

Happier abroad? Insights into the wellbeing of Romanian emigrants

 Oana-Maria Cozma 


Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania

Abstract: Wellbeing is a multidimensional concept addressed across psychology, sociology, political science, and economics. From an economic perspective, it is typically linked to income, poverty, access to basic needs, and employment. This paper investigates whether Romanian emigrants working in EU countries perceive an improvement in their wellbeing after migration, particularly regarding wages and social status, compared to their situation in Romania prior to emigration. It also examines whether perceptions differ across socio-demographic groups defined by age, gender, education, marital status, medium of origin, and country of destination. This paper is based on quantitative methods, using data from a structured questionnaire completed by 100 Romanian emigrants who currently live abroad or have returned from migration. By exploring the relationship between migration and perceived wellbeing, the paper contributes to a broader understanding of how economic and social conditions abroad shape individual experiences. It adds to both migration research and wellbeing studies, highlighting the role of subjective and objective factors in shaping quality of life. The findings provide useful insights for academic debates and policy discussions on the integration and wellbeing of mobile workers in the European Union.

Keywords: wellbeing, migration, Romanian emigrants, European Union

Introduction

The concept of wellbeing is relatively recent and has become a focus of study across various academic disciplines. Psychologists, sociologists, health professionals, and economists all seek to define, analyse, and explain this phenomenon, aiming to develop strategies and solutions to enhance individuals' overall wellbeing. Being a dynamic construct that encompasses individuals' evaluations of their lives and their psychological functioning, the concept of wellbeing is commonly divided into two broad dimensions (1) hedonic well-being, which emphasizes pleasure, happiness, and life satisfaction, and (2) eudaimonic

 PhD. student at Doctoral School of Economics and Business Administration, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania, cozma.oanamaria@gmail.com.

well-being, which focuses on meaning, personal growth, and authenticity (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1995). These dimensions highlight both the emotional experience of feeling good and the deeper sense of living a meaningful life. Moreover, wellbeing is not static, as it fluctuates over time due to various factors including work conditions, interpersonal relationships, and personal resources. These fluctuations can occur over both short-term intervals and long-term trajectories (Sonnentag, 2015). Importantly, well-being not only reflects individuals' current experiences but also predicts important outcomes such as job performance, motivation, and health-related behaviours (Sonnentag, 2015). The concept of well-being has gained wide applicability across disciplines and contexts, supported by the development of generic and cross-contextual measurement tools like the WHO-5, which are validated for use in both clinical and general populations (Topp et al., 2015). This universal relevance underlines well-being as a central construct in understanding human functioning and societal progress.

The concept of economic well-being has evolved beyond traditional measures such as gross domestic product (GDP), prompting scholars and policymakers to seek more comprehensive indicators that better reflect human and societal progress. Increasingly, researchers argue that GDP fails to account for essential dimensions of well-being, including the value of leisure, environmental sustainability, income distribution, and economic security (Osberg & Sharpe, 2002). As a result, alternative frameworks have emerged to capture a fuller picture of prosperity, particularly within the context of growing concerns over inequality, environmental limits, and subjective well-being. One such framework is the wellbeing economy, which proposes a shift away from growth-centered economic models toward systems that prioritize human flourishing, ecological stability, and sufficiency. Advocates of this approach argue that in high-income nations, continued economic expansion yields diminishing returns in terms of happiness and well-being, and may exacerbate ecological degradation and social disconnection (Hayden, 2024). This post-growth orientation challenges the long-standing assumption that economic growth is synonymous with societal improvement, advocating instead for policies that focus on equity, health, and environmental integrity. Empirical evidence supports this perspective. A meta-analysis by Howell and Howell (2008) found that the relationship between economic status and subjective well-being (SWB) is strongest in low-income countries, particularly when well-being is defined in terms of life satisfaction. However, in more affluent contexts, this relationship weakens, reflecting the phenomenon of diminishing marginal utility and suggesting that once basic needs are met, additional income contributes little to overall happiness. These findings bolster need theory, which posits that economic resources have the greatest impact on well-being when they help fulfil essential physical needs.

In parallel, the concept of the happiness economy has gained popularity. It promotes a multidimensional vision of development that values social inclusion, environmental stewardship, and psychological resilience. This paradigm seeks to

measure success through indicators of well-being rather than material production alone, aiming to create economic systems where people's quality of life takes precedence over income growth (Agrawal et al., 2024). International institutions such as the OECD and WHO, along with national initiatives like the Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo), are increasingly adopting these approaches to guide policymaking (Hayden, 2024). Together, these developments signal a growing consensus that economic well-being must be understood not merely in financial terms but through a holistic lens that includes health, equity, sustainability, and subjective life satisfaction.

