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## **TWO FACETS OF RETURNEES' ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN ROMANIA: JUXTAPOSING BUSINESS OWNERS AND SELF-EMPLOYED RETURN MIGRANTS WITHIN A MULTI-METHOD RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

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*This paper contributes to the growing literature on the diversity of return migration by analysing the different types of small-scale entrepreneurship among returnees. Data from an original survey conducted among Romanian returnees and in-depth interviews with returnees in entrepreneurship are combined to reveal distinct profiles of returnee entrepreneurs and to illustrate their specific ways of thinking about entrepreneurship and migration. Currently, Romania is one of the most fertile settings to research intra-European return migration due to its important flows of temporary international migrants. The paper highlights that there are major differences between business owners and self-employed returnees in terms of entrepreneurship. Returnees who are business owners are those who benefited significantly more from migration than non-entrepreneur returnees—in terms of economic savings, human capital accumulation, and enhancement of their stocks of social capital; while returnees in self-employment reveal no significant differences for these migration outcomes compared to non-entrepreneur returnees. The distinction between the two groups of entrepreneurs has certain implications for origin states' policies oriented towards stimulating return migration through programmes oriented towards returnees' entrepreneurship.*

**Keywords:** *Return Migration; Intra-European Migration; Entrepreneurship; Self-Employment; Multi-Method Social Research.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

New intra-European mobilities (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019; King 2012; Recchi et al. 2019) challenge the traditional approach to understanding the relationship between return migration and entrepreneurship. Certainly, this is part of a paradigmatic transformation of researching mobility and its multidimensional impacts on a variety of scales (King 2012; Sheller and Urry 2006), as well as a factual validation of the tendency of Eastern Europeans to be 'settled in mobility'

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(Morokvasic 2004). Simultaneously, exploring interlinkages between the current expressions of intra-European return migration and the entrepreneurship scholarship creates excellent premises for epistemological inputs for understanding certain roles played by ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ in life course pathways altered by migration (Vlase and Voicu 2018). Against this background, our paper addresses the diversity in returnee entrepreneurship in Romania, which is one of the main countries of origin and return for the new types of East–West intra-European migrants.

Most classical research on returnees’ entrepreneurship has emphasised the important economic potential of their investments in the context of return (McCormick and Wahba 2001; Diatta and Mbow 1999; Batista, McIndoe Calder, and Vicente 2017) and this has fascinated stake-holders and policymakers in various origin countries (Sinatti 2015; Croitoru 2021b). Gradually, this interest in returnees’ entrepreneurship also entered into the policy agenda of the Eastern European (EE) countries, but their policies were marked by lack of consistency over time (Boros and Hegedűs 2016; Hawes 2019), as well as an insufficient understanding of the heterogeneity of the return migrant population and the uncertainty embedded in contemporary return projects (Apsite-Berina, Manea, and Berzins 2020; White 2014). Therefore, it is highly relevant to analyse the profiles of returnee entrepreneurs and to understand how a returnee’s individual characteristics and the features of the migratory experience influence a migrant’s probability of becoming an entrepreneur upon return.

The present study embraces and contrasts the different types of returnee entrepreneurs by examining their form of employment after returning to their home country (business ownership versus self-employment). An original data set was created using a multi-method research design (Seawright 2016). This included a social survey for collecting data from a relatively large sample of Romanian returnees and a series of in-depth follow-up interviews conducted with a sub-sample of return migrants in entrepreneurship.

After outlining the relevant literature for studying returnees’ entrepreneurship, we provide a brief overview of Romanian migration. The next section presents the methodology used to collect data and explains the selected methods for quantitative and qualitative data. The core of the analysis and the main results are presented in a section organised for contrasting the specific profiles of return migrants in entrepreneurship. The conclusions argue in favour of greater emphasis to be placed on heterogeneity in the study of returnee entrepreneurship and discuss the article’s contribution to extant scholarship.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The contemporary East–West intra-European migration system (Favell 2008) is embedded with high circularity and fluid patterns of migration (Engbersen and

Snel 2013; Sandu, Toth, and Tudor 2018; White 2014). There are multiple factors which contributed to the development of this new migration system and the associated new types of mobility: economic development gaps between the EE countries and the 'old' members of the European Union (EU) which are often discussed under the 'push-pull' conceptual umbrella; successive political decisions for shifting of the EU's borders to the East which also included rights to free mobility for EE citizens; a general decrease in the economic and psychological costs of migration due to the development of the transport infrastructure and advancement of the means of communication; the development of transnational social networks and social spaces; the socio-cultural interest of post-communist generations in Western lifestyle, etc. All these aspects reconfigured the opportunity structure for mobility, and new categories of people were able to manifest agency through international migration. The core of this system is definitely linked to economic migration and labour reasons (Black et al. 2010), but new categories of motivations for migrating developed mainly in relation to educational goals or lifestyle preferences (Recchi et al. 2019; Sandu, Toth, and Tudor 2018). In light of the aforementioned aspects, migration research that was focused on intra-European migration began acknowledging two-way migration streams and the existence of an important segment of EE population which lived abroad for a period of time and returned to origin thereafter (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019; Apsite-Berina, Manea, and Berzins 2020; Vlase and Croitoru 2019). However, there is insufficient empirical knowledge for understanding returnees' entrepreneurship in this new context and for rethinking specific inputs of the migratory experiences for evaluating individuals' occupational trajectories.

