

Migration Narratives in Europe

A Social Media Intelligence Study

Country report for Romania



A Bakamo Public  **Project for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung**

- 2019 -



Context to the Romanian Discussion on Migration

- Romania has been member of the European Union since 2007, with a population of 19 870 647 in 2015. Number of asylum seekers peaked in Romania in 2017, with 4815 cases, which is just a fraction compared to that of neighbouring countries Hungary and Bulgaria. Also, **asylum seekers in Romania make up for only 0.01% of the population, which is one of the lowest rate in the EU.**
- In comparison with other EU member states, the **topic of migration is not vital in the Romanian online discourse.** (With approximately ~364,600 posts for 1 year, the conversation on migration in Romania is only the 20th by size per population among member states.)
- The Romanian government does not oppose migrant influx to the country, and is in fact **open to participate in the EU quota system.**
- Overall, **locals are more concerned about mass emigration of Romanians** than the minor influx of refugees to the country.



*Source: europarl.europa.eu

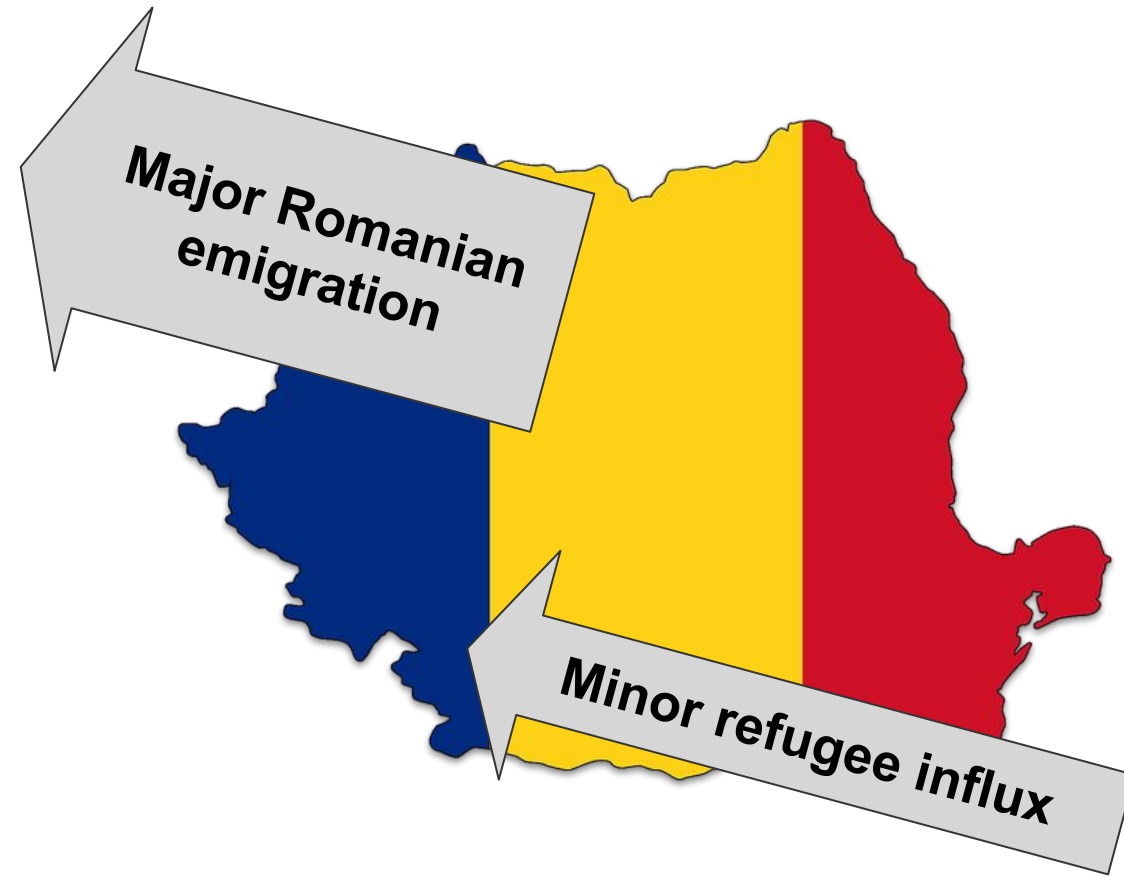


Introduction | RO

Romanian Emigration Overshadows the Miniscule Refugee Influx

Emigration of locals and the consequent labour shortage is a crippling problem in Romania – a much larger one than the influx of refugees. In fact, many Romanians are welcoming to migrants, hoping that they will make up for the loss in local population and bring economic gain to the country.

Nevertheless, the migration crisis is perceived mainly as a distant issue in Romania, and it is more understood as a problem of other European Union member states. Cases of border violation or crime committed by migrants in Romania are very rare, and thus typically receive extensive media attention but trigger little negative sentiment in locals against refugees.





Key Findings | RO

Romanians' Immigration is More Pivotal Than the Refugee Influx

Size of Pan-European Narratives

With more than half of the collected data discussing topics relating to security, the **security narrative is the strongest** in the Romanian conversation around migration. The **second most common narrative is humanitarianism**.

Local Issues

When it comes to migration, Romanians are mainly concerned about the masses of compatriots leaving the homeland. The issue of **Romanian exodus** influences all Pan-European narratives around migration.

EU & Domestic Politics

Mentions of other EU member states and key politicians dominate the conversation: Romanians mainly discuss **migration as a foreign issue that affects other countries more than Romania**.

Conversation Tone

Romanians are more concerned about their compatriots' emigration, and are often indifferent to the current migration crisis. They discuss migration in a **conversational tone, without expressing heated argument**.

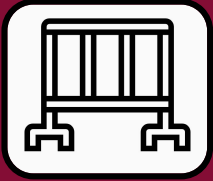
Conversation Channels

The Romanian conversation is dominated by **edited content from blogs and news sites**. Some of these platforms are interlinked and promote international stories directly to readers, often in an alarming context.



Key Findings | RO

Pan-European Narratives in Romania



Although security is the most often discussed narrative in Romania, **the threat is distant** for locals, and people often comment on foreign, rather than local events.



Humanitarianism is the second biggest narrative in Romania. Low number of refugees in Romania and the anticipated gain from their presence are two factors that drive the **mainly pro-migrant sentiment** in the narrative.



Due to an immense labour shortage, **Romanians would welcome migrants joining the local job market**, thereby lending much needed support to the local economy.



Inverse understanding of the narrative reflects that **local identity in Romania is not shrinking due to refugee influx but due to locals' emigration**.



Due to the EU's remittance of payment per accepted asylum seeker, **migration is perceived less of an economic burden and more of an economic opportunity**.

+ *Pan-European Narratives in Romania*



1.