Understanding how wellbeing changes through the process of emigration offers key insights into how emigrants adapt, integrate, and find satisfaction in their new environments. The literature shows that migration significantly affects the wellbeing of people who leave their home countries. While migrants often experience improved incomes and material conditions after relocating, changes in subjective wellbeing (SWB), including life satisfaction, happiness, and emotional health, are more nuanced. For example, migrants from Tonga to New Zealand saw gains in income and mental health, but reported declines in happiness and social status due to shifts in reference groups (Stillman et al., 2015). Cultural integration plays a central role in shaping migrant well-being. A flexible, adaptive approach that allows individuals to retain aspects of their identity while integrating into the host culture is positively linked to SWB. This process is strengthened by the subjective significance of identity, the psychological importance of maintaining a valued sense of self which supports confidence and resilience (Wang & Giovanis, 2024). Social networks are another key factor of wellbeing in the process of migration. Migrants with supportive community ties, especially within culturally familiar groups, tend to report higher well-being. In Israel, North American immigrants felt more satisfied despite lower labour market outcomes, largely due to strong social support and religious motivation for migration (Amit & Riss, 2013). Pre-migration conditions also matter. Migrants who had supportive environments and clear motivations before moving generally adapt better and experience greater post-migration well-being (Amit & Riss, 2013; Nikolova & Graham, 2015). Moreover, many migrants report increased freedom and autonomy, which enhances well-being even when material gains are modest (Nikolova & Graham, 2015). However, migration also brings challenges such as identity conflict, cultural dislocation, and emotional stress, especially when expectations are unmet. These findings highlight the need for policies that support both the economic and psychological integration of migrants (Wang & Giovanis, 2024; Stillman et al., 2015).

Analysing the concept of well-being in the context of migration is a two-way process: on one hand, it offers valuable insights into the complex experience of migration by highlighting how emotional, social, and economic dimensions shift before and after emigration. On the other hand, examining the lived experiences of emigrants' challenges and deepens our understanding of well-being itself, pushing

us to consider it not as a static or universal condition, but as something deeply shaped by context, identity, and mobility. In this way, migration studies not only benefit from the lens of well-being but also contribute to refining and expanding its conceptual framework. The aim of this paper is to investigate how Romanian emigrants working in EU countries perceive changes in their wellbeing after migration, with particular attention to differences across socio-demographic groups such as age, gender, education, marital status, medium of origin, and country of destination. Romania represents a particularly relevant case, as it is one of the largest sources of labour migration within the European Union, and the scale of this mobility raises important questions about integration, social positioning, and quality of life abroad. Methodologically, the paper relies on a structured questionnaire completed by 100 Romanian emigrants, both current residents abroad and returnees. Responses were analysed in IBM SPSS Statistics 20, combining descriptive statistics, a composite wellbeing index, and inferential techniques (independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA with Tukey post hoc tests) to assess variations in perceived wellbeing across groups. This design directly addresses the paper's aim and provides robust evidence on how migration shapes subjective wellbeing. The remainder of this paper is organised in the following manner: Section 1 explores a brief literature review on the wellbeing of Romanian emigrants; Section 2 presents the used data and methodology; Section 3 outlines the results and conclusions. Some final remarks conclude the paper.

1. A brief literature review on the wellbeing of Romanian emigrants

Research on the wellbeing of Romanian emigrants reveals a complex picture shaped by economic gains, cultural integration, discrimination, and evolving personal aspirations. While migration often improves objective indicators such as income and access to services, its effects on subjective well-being are far more complex and context-dependent. The academic literature specifically focused on the wellbeing of Romanian emigrants is still relatively limited and emerging, particularly in comparison to broader migration and well-being studies. Although there is a growing body of work examining Eastern European migration and its socio-economic outcomes, focused, longitudinal, or comparative studies that assess Romanian emigrants' subjective well-being across diverse host contexts remain sparse. Much of the existing research relies on cross-sectional data and case studies in specific countries such as Belgium, Spain, and Italy. This indicates a clear need for more systematic and long-term studies that include psychological, economic, social, and intergenerational dimensions of well-being in Romanian migrant populations.

Studies that are available highlight key insights. Romanian emigrants often experience an overall increase in quality of life in host countries, particularly in terms of job satisfaction, financial stability, healthcare, and educational access. However,

these gains are tempered by persistent ties to value systems from Romania, which shape perceptions of success and influence both personal and professional aspirations abroad (Mocanu et al., 2020). For instance, Romanian white-collar migrants in Brussels report improved living standards but also demonstrate diverse integration strategies and complex feelings of identity and belonging, reflecting their transnational lifestyle (Nicola et al., 2021).

At the psychological level, perceived discrimination has emerged as a key factor undermining wellbeing. Romanian migrants in Spain who report higher levels of discrimination, particularly in employment and healthcare, also show lower levels of self-acceptance, an important component of psychological well-being. Social support, however, significantly buffers this relationship, highlighting the protective role of strong interpersonal networks (Fernández et al., 2014). Wellbeing also varies across generations and life stages. Romanian adolescents living in Italy display lower life satisfaction and more psychosomatic complaints than their peers in Romania, with first-generation migrants reporting the highest levels of dissatisfaction. These outcomes are attributed to factors such as acculturation stress, disrupted family dynamics, and social exclusion (Charrier et al., 2023). Meanwhile, longitudinal data show that while migration can lead to significant gains in income and perceived freedom, it does not always result in greater happiness. In some cases, return migrants in Romania report lower happiness than those who never migrated, suggesting that unmet expectations and reintegration difficulties can offset the potential well-being benefits of migration (Bartram, 2013).

On a broader scale, Romanian migrants from post-transition countries generally report improvements in subjective well-being and satisfaction with freedom after migrating, particularly when migration leads to greater autonomy and opportunity (Nikolova & Graham, 2015). However, this effect varies depending on the social and policy environment of the host country, emphasizing the importance of institutional support and integration pathways.