Returnees' employment decisions and propensity towards entrepreneurship are dependent on the specific types of resources that they accumulated during their stay abroad (e.g. Batista, McIndoe Calder, and Vicente 2017; Dustmann and Kirchkamp 2002; Martin and Radu 2012). Prior research has indicated the importance of economic gains and human capital accumulation as well as changes in the stocks of social capital in this context. We argue that examining the outcomes of an individual's migratory experiences facilitates an incursion into the heterogeneity of the return population and frames comparisons between certain profiles of entrepreneurs. Simultaneously, return migration is not always the final point of the migratory experience, as returnees may have an augmented capacity to re-migrate (White 2014).

We mentioned above that strategies of international mobility among EE citizens are often dominated by economic goals, despite the presence of other motivations since these countries joined the EU. Extant literature has documented the economic dimension of these flows in terms of motivations, savings, remittances, and investment practices among EE migrants (Black et al. 2010; Coniglio and Brzozowski 2016; Sandu 2016). The use of savings and/or money and goods remitted home for enterprise purposes upon return was a central topic in

classical studies of returnees' entrepreneurship (Dustmann and Kirchkamp 2002; McCormick and Wahba 2001) and is a salient topic in debates on the benefits of return migration (Sinatti 2015).

Individuals' stocks of human capital are essential factors for analysing employment opportunities and employment decisions (Jayawarna, Rouse, and Macpherson 2014); in this context, a specific discussion can be developed for return migrants. In order to understand returnees' propensity towards entrepreneurship, it is important to acknowledge the importance of their previous experiences in entrepreneurship as a valuable form of human capital. On the one hand, these are formative experiences which equip individuals with a set of specific abilities and increase their propensity towards entrepreneurship (Croitoru 2020; Dustmann and Kirchkamp 2002; Hamdouch and Wahba 2015). On the other hand, entrepreneurship research emphasises certain aspects of an individual's personality, which increase the likelihood of former entrepreneurs to re-assume this employment later in their life (e.g. habitual entrepreneurship – Ucbasaran, Alsos, and Westhead 2008). However, the migratory experience of an individual can contribute to the improvement of the individual's skills and knowledge through formal and informal mechanisms. Williams (2007) contributed to the conceptualization of migrants' tacit knowledge transactions and Hagan and Wassink (2016: 531) provided empirical evidence that tacit skills learned abroad 'facilitated a unique mobility pathway upon return through business formation'. While an individual's level of education frames their learning experiences abroad, migrants' capacity to enhance their human capital and to use it after return was documented for both high-skilled returnees (Klagge and Klein-Hitpaß 2010) as well as for low-skilled returnees (Dun, Klocker, and Head 2018). Within the less-selective new types of intra-European migration, not much attention has been paid to the importance of accumulating human capital abroad in the process of enterprising upon return. Lastly, returnees' use of human capital in their own business or in self-employment can create higher degree of flexibility in terms of employment; this offers the premises to re-enter into a migratory pathway if better opportunities are found abroad.

Further, the new types of intra-European mobilities among EEs register higher levels of transnationalism during their stay abroad (Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer 2013; Recchi et al. 2019) as well as in the case of return (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019; Apsite-Berina, Manea, and Berzins 2020). The advance of the technology is one of the main pieces from the puzzle which facilitate individuals' connectedness at origin (Nedelcu 2012; Recchi et al. 2019), even if qualitative evidence seriously challenged the strength of the cross-border friendship relationships (Morosanu 2013). The return process can be smoothed by connectivity back home (Cassarino 2014; for research focused on entrepreneurs – Sinatti 2019), but this implies disregarding the social aspects related to the destination context. Frequent communication when abroad is an important factor

for various transnational activities during the stay abroad (Recchi et al. 2019; Sandu 2016); however, numerous migrants also manage to maintain contacts in the destination country upon return and this can contribute to their reintegration strategies or to the initiation of re-migration projects (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019). Both dimensions of social capital frame the return process and influence individuals' decisions of employment upon return.