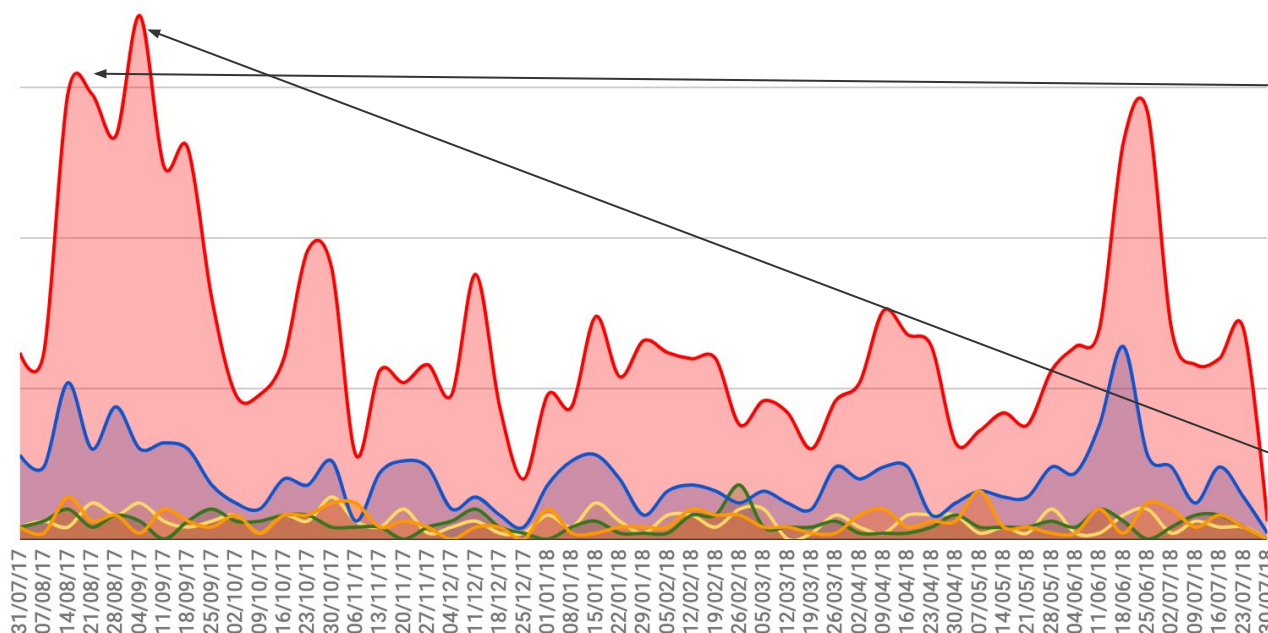


The shape of the migration discourse

Due to the small number of immigrants thus far, **Romania is generally welcoming towards refugees**. People claim that their country is unsuccessful and unattractive for migrants due to its poor economic conditions, corrupt politicians, and location outside of the Schengen area. As there are so few occasions of bigger groups of refugees being held in Romania, it makes national news for days.

Results:
~364,600