In sum, the wellbeing of Romanian emigrants is influenced not only by economic outcomes but also by cultural identity, perceived inclusion, and access to supportive social networks. While the existing literature offers valuable insights, there remains significant potential for deeper and more comparative research to better capture the diverse realities of Romanian migrant wellbeing across countries and generations.

2. Data and methodology

This article is based on a subsample of 100 respondents drawn from a broader dataset currently being compiled as part of my PhD research project on Romanian labour migration. The data used for this paper were collected between July 2024 and February 2025 through an online questionnaire distributed via social media platforms and diaspora networks, using a snowball sampling method. While this

approach does not yield a representative sample, it is appropriate for reaching mobile and dispersed populations such as emigrants and allows for the collection of diverse responses from various EU countries. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and all respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and gave their informed consent.

The questionnaire included several sections, but this paper focuses on selected variables relevant to the analysis of perceived wellbeing following emigration. Specifically, the variables considered were: age, gender, level of education, marital status, medium of origin (urban or rural), and country of destination. The key dependent variable in this analysis is the respondent’s subjective evaluation of their job abroad compared to the one they had in Romania prior to migration. To measure this, participants were asked to select one of five statements on a Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), describing their perception of both remuneration and social status associated with their job abroad, in comparison with their previous employment in Romania. The response options were as follows:

Question: <i>Compared to the job you had in Romania prior to migration, how would you evaluate your job abroad in terms of remuneration and social status?</i>	
Response options	Statement
1	<i>The job I have/had on the European labour market is/was better paid and has/had a higher social status than the one I had in Romania.</i>
2	<i>It is/was better paid but has/had a lower social status than the one I had in Romania.</i>
3	<i>It is/was worse paid and has/had a lower social status.</i>
4	<i>It is/was worse paid but has/had a higher social status.</i>
5	<i>It is/was similarly paid and with a similar social status.</i>

The data were processed and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample and response distributions. To assess the overall perception of Romanian emigrants regarding their labour market integration and social positioning abroad, a composite index was constructed based on five Likert-scale items. These items captured self-assessed differences in both remuneration and social status between the job held abroad and the one previously held in Romania. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), reflecting increasing agreement with positive evaluations of their situation abroad. A new variable, labelled „Perceived Wellbeing Index”, was created in IBM SPSS Statistics 20 using the MEAN function, which computed the average score across the five items. This method allowed for partial item responses to be included, provided that at least one of the five questions was answered. The resulting index offered a

continuous measure ranging from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating more favourable perceptions of occupational and social improvement after emigration.

This composite score served as the dependent variable in subsequent inferential analyses, including t-tests, one-way ANOVA, to examine how perceived wellbeing varied across sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, age, education level, marital status, urban/rural origin, and country of emigration. Independent-samples t-tests were used for binary categorical variables, such as gender and urban/rural origin, because these variables divide respondents into two distinct groups, and the objective was to compare the mean values of the Perceived Wellbeing Index between them. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed for independent variables with more than two categories, including age group, education level, marital status, and country of emigration. This test allows for the comparison of mean wellbeing scores across multiple groups simultaneously. Where the ANOVA results indicated significant differences, Tukey post hoc tests were applied to identify which specific groups differed from each other.

3. Results and discussions

3.1. Descriptive analysis of the sample

The sample used in this study consists of 100 Romanian emigrants currently or formerly residing in various EU countries. The analysis of sociodemographic characteristics reveals a relatively diverse, though non-representative, profile of respondents.

The majority of respondents (58%) are between 18 and 35 years old, indicating a young and potentially more mobile segment of the Romanian population. Another significant share (23%) falls within the 36–45 age range, while smaller percentages are distributed across older age groups: 10% are between 46–55, 5% between 56–65, and only 4% in other intermediate brackets.

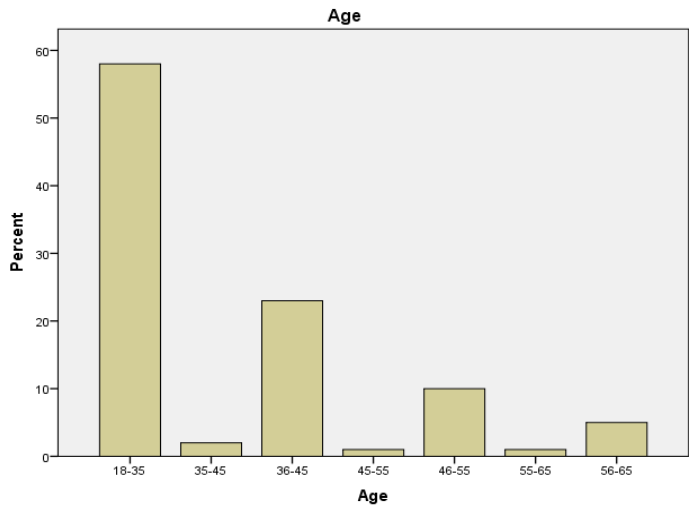
Out of the 100 participants, 57% are female and 43% are male. This gender imbalance may reflect higher response rates from women in online surveys or possibly indicate a greater willingness among female emigrants to participate in research.

A notable majority of respondents (61%) come from rural areas, with 39% from urban environments. This is a particularly interesting finding, as it highlights the importance of migration for individuals from rural Romania, who may seek better employment and living conditions abroad. This also aligns with broader national migration trends, where rural populations face fewer local economic opportunities.