The concept of entrepreneurs has a long-standing tradition within the social sciences. In our study, this is used in a rather broad fashion and includes all return migrants who decide to undertake a risk-taking activity either in business ownership or in self-employment (Parker 2009; Berglann et al. 2009). Moreover, acknowledging the distinction between business ownership and self-employment (Østergaard 2019), we explore the diversity among returnee entrepreneurs and test the effects of migration on both categories of entrepreneurs. Simultaneously, the exclusion of self-employment limits the study of returnee entrepreneurship in Romania because this seems to be the favoured choice of employment among returnees in certain business niches and embeds important risks and investments in tools or assets (Cosciug 2019; Vlase and Croitoru 2019). While individuals' preferences for one of these two forms of entrepreneurship is highly dependent on personality traits (Østergaard 2019), research on return migration has also indicated the importance of returnees' various resources (including various forms of economic and social capital) and their preparedness for return (Cassarino 2014). We complete the analytical model with the variables related to the importance of migration in terms of human capital accumulation and test this combination of the new types of intra-European EE return migrants.

In a similar fashion to other post-communist EE countries, Romania became part of the prevalence of the neo-liberal rhetoric (Chelcea and Druță 2016) within which migration and entrepreneurship are perceived as valuable pathways towards an individual's success. Money earned from migration also has a symbolic value which emphasizes individuals' agency and their capacity to capitalize on opportunities. Recent qualitative research among Romanian returnees revealed that lucrative investments and small-scale entrepreneurship are perceived by self-employed returnees and entrepreneurs as a modality to strengthen self-assessed improvements of their own social status through migration (Cosciug 2019; Vlase and Croitoru 2019). In this context, entrepreneurship can also be an attempt to gain an employment status which is highly appreciated among Romanians [according to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2016), over 75% of Romanians evaluated that 'entrepreneurs have high social status' and approximately 72% believe that 'entrepreneurship is a good career choice' (Kelley, Singer, and Herrington 2016)].

Last but not least, scholarship resulted from the study of work and employment exposed multiple mechanisms which reinforce entrepreneurship masculinization (Ogbor 2000). This can be corroborated with studies on return migrants which found a lower likelihood of women becoming entrepreneurs after

returning (McCormick and Wahba 2001; Martin and Radu 2012) as well as qualitative fieldwork which portrayed entrepreneurship as a valued form of masculinity among returnees (for Romanian return migrants – Vlase 2018). At the same time, age has also been introduced as a control variable in multiple studies (Martin and Radu 2012; Piracha and Vadean 2010) and the distinct prolife of return migration linked to retirement has also been emphasized (Gualda and Escriva 2014). Based on these arguments, we decided to introduce the individual's gender and age at return into the analytical models proposed in our study and to restrict to research on a sample of adult returnees who are not retired.

### ROMANIA – EMIGRATION AND RETURN MIGRATION

The Romanian migration phenomenon provides excellent premises for studying diversity in migration. During the last two decades, this country has witnessed *en masse* emigration towards western EU countries and its citizens constitute one of the largest intra-EU immigrant groups (Eurostat, 2020). Standard economic and social factors have contributed to the development of the country's migration flows, and even more so since the country became an EU state (Black et al. 2010; Recchi et al. 2019). Correspondingly, a significant portion of the population also lived abroad for a while and returned to the country due to the increased circularity and temporary strategies of short- or medium-term migration (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019). The official statistics cover only a part of the amplitude of the phenomenon and numerous shorter periods of migration are not registered (e.g. seasonal labourers or experiences of few months abroad). In *Table no. 1*, we provide an overview on the amplitude of the return migration by examining the number of immigrants who hold Romanian citizenship at the time of registration in Romania and we also list the main destination countries for Romanians.

*Table no. 1*

#### Overview of Romanian migration between 2014 and 2019, by year

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>A. Number of Romanian citizens officially residents in:</b>						
1. Italy	1,081,400	1,131,839	1,151,395	1,168,552	1,190,091	1,206,938
2. Spain	728,252	708,389	695,044	683,797	673,593	670,187
3. Germany	260,542	345,753	444,241	507,062	586,594	659,470
4. United Kingdom	137,036	178,232	237,120	333,507	416,092	421,974
Total in EU countries	2,609,683	2,802,802	3,002,276	3,197,669	3,399,456	3,533,186
<b>B. Snapshots on Romanian return migration</b>						
Immigrants who hold Romanian citizenship at registration	123,916	115,485	119,315	146,315	141,289	161,286

Source: EUROSTAT, 2020.

