Wohnstatistik*.
- Statistik Austria (2023) “Employed Persons: Characteristics (Erwerbstätige – Merkmale).” Accessed October 30, 2023. <https://www.statistik.at/statistiken/arbeitsmarkt/erwerbstaetigkeit/erwerbstaetige-merkmale>.
- Statistik Austria (2024) “Population by Citizenship and Country of Birth (Bevölkerung nach Staatsangehörigkeit/Geburtsland).” Accessed December 26, 2024. <https://www.statistik.at/statistiken/bevoelkerung-und-soziales/bevoelkerung/bevoelkerungsstand/bevoelkerung-nach-staatsangehoerigkeit/-geburtsland>.
- Statistik Austria (2024) *Migration & Integration: Zahlen, Daten, Indikatoren 2024* (Statistisches Jahrbuch).
- Strey, Anina, Veronika Fajth, Talitha Mortimer Dubow and Melissa Siegel (2018), *Determinants of Migration Flows within the EU*, Maastricht University, Maastricht.
- USP—Business Service Portal (Austria), “Special Regulations: Working Hours for Young People (Sonderregelungen – Arbeitszeit für Jugendliche).” Accessed October 20, 2023. <https://www.usp.gv.at/mitarbeiter-und-gesundheit/urlaub-und-arbeitszeit/weitere-informationen-zu-urlaub-und-arbeitszeit/sonderregelungen-arbeitszeit-jugendliche.html>.
- Vienna Chamber of Commerce (2023) “Business Start-Ups Remain at a High Level (Unternehmensgründungen auf hohem Niveau)” (press release, August 5, 2023). Accessed December 26, 2023. <https://www.wko.at/wien/news/unternehmensgruendungen-auf-hohem-niveau>.
- Wendt, Alexander (1992), *Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics*, in *International Organization*, Vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 391–425.