The educational background of the sample is relatively high: 25% of respondents hold a Master's degree, 16% have a Bachelor's degree, and 12% have completed post-secondary education (non-university). A significant portion (33%) completed high school, while a smaller percentage have vocational education (9%)

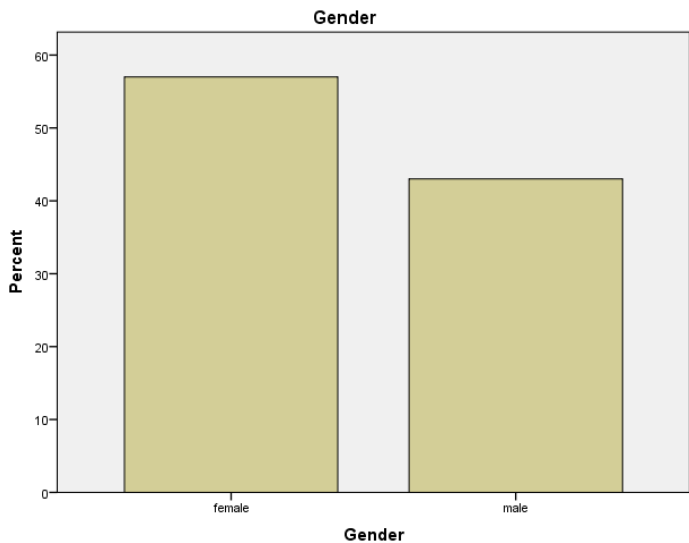
or a doctoral degree (4%). Only 1% of respondents had education limited to middle school level.

Figure 1. Age distribution of the Romanian emigrants



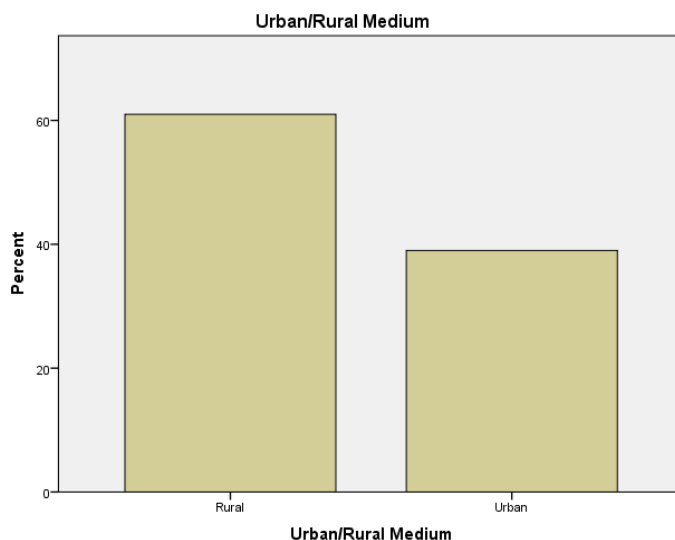
Source: made by author in SPSS, sample size =100

Figure 2. Gender distribution of the Romanian emigrants



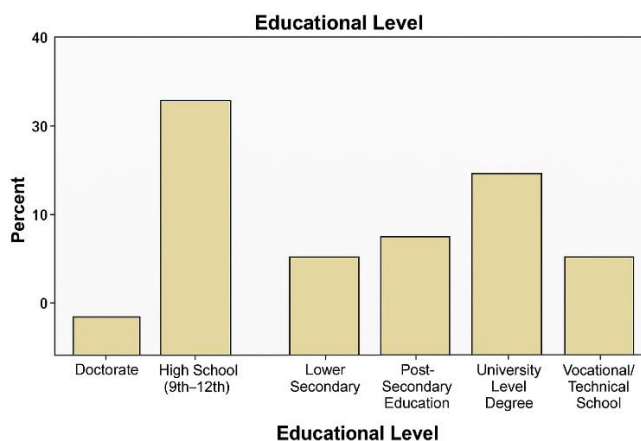
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Figure 3. Medium distribution of the Romanian emigrants



Source: made by author in SPSS, sample size =100

Figure 4. Educational level of the Romanian emigrants

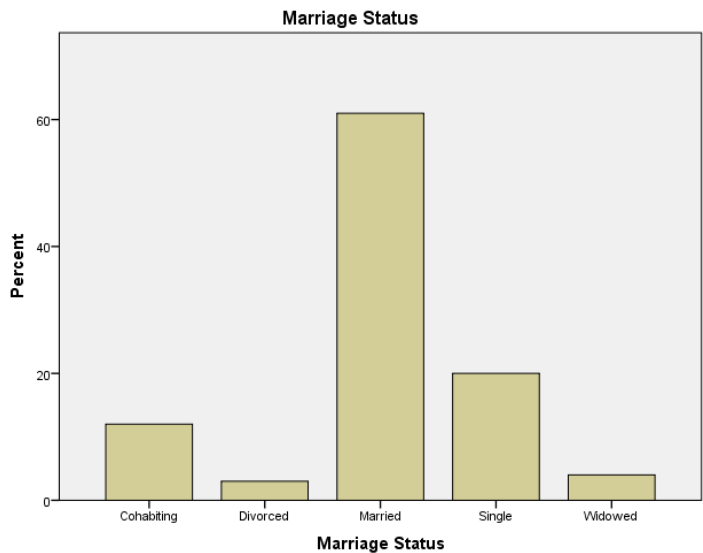


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The majority of respondents (61%) are married, with an additional 12% cohabiting and 4% widowed, indicating a sample largely composed of individuals in stable personal relationships. Only 20% identified as single, and 3% as divorced. This may suggest that Romanian emigrants who are married or in relationships are