Similar to other EE countries, Romania was rather timid in implementing policies for stimulating return migration policies (Șerban 2015; Boros and Hegedűs 2016), but there are some visible changes since diasporic communities have played an important role during the last national elections. There is a rather positive gaze in which return migration is perceived both by politicians and by scholars who have analysed the outcomes of Romanians' experiences of migration (e.g. Sandu 2010; Vlase 2013) and there are certain expectations regarding returnee entrepreneurship. Extant qualitative studies began documenting the heterogeneous nature of returnee entrepreneurship in Romania (Cosciug 2019; Vlase and Croitoru 2019), but empirical knowledge regarding the specific profiles of such returnees can facilitate further comparisons.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, we employed a multi-method approach (Seawright 2016) to identify the complex mixture of individual's features and characteristics of the migratory experience required to understand returnees' entrepreneurship after return. The data collection strategy had the following two phases.

First, a survey was conducted with Romanian citizens who lived abroad for a minimum of three consecutive months, since the country joined the EU, for any reason apart from tourism, medical issues, or pilgrimage and at the moment of the survey were back in Romania (the minimum period of three months was also used in other studies focused on EE migrants, e.g. Coniglio and Brzozowski 2016). The survey employed a questionnaire applied on paper (PAPI method) and the data were collected over a period of approximately two months (June and July 2019). In order to increase the heterogeneity of the sample, we used an extended network of field operators who autonomously selected 'seeds' (return migrants) for the snowball technique and each interviewer questioned a maximum of seven return migrants. We obtained a sample of approximately 600 non-retired returnees located in the central part of Romania (the fieldwork began from Sibiu and gradually extended towards the neighbouring counties). The questionnaire included questions regarding the period before migration, the migration experience, and the return process. In order to facilitate a follow-up qualitative phase of research, the participants were asked to provide written consent and their contact details. After the survey, we broadly distinguished between return migrants who became entrepreneurs and those who entered into other types of employment and asked them to participate in our in-depth interviews. The interviews had a lifecycle format (Kuschminder 2017) and included detailed discussions regarding individuals' employment trajectories. The language used for all the interviews was Romanian and they were conducted face-to-face mostly in public spaces (e.g. coffee shops or parks) or at the interviewee's house if they wished (see *Table no. 2* for an overview on the sample used for this article).

Table no. 2

**The structure of the qualitative sample**

Returnee entrepreneurs (10 interviewees)	Level of education	Five without tertiary education	Five with tertiary education completed
	Type of entrepreneurship	Six business owners	Four self-employed
	Average age	37 years (aged between 23 and 48 years)	
	Average duration of the interviews	56 minutes (duration between 28 and 79 minutes)	

Source: Database of the Project entitled *Returnees' Innovative Skills and Knowledge (RISK)* – qualitative fieldwork.

Transcripts of the interviews were available for this article and we performed a thematic analysis (Grbich 2013) on the interviews conducted with entrepreneurs in terms of the following topics: outcomes of the migratory experience and the use of various forms of capital (economic, human and social), employment decisions at the moment of return, and plans for the future.

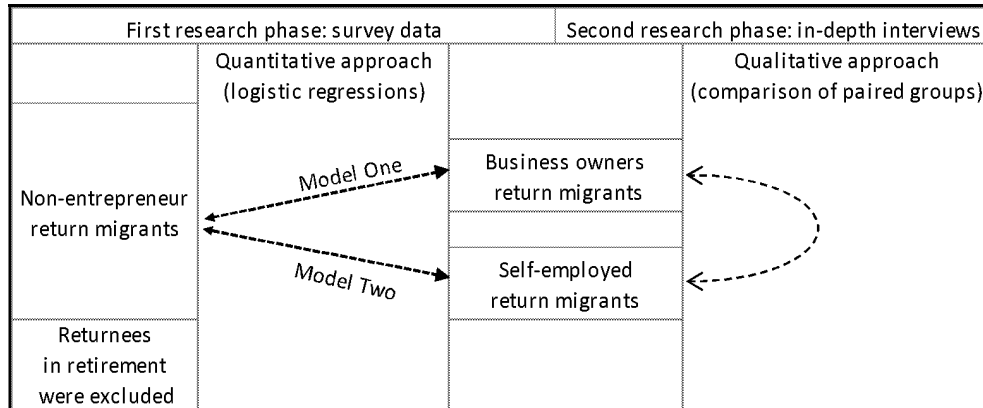
To analyse the survey data, we decided to employ Firth's corrected binomial logistic model, which has become an important approach in analysing binary outcomes in a condition of imbalanced distribution of the dependent variable (Puhr et al. 2017). This type of logistic regression has been previously used in studies focusing on migrant populations and entrepreneurship (e.g. Szarucki, Brzozowski, and Stankevičienė 2016). The dependent variables within the discussed logistic regression models are derived from contrasting the two specific types of returnee entrepreneurs with those that are employed in other professions upon return (business owners in contrast with non-entrepreneur returnees; self-employed returnees in contrast with non-entrepreneur returnees). In *Appendix 1*, we present the types of measurements used for variables introduced in the logistic regression models.