■ Demographics ■ Economy ■ Humanitarianism ■ Identity ■ Security



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs announces that **Romania is ready to donate 5,3 million euros as humanitarian assistance** to refugees from Syria with the occasion of World Humanitarian Day (19 August)

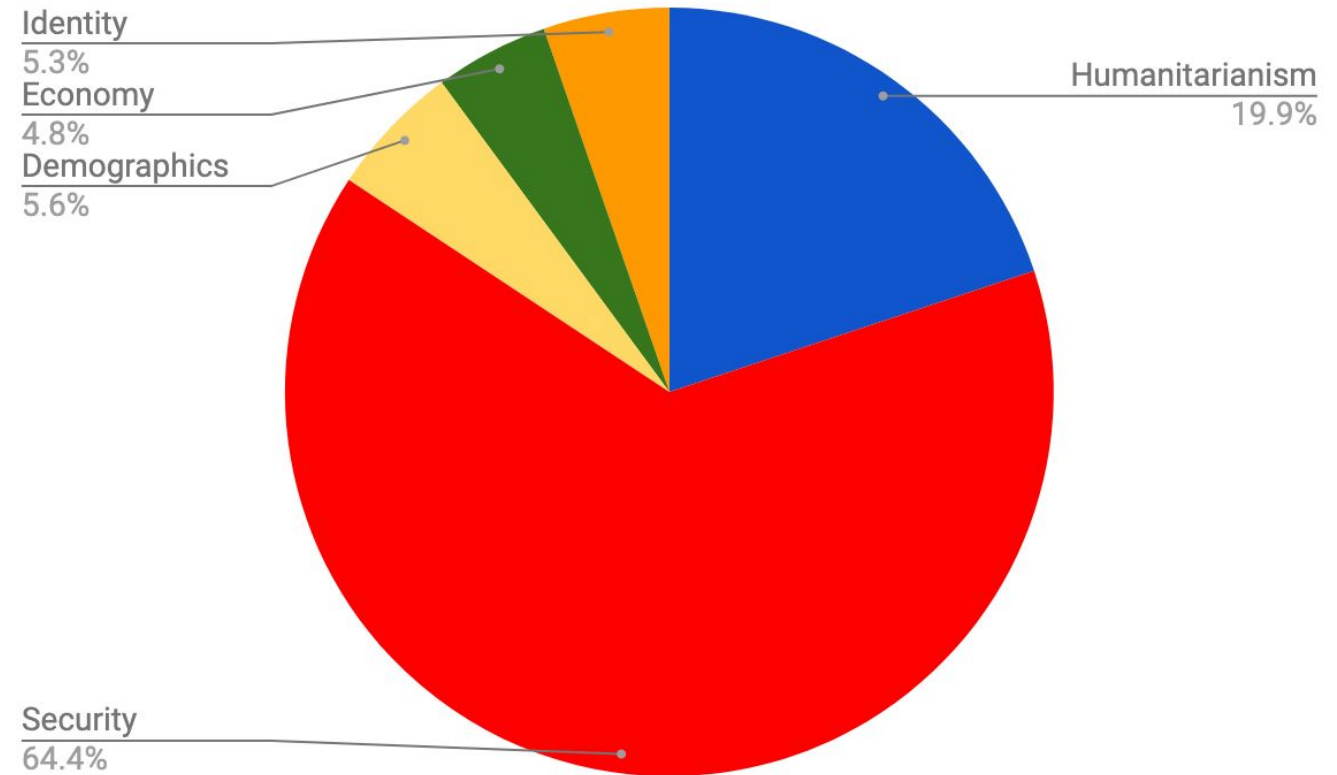
- (1) **Hungary** announced that they **will not accept the EU quotas**;
- (2) **~20 refugees getting off a train in Timisoara**, which were originally going from Bucharest to Budapest