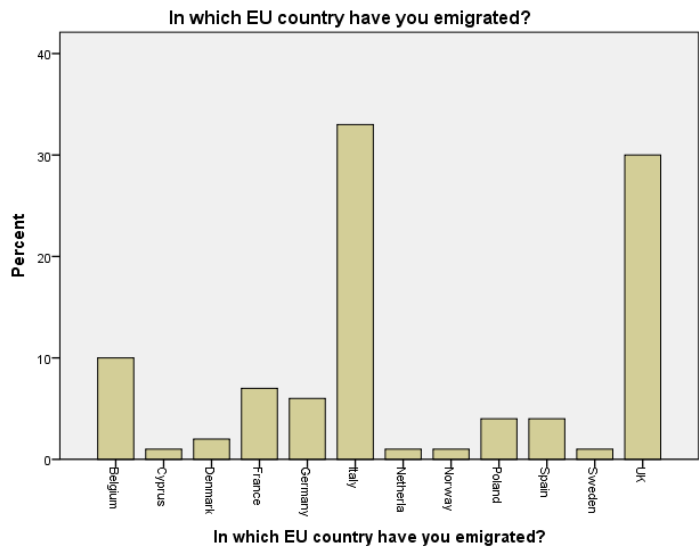
more settled or perhaps more motivated to reflect on their post-migration experiences.

Figure 5. Marriage status of the Romanian emigrants



Source: author’s representation made in SPSS, sample size =100

Figure 6. Country of emigration of the Romanian emigrants

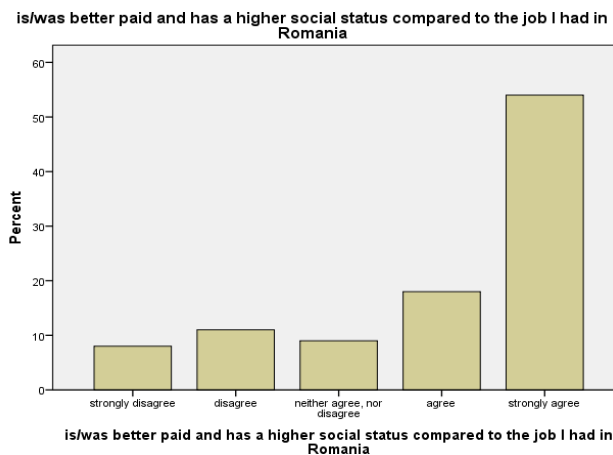


Source: author’s representation made in SPSS, sample size =100

The most common countries of emigration were Italy (33%) and the United Kingdom (30%). These two destinations alone account for over 60% of the sample. Other destinations included Belgium (10%), France (7%), and Germany (6%), with smaller numbers in Spain, Poland, and Northern European countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.

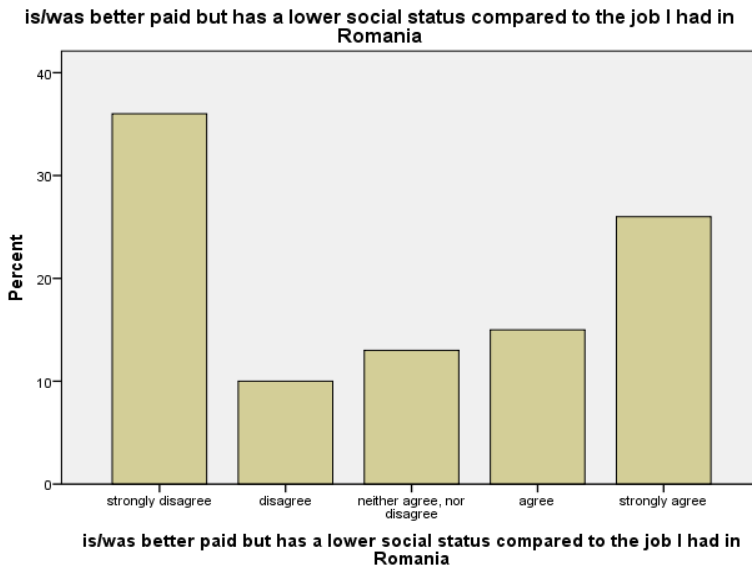
The analysis of respondents' answers to the question „The job I currently hold / have held in the European labour market in the country I emigrated to...” reveals significant variation in how Romanian emigrants perceive changes in both remuneration and social status when comparing their job abroad to the one they had in Romania. The most positively perceived outcome was that employment abroad is both better paid and of higher social status, with 72% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing, supported by high central tendency values ($M = 3.99$; median = 5.00; mode = 5). In contrast, the statement that jobs abroad are better paid but of lower social status divided opinions: 36% strongly disagreed while 26% strongly agreed, suggesting that some migrants may accept socially inferior or overqualified positions in exchange for higher wages. The idea that jobs abroad are both lower paid and of lower status was overwhelmingly rejected (78% disagreement, $M = 1.80$), confirming that migration is rarely associated with a downward trajectory. Similarly, few respondents agreed that their jobs abroad offer higher status but lower pay ($M = 1.97$), indicating that income remains the decisive factor in how migrants evaluate outcomes. Finally, the perception that jobs abroad are equivalent in both pay and status to those in Romania was also dismissed by the majority (61% strongly disagreed, $M = 1.91$), reinforcing the notion that migration represents a significant break from previous employment rather than a mere continuation.