The *Figure 1* provides a visual representation of the article's methodological approach and additional details regarding each specific analysis are provided in the next section.



Figure 1

Visual aid for summarizing the article's multi-method analysis



## ANALYSES AND RESULTS

A brief depiction of the relevant features for the quantitative sample is introduced in *Table no. 3*. First of all, we can observe that the share of entrepreneurs in the entire sample is 8.7% (business owners: 3.3% vs. self-employment: 5.4%).

Descriptive statistics regarding the dependent variables are also relevant for presenting the specificity of the total sample of Romanian returnees used for our study (the first column in *Table no. 3*) and to draw an individual profile for each of the category of entrepreneurs (the next columns in *Table no. 3*). The data collection strategy provided a rather balanced sample in terms of gender distribution (53% male returnees and 47% female returnees) and this is important for exploring the influence of gender within a multi-dimensional analytical model. Over 50% of the total sample constituted those who were highly connected to their homes during migration and communicated on daily basis with people left behind. Simultaneously, an overwhelming majority saved money or sent remittances during their stays abroad (86%). The sample is also characterized by short-term and medium-term experiences of migration (the average is 32 months), predominance of returnees who returned young (the average age is 30 years), and an average of 13 years of education due to a relatively high share of those with tertiary education.

Table no. 3

## Summary statistics

Variables	Total sample	ENTREPRENEURSHIP	
		Business ownership	Self-employment
Gender (Male): %	53.8	75	75
Entrepreneurship before migration (Yes): %	8.3	15	41
Highly connected home during migration (Yes): %	50.8	25	38
Savings or remittances (Yes): %	86.1	100	88
Connected abroad after return (Scale 1 to 5)	2.37	2.65	2.21
New work skills gained abroad (Scale 1 to 5)	3.43	3.60	3.47
New formal qualifications (Scale 1 to 5)	2.64	2.75	2.13
Risk tolerance (Scale 1 to 5)	3.65	4.15	4.03
Education (Average no. of years)	13.03	13.85	12.87
Age at last return (Average no. of years)	30.35	30.40	32.37
Length of migration (Average no. of months)	32.64	45.80	36.41
No. of cases	593	20	32

Source: Author's calculation based on the RISK Project's survey.

### BUSINESS OWNERSHIP VERSUS SELF-EMPLOYMENT

The proposed analytic model investigates specific profiles of Romanian returnees who were entrepreneurs at the time of the survey by distinguishing between business owners and self-employed individuals. This multi-dimensional comparison provides an excellent framework for discussing the differences between these categories and to indicate how migration's outcomes affect an individual's probability of becoming a business owner or a self-employed person upon return (*Table no. 4*).

Table no. 4

**Firth logistic regression models to predict log odds for entering into entrepreneurship among Romanian returnees: Types of entrepreneurship**

Predictors		Model One: Business ownership			Model Two: Self-employment		
		Coef.	Std. Err	Z	Coef.	Std. Err	z
Personality	Risk tolerance	0.595*	0.281	2.11	0.035 <sup>+</sup>	0.199	1.75
Social capital	Connected home during migration	-1.542**	0.550	-2.80	-0.626	0.412	-1.52
	Connected abroad after return	0.471*	0.234	2.01	0.002	0.207	0.01
Human capital	Entrepreneurship before migration	0.936	0.669	1.40	1.967***	0.426	4.62
	New work skills gained abroad	0.067*	0.271	2.48	0.026	0.019	1.33
	New formal qualifications gained abroad	-0.201	0.182	-1.10	-0.307 <sup>+</sup>	0.159	-1.93
Economic capital	Savings or remittances during migration	2.394 <sup>+</sup>	1.440	1.66	-0.221	0.570	-0.39
Length of migration		0.193	0.479	0.40	0.428	0.407	1.05
Socio-demo	Education	0.141 <sup>+</sup>	0.084	1.65	0.011	0.083	0.13
	Age at last return	0.007	0.024	0.30	0.012	0.196	0.62
	Gender	0.652	0.523	1.25	0.656	0.435	1.50
Constant		-10.019***	2.346	-4.27	-3.309**	1.494	-2.21
R <sup>2</sup>	Cox-Snell/ML	0.062			0.084		
	McFadden	0.226			0.222		
No. of cases		451			462		

Note: \*\*\* p < 0.001, \*\* p < 0.01, \* p < 0.05, <sup>+</sup> p < 0.1.

Source: Author's elaboration based on the RISK Project's survey.