Pan-European Narratives | RO

Context of the Romanian migration discourse

The Romanian conversation mainly focuses on the **security** aspects of migration, even though the number of refugees in Romania is minor and no major attacks committed by migrants occurred in the country.

The second biggest Pan-European narrative is **humanitarianism**, discussed in a fifth of all conversations.



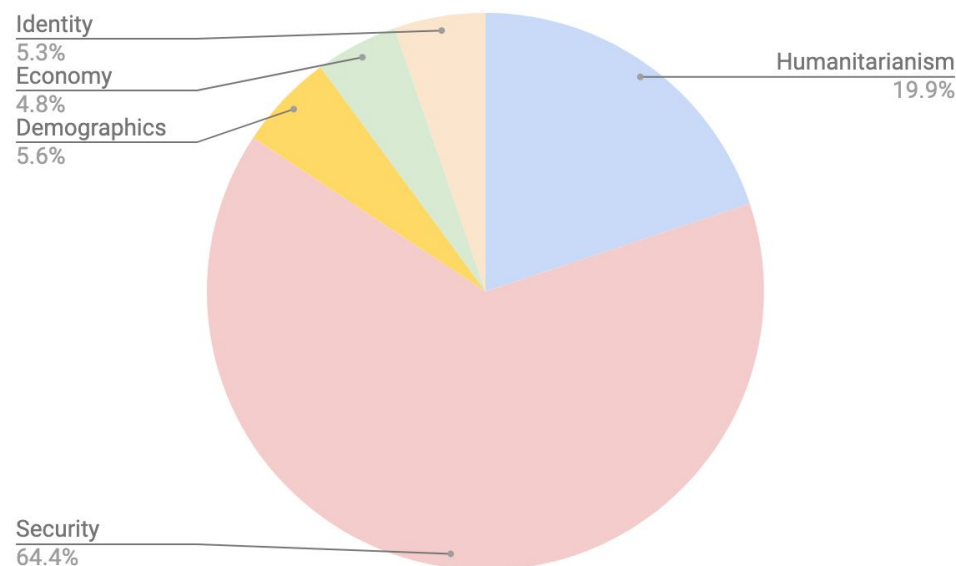
Pan-European Narratives | RO

Demographics (1)