Figure 7. Respondents' views: job abroad better paid and higher social status than in Romania



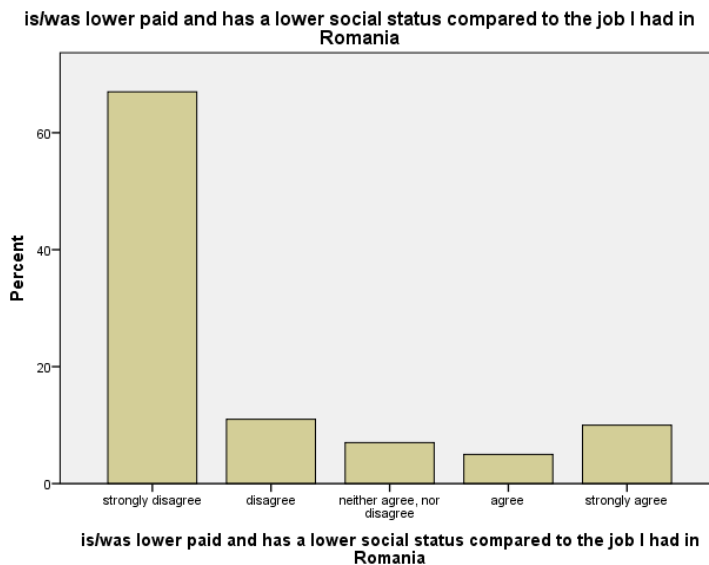
Source: author's representation made in SPSS, sample size =100

Figure 8. Respondents' views: job abroad better paid but lower social status than in Romania



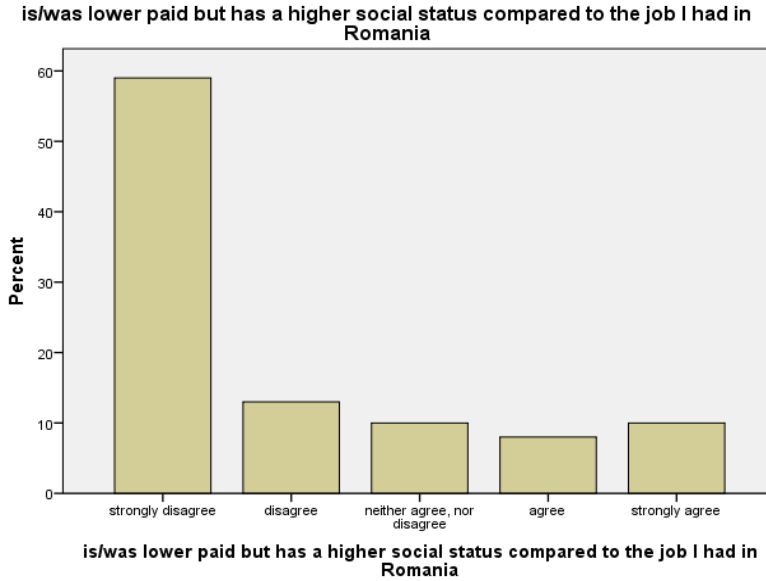
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Figure 9. Respondents' views: job abroad lower paid and lower social status than in Romania



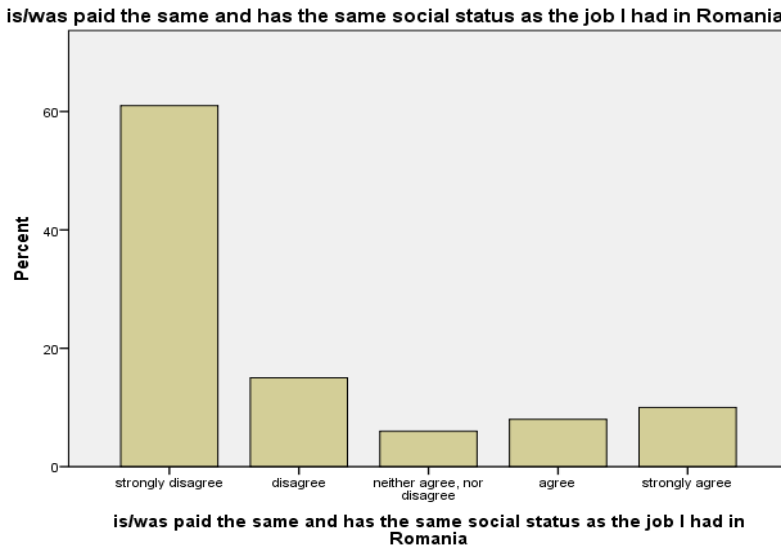
Source: author's representation made in SPSS, sample size =100

Figure 10. Respondents' views: job abroad lower paid but higher social status than in Romania



Source: author's representation made in SPSS, sample size =100

Figure 11. Respondents' views: job abroad equally paid and same social status as in Romania



Source: author's representation made in SPSS, sample size =100

3.2. Inferential Statistical Analysis

An independent-samples t-test was performed to explore whether perceived wellbeing differed significantly between male and female respondents. The results showed no statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(98) = -0.177$, $p = .860$. On average, men reported a slightly higher Perceived Wellbeing Index ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 0.84$) compared to women ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 0.82$), but the difference was negligible. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference $[-0.36, 0.30]$ includes zero, indicating that any observed difference is likely due to chance. These findings suggest that gender is not a determining factor in how Romanian emigrants evaluate their job-related and social outcomes abroad.