Our results indicate that the migratory experience significantly influences a returnee's pathway towards entrepreneurship for the category of business owners, while self-employed returnees derived no competitive advantages from migration compared to non-entrepreneurs (Table no. 4). The profile of the business owners satisfies most expectations presented in the literature review—those who are more educated migrants, with higher risk tolerance, send remittances back home, develop new skills as migrants, and maintain close connections abroad are more likely to become business owners. However, a few new insights can be derived from the model dedicated to business owners. First, migrants who remain

connected with those back home while living abroad have significantly lower odds ratios of becoming business owners upon return due to the negative relationship between this predictor and the dependent variable. Second, experiences in entrepreneurship prior to migration and one's gender have no statistically significant effects on returnee's odds ratio of becoming business owners, all other things being equal. In contrast, within the profile of the self-employed returnees, we found no statistically significant effects linked to economic capital accumulation or transformation of one's stock of social capital. Self-employed individuals have higher risk tolerance compared to non-entrepreneur returnees and prior experiences in entrepreneurship increases the probability of being self-employed upon return. In terms of human capital gained during migration, we found a negative statistically significant relationship between new formal qualifications obtained abroad and the probability of being self-employed. Evidently, these two types of entrepreneurs are not similar and they differ from the non-entrepreneur returnees in unique ways.

The qualitative insights enable a deeper exploration of a few of the findings introduced by comparing these two types of entrepreneurship. The interviews echoed that in certain cases, business owners encountered difficulties in maintaining social relationships with friends and relatives who remained at origin and found it challenging to implement business ideas. As argued by one of the business owners,

*During the time spent abroad, we started to think a little differently compared to the period before emigration and that is why our relationships has cooled down ... with acquaintances and relatives. How could I put it... we distanced from each other; we were no longer as close as we used to be. We changed our way of thinking, but in vain because we can apply absolutely nothing. (...) How to apply? Nobody helps us with anything. For example, we opened this company in 2018, without any help. [Upon return] They are interested in taking from you, to give to them. (Female returnee, 44 years old, two years and six months years in Germany).*

The above quotation illustrates the business owner's anxiety concerning her business idea and the challenging task of confronting social pressure and expectations. Apparently, these small-scale business owners are not sophisticated entrepreneurs in a Schumpeterian sense, but they satisfy the essential requirements for this status – 'the only things a person needs to be an entrepreneur are the will and the action' (Schumpeter 2008, 133). Among the interviewed business owners, migration interferes with both the aforementioned attributes and facilitate agency understood as risk-taking employment status. Prior research has indicated how migration changes one's social embeddedness at origin (Morosanu 2013) and we argue that this process also can stimulate an individual's actions in relation to entrepreneurship upon return. Juxtaposing the quantitative and the qualitative

results of our study, we indicate that migration can stimulate an individual's willingness to assume new risks linked to business ownership.

Along with the social distance that occurs in relation to the origin (and return) context, we also exemplify an extension of the social relationships in the destination and a business owner's interest in reinforcing such transitional ties upon return. A young returnee entrepreneur who has a small-scale business in logistic presents himself as a reliable source of information for other migrants who may be thinking about returning and establishing business projects at home.

*I still have many friends abroad (...) with everyone from abroad that I talked to. Everyone, if they will return, they will return to start businesses...*

*My uncle lived in France for 20 years and he was undecided, but I told him to come home. I talked to him on the phone, come home, one can earn money here too. With all you can do [business] you can earn comparable here...*

(Male returnee, aged 23 years, approximately one year and six months in Germany).

Their status of former migrants facilitates two-way informational exchanges, and the business owner quoted above also mentioned in his interview how his uncle provided a few contacts of truck drivers who worked in France who helped him in a few professional matters.

Most of the business owners in the qualitative sample emphasize their focus on accumulating economic, human, and social capital through migration, occasionally known as the 'whole reason of the migration'. Migration is portrayed as part of a life-long process oriented towards personal growth and independence. In such cases, migration followed by business ownership is a celebrated ideal of neoliberal principles prevalent in Romanian and other EE countries (Chelcea and Druță 2016). As one of the business owners explains,

*[Migration] It helped me a lot. It was hard to grow if I didn't do this.*

*I desire to have my own company because I want to grow. This is the main advantage of this work status.* (Male returnee, aged 34 years, approximately one year and six months in Germany).

Further, migration also enabled people to accumulate tacit knowledge and language proficiency. One of the respondents used money saved from migration to buy a second-hand car and use it to start a rent-a-car business. After a while, he transformed that business into a cleaning company and it had an advantage in negotiating contracts with office buildings and supermarkets; subsequently, he decided to import professional machinery and cleaning products from Italy.

*The life experience as a whole was useful to me (...) The Italian language is the most useful thing I brought with me from there, after the [life] experience.*

*(...) A few years ago we started to do businesses with Italians because we often have to buy various products from them. They are very big producers of*

*various components, not only in cleaning services, in all services, and now it's very easy for me to get on the phone, talk in Italy and I know how to explain it to him (i.e. the Italian provider). (Male returnee, aged 39 years, approximately seven years in Italy).*

Therefore, it is evident that the business owners are committed to their return projects and re-entering into migration is perceived as personal failure and a downward step in their social mobility. One of the interviewees emphasizes,

*I wanted to invest in something. I had money and I wanted to invest to produce, to earn. For example, [in Romania] I have a need of 1,000 euros per month for family expenses. I want that my investments generate the minimum earnings I need. I want to avoid restarting from where I left. (...) I never leave again. If I go abroad, I just go on a visit or something. (Male returnee, aged 41 years, approximately seven years in Spain).*

Unlike business owners in our interviewee sample, self-employed returnees bring to light a different reality of entrepreneurship upon return. We focus this analysis on two equally interesting components of self-employment. First, there are cases of return migrants who owned small-scale businesses and who entered into self-employment after return. An illustrative case here is a returnee who owned a business in construction before emigration, worked as an employee in Germany for a few years, and after returning decided to enter into self-employment. Similar to other returnees, he invested part of his savings in tools for securing an independent work status after returning, but preferred self-employment due to a different taxation system and autonomy, as well as his lack of interest in the future development of the business.

*I had a friend who was also a builder and I said let's settle a business ... We started building small projects in different cities, but the crisis came and the market fell .... in 2010 we decided to go to Germany. A friend from there called us and he told us about a German company which needed workers with skills in construction. (...) I saved only a little money. I sent some money home and I bought tools (...) I learned from the Germans: if you want to make your work easier, you also have to invest in tools. If you want a good outcome, you have to invest in it. This is a way to make profit. (...) This is the best situation for my type of work. I have about 15 years until retirement and this works for me (...). I don't need any employees. (Male returnee, aged 49 years, approximately four years and six months in Germany).*

Second, return migrants who are self-employed indicated an interest in re-migration and were prone to combining working in Romania with shorter periods of working abroad to supplement their earnings up to a satisfying level. This was an important discursive difference compared to business owners—individuals who

are self-employed were found to still be mentally engaged in migration projects, even if some of them do not have tangible plans to re-migrate.

*I work more with renovations: roofs, facades and interiors, electricity. I learned to work with plumbing water systems, everything (...) Honestly, a friend taught me in Spain, with electrical connections, with everything you need to know and then I started alone (...)*

*At the moment I don't want to leave anymore for long time, but periodically I do. (...) That's how you raise money and where I go, I'm paid for the project. I do the work; we finish it and come back ... For me, the best is in Italy, it is better than Spain and Germany. Yes, because I worked on a project basis. (Male returnee, aged 34 years, over six years abroad—five years in Spain and shorter periods in Germany and Italy).*

*We consider the idea that we can build our future abroad. It is even easier to build it abroad, given that it takes half an hour to register as a self-employed professional. (...) I have not done anything in this regard, but when the time comes, I will go on an exploration again, I will prepare what I have to prepare, and I will call my family. (Male returnee, aged 35 years, approximately eight months in Germany).*

The comparison between business ownership and self-employment is essential for understanding returnee entrepreneurship. These categories of returnees have specific profiles, they extracted very different benefits from the migration experience, and there is a contrast between their return projects and discourses about future plans related to migration.

## CONCLUSIONS

In response to the profound changes in the intra-European migration of EE citizens, this study sought to fill the gaps in the literature on return migration by conducting an empirical research that identifies different types of entrepreneurs. It contributes to the vivid debate on reintegration at origin and a returnee's unsettledness (Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni 2019; Coniglio and Brzozowski 2016; Vlase and Croitoru 2019; White 2014), as well as to the understanding of diversity in return projects (Bermudez and Paraschivescu 2021; Lulle, Krisjane, and Bauls 2019). The focus of the article on returnees' entrepreneurship enabled a deeper understanding of certain outcomes of their migratory experiences. The multi-method approach embraced specific profiles of certain categories of entrepreneurs and depicted their subjective evaluations on the relationships between migration and entrepreneurship.

The comparison between business owners and self-employed returnees provides fertile ground for further exploration of the diversity of returnee entrepreneurship. The two forms of entrepreneurship are characterized by agency,

but it is oriented towards different contexts: business owners are focused on the return context, while self-employed returnees actively evaluate labour opportunities abroad. The qualitative analysis indicates that business owners decided to settle in Romania after returning. In contrast, self-employed returnees are rather undecided regarding remaining in the country; they also choose self-employment due to the flexibility it offers, enabling them to have a combination of periods for which they work in Romania and periods of work abroad. Compared to non-entrepreneur returnees, the business owners' profile includes several significant differences: lower frequency in communicating with people left behind during migration, higher connectivity abroad upon return, accumulation of new work skills and economic gains during migration. In addition, they have a higher number of years in education as well as higher risk tolerance. Those who are self-employed report few significant differences compared to non-entrepreneur returnees: higher risk tolerance, prior experience in entrepreneurship before migration and lower levels of formal qualifications gained abroad.