Another independent-samples t-test was also conducted to assess whether the perceived wellbeing of Romanian emigrants differed based on their place of origin — urban or rural areas. The results indicated no statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(98) = 0.360$, $p = .720$. Respondents from rural areas reported a slightly higher average Perceived Wellbeing Index ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 0.78$) compared to those from urban areas ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.90$), but the mean difference of 0.06 was not statistically meaningful. The 95% confidence interval for the difference $[-0.28, 0.40]$ includes zero, further supporting the conclusion that urban/rural background is not significantly associated with differences in perceived wellbeing among Romanian emigrants.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in perceived wellbeing across age groups. The results indicated that the effect of age on perceived wellbeing was not statistically significant, $F(6, 93) = 2.103$, $p = .060$. Although the result did not meet the conventional threshold for significance ($p < .05$), it was marginally close, suggesting a possible trend that may warrant further investigation with a larger and more evenly distributed sample. The highest average wellbeing scores were observed among respondents aged 35–45 ($M = 3.00$) and 45–55 ($M = 4.20$), while lower scores were reported by those in the 46–55 and 56–65 groups. However, due to the small number of participants in some age categories (particularly those with only one respondent), post hoc tests could not be conducted to further explore specific group differences.

One more one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess differences in perceived wellbeing across levels of educational attainment. The results revealed a statistically significant effect of education level on perceived wellbeing, $F(6, 93) = 2.369$, $p = .036$. This indicates that the way Romanian emigrants perceive their occupational and social outcomes abroad differs depending on their educational background. The highest levels of perceived wellbeing were reported by respondents with vocational secondary education ($M = 3.04$) and lower secondary education ($M = 3.60$), while those with a doctorate degree reported the lowest wellbeing scores ($M = 1.90$). However, due to the small number of participants in some categories, post hoc comparisons could not be performed, and these trends should be interpreted with

caution. A more balanced sample across education levels would be needed to confirm which specific groups differ significantly.

Furthermore, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether perceived wellbeing differed according to marital status among Romanian emigrants. The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences between groups, $F(4, 95) = 0.273$, $p = .894$. Although small variations in mean scores were observed, with widowed respondents reporting the highest average wellbeing ($M = 2.75$) and cohabiting respondents the lowest ($M = 2.40$), these differences were not statistically meaningful. The results of the Tukey post hoc test further confirmed that none of the pairwise comparisons between marital status groups reached significance, and all categories fell within the same homogeneous subset.

Another one-way ANOVA was performed to examine whether perceived wellbeing among Romanian emigrants varied by destination country. The results showed no statistically significant differences, $F(11, 88) = 1.667$, $p = .094$, though the p-value approached the conventional threshold for significance. While some variation in mean scores was observed, for instance, the highest wellbeing was reported by respondents in Cyprus ($M = 4.20$) and Norway ($M = 3.80$), while the lowest was reported in Denmark and Sweden ($M = 1.60$), these differences were not statistically meaningful based on the available sample. Moreover, due to small group sizes (some with only a single respondent), post hoc comparisons could not be conducted, and results should be interpreted with caution.

3.3. Discussions

The results of the descriptive analyses suggest that for most Romanian emigrants in this sample, migration has led to a perceived improvement in both material and social dimensions of life, which are key components of subjective wellbeing. The strong agreement with the statement „my job abroad is/was better paid and has/had a higher social status compared to the job I had in Romania”, chosen by 72% of respondents, indicates that a large share of migrants associate their employment abroad with upward mobility and a better life overall. This perception aligns with theories of subjective wellbeing that go beyond economic indicators to include aspects like social recognition, occupational prestige, and personal dignity. A job that is not only better paid but also enjoys higher status in society likely contributes to migrants’ self-worth, sense of accomplishment, and life satisfaction, all core elements of wellbeing in both psychological and sociological literature. At the same time, the noticeable split of opinion regarding the statement „better paid but lower social status” (with 36% strongly disagreeing and 26% strongly agreeing) reveals a more complex reality for some migrants. For this group, although the economic benefit of migration is clear, the loss of social standing may temper their overall wellbeing. This is often the case for skilled migrants who experience occupational downgrading, where their qualifications are underutilized or

unrecognized in the host country. Such situations may lead to feelings of frustration or marginalization, despite financial improvement. Even more telling is the near-universal rejection of the scenarios in which jobs abroad are perceived as worse paid or equivalent to those in Romania, regardless of social status. These responses suggest that Romanian migrants do not view their migration experiences as neutral or negative; they tend to associate emigration with meaningful and positive change, especially in economic terms. However, the fact that social status alone was rarely seen as a compensating factor for lower pay highlights the primacy of economic stability and income in shaping perceptions of wellbeing among this group.

In sum, the findings indicate that subjective wellbeing among Romanian emigrants is largely influenced by a combination of higher wages and enhanced social status, with material gain playing a slightly more dominant role. The role of symbolic rewards, such as prestige or social recognition, is significant but insufficient by itself to ensure positive wellbeing outcomes. Thus, migration is perceived as beneficial when it delivers both economic and social validation, contributing to an integrated sense of improved quality of life.