From a different perspective, our analysis can contribute to the broader debate about origin state's policies designed for stimulating return migration. Policies oriented towards returnees' entrepreneurship register high levels of support among Romanian return migrants and the government recently started to implement a Diaspora Start-Up programme (Croitoru 2021a, 2021b). In this context, we argue for using the distinction between business-owners and self-employment specific profiles in order to adequately address each group real needs of support upon return. Firstly, origin countries interested in return migration should make room within their policy agenda for individuals who enter into self-employment which were totally ignored up to the present time. They register significant differences compared to the non-entrepreneur returnees and the qualitative interviews illustrated that self-employment is adopted in relation to their mobility trajectories. Secondly, policies for supporting business-owners' initiatives should take into consideration that this group have increased potential to make use of social capital and human capital enhanced through migration. Programmes should include stimulus for using social connections from abroad into their business initiatives whenever applicable and smoother processes for testing and certifying their new work skills gained abroad.

Thus far, most of the existent knowledge on returnee entrepreneurship in EE return contexts was derived either from quantitative analyses (official statistics or survey data) or from small-scale qualitative fieldwork. Certainly, this study's multi-method approach embeds both advantages and limitations that are specific to combining survey data with interviews, and further research is required for validating the extrapolation of results to other EE return contexts.



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### Appendix 1

#### Types of measurements for variables included in the quantitative analysis

Variables		Measurement				
<b>Dichotomous variables</b>		NO	YES			
DV	Business owner after return	0	1			
	Self-employed after return	0	1			
IV	Self-employed or business owner before migration	0	1			
	Highly connected with home during migration period (daily communication)	0	1			
	Savings or remittances during migration	0	1			
	Gender (Male)	0	1			
<b>Variables measured on a scale from 1 to 5 (minimum value 1 and maximum value 5)</b>						
IV	New work skills gained abroad	1	2	3	4	5
	New formal qualifications	1	2	3	4	5
	Risk tolerance	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Numeric variables</b>						
IV	Age at last return	Number of years				
	Education	Number of completed years				
	Length of migration	Number of months				
<b>Summative index which varies from 1 to 5</b>						
IV	Connected abroad after return (1 + one unit for each YES at the next four items)					
		NO	YES			
	A. During the last 12 months...s/he discussed weekly or more often with relatives or friends from abroad	0	1			
	B. During the last 12 months...s/he discussed weekly or more often with people from abroad for professional/work reasons	0	1			
	C. Migration was important or very important for extending social networks	0	1			
	D. S/he has foreign (non-Romanian) friends abroad	0	1			

Note: DV—dependent variable and IV—independent variable.

Source: RISK Project's Survey.

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*Articolul contribuie la literatura dedicată diversității migrației de revenire prin analiza unor tipuri diferite de antreprenoriat în rândul migranților reîntorși în țara de origine. Pentru a documenta profilurile specifice ale migranților care sunt antreprenori după revenire, sunt combinate date culese printr-un sondaj cu migranți reveniți în România și interviuri de profunzime cu migranți care au statutul de antreprenori după revenirea din străinătate. În prezent, România reprezintă*

*unul dintre contextele excelente pentru cercetarea migrației de revenire datorită fluxurilor importante de migrați temporari internaționali. Lucrarea subliniază o serie de diferențe majore între migrații reveniți care au deschis mici afaceri și cei care lucrează pe cont propriu (de exemplu, sub formă de persoană fizică autorizată). Pe de o parte, migrații reveniți care dețin mici afaceri sunt cei care au beneficiat semnificativ mai mult din experiența de migrație comparativ cu reveniții non-antreprenori, în termeni de bani economisiți din migrație, acumulare de capital uman în străinătate și reconfigurarea capitalului social. Pe de altă parte, compararea profilurilor celor care lucrează pe cont propriu cu non-antreprenorii nu arată diferențe semnificative între cele două categorii în termeni de resurse acumulate prin experiența de migrație. Distincția dintre cele două tipuri de antreprenori poate avea implicații pentru politicile statelor de origine orientate către stimularea migrației de revenire prin programe centrate spre antreprenoriatul migraților reveniți.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** migrație de revenire; migrație intra-europeană; antreprenoriat; angajare pe cont propriu; cercetare multi-metodă.

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