The inferential statistical analyses aimed to explore whether Romanian emigrants' perceived wellbeing, measured through a composite index reflecting changes in occupational pay and social status abroad, differed across key sociodemographic characteristics. Overall, the findings suggest that most sociodemographic factors showed no statistically significant influence on perceived wellbeing after emigration. Independent-samples t-tests revealed no significant differences in perceived wellbeing based on gender or urban/rural origin. Male and female respondents, as well as those from urban and rural areas, reported very similar average wellbeing scores, suggesting that gender and place of origin are not differentiating factors in how migrants perceive their integration abroad. One-way ANOVA tests were used to assess differences across variables with more than two categories, including age group, educational level, marital status, and destination country. Among these, only educational level showed a statistically significant association with perceived wellbeing ($p = .036$). Respondents with vocational or lower secondary education tended to report higher perceived wellbeing compared to those with post-secondary or doctoral degrees. However, post hoc comparisons were limited by the uneven distribution of participants across categories, particularly in the highest and lowest education levels. No statistically significant differences were found across age groups ($p = .060$), marital status ($p = .894$), or country of emigration ($p = .094$), though the latter two p-values were relatively close to the threshold of significance and may warrant further exploration in larger or more balanced samples. Although no statistically significant differences were found across destination countries ($p = .094$), some variation in average wellbeing scores was observable. Migrants in Western and Northern European countries (e.g., Germany, UK, and the Nordic states) tended to report slightly higher wellbeing, reflecting both better wages and stronger institutional protections, while those in Southern Europe (e.g., Italy,

Spain) showed more mixed perceptions, likely due to occupational downgrading despite wage improvements. These tendencies, while not conclusive, suggest that the institutional and economic contexts of destination countries may subtly shape migrants' evaluations of their job outcomes and wellbeing, a finding that could be explored more robustly in future studies with larger or more evenly distributed samples. The lack of significance in these variables may suggest that perceived wellbeing is not strongly shaped by demographic profiles alone, but may be more closely related to individual work experiences, motivations for migration, or subjective expectations.

Conclusion

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Romanian emigrants perceive their post-migration wellbeing, emphasizing the mixed roles of economic advancement and social recognition. The findings show that most migrants associate emigration with improved material and symbolic outcomes, particularly through better-paid jobs and higher occupational status. While perceived wellbeing does not significantly vary across most sociodemographic categories, educational level emerges as a relevant factor, suggesting that expectations and outcomes may diverge depending on one's prior qualifications. One of the strengths of this research is the use of a composite measure that combines perceptions of both financial gain and social status change, providing a broader view of subjective wellbeing than income alone.

Beyond the descriptive and inferential results, the study highlights several implications for policy. In Romania, persistent wage disparities and limited career opportunities remain important push factors for migration. Addressing these structural drivers requires more than short-term solutions. Sustainable wage increases, investments in productive sectors, and comprehensive career development programs are necessary to create incentives for workers to remain in the country. Moreover, policies that improve mechanisms for skills recognition and reward merit could encourage not only retention but also return migration, particularly among skilled workers. For destination countries, the findings underscore the importance of improving systems for recognizing foreign qualifications and reducing occupational downgrading. Many Romanian emigrants experience a mismatch between their training and the jobs they obtain abroad, which undermines their social status even when income improves. Better alignment of migrants' skills with host-country labour market needs would enhance wellbeing outcomes while simultaneously increasing economic efficiency. This could be achieved through streamlined recognition procedures, targeted training programs, and active labour market policies designed to maximize the use of human capital. At the European level, the findings highlight the importance of preserving the free movement of labour as a central mechanism for market adjustment. Wage differentials between East and West

largely reflect differences in productivity, capital accumulation, and institutional quality, and migration represents an efficient response to these disparities. Rather than attempting to administratively engineer wage convergence, European policy should focus on reducing frictions that prevent labour from being allocated where it is most valued. Measures such as improving the portability of social rights, facilitating the recognition of qualifications, and ensuring transparent labour market information can enhance the efficiency of mobility without distorting underlying price signals. In this sense, migration should be viewed not as a challenge to be managed but as a process through which individuals respond to incentives, contributing to overall economic dynamism within the Union.

From an academic perspective, this research demonstrates the value of combining material and symbolic indicators when evaluating migration outcomes. While economic stability remains the most decisive determinant of perceived wellbeing, social recognition plays an important supporting role. Future studies should build on this approach by employing larger and more balanced samples, especially across different educational levels and destination countries. Longitudinal designs would allow researchers to track how wellbeing evolves at different stages of migration, from initial settlement to longer-term integration or potential return. Comparative studies with other Central and Eastern European countries would help determine whether the Romanian experience is unique or representative of broader regional patterns. Qualitative approaches could also complement statistical findings, capturing migrants' lived experiences of occupational mobility, identity, and recognition in host societies. In conclusion, Romanian labour migration emerges as a phenomenon broadly perceived as transformative, with the clearest benefits achieved when both income and social status increase at the same time. Economic advancement appears as the most decisive factor, yet symbolic rewards such as prestige and social recognition are indispensable to achieving a holistic sense of wellbeing. By addressing both material and social dimensions, policymakers and scholars can contribute to shaping a European labour market in which mobility is not merely an economic necessity but a genuine opportunity for improving quality of life.

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