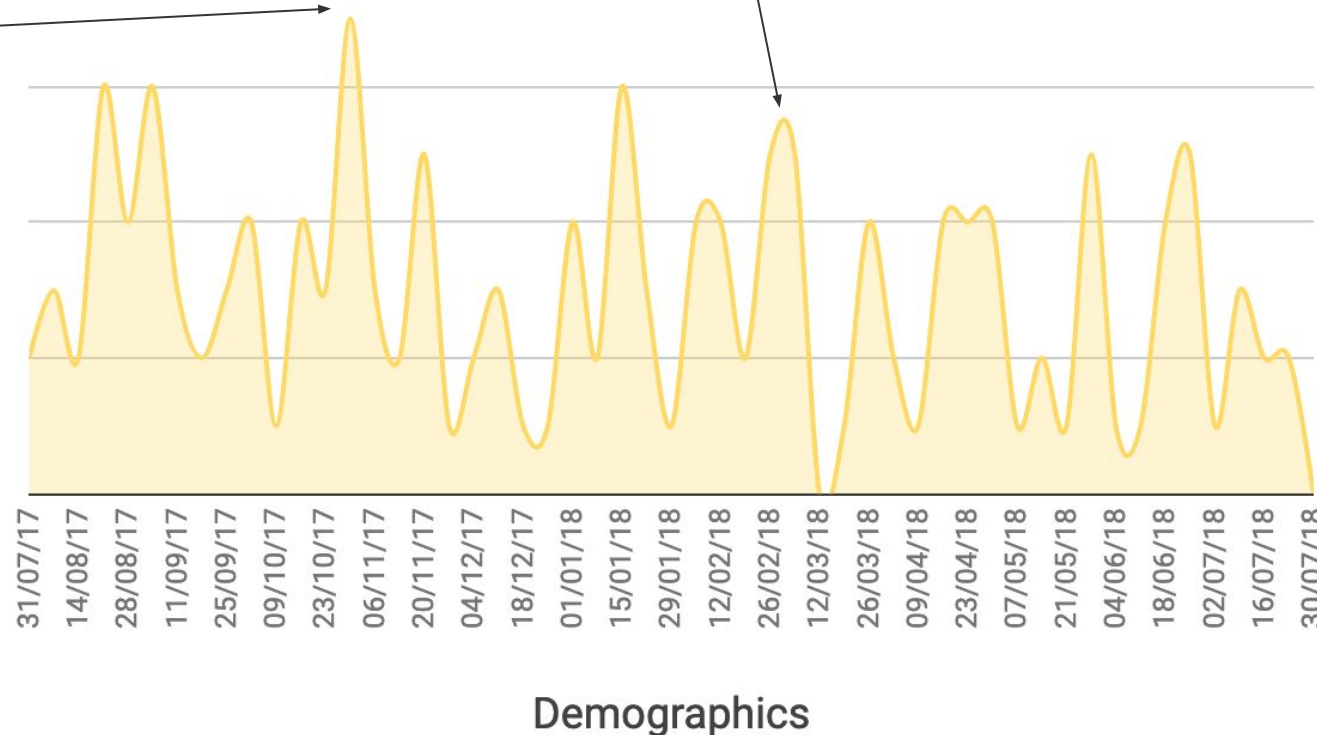
Concerns around long-term integration appear inversely in the Romanian context: **people would be open for migrants joining the local labour market**, which is struggling with labour shortage due to mass emigration of skilled Romanian workers.

Results: ~20,400 (5.6%)

Comments on Canada announcing that they want to welcome 1 million refugees over the next 3 years to secure workforce.



At a conference organised by the Research and Information Center on Immigrant Integration in Romania Luciana Lazarescu said that **the country is not conscious of it's deficit on the labour market and doesn't have a strategy to immigrate workforce.****





Pan-European Narratives | RO

Demographics (2)

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Immigrants are lower skilled than locals, and their contribution will not compare to that of skilled Romanians

*Most immigrants, **legal or illegal**, have much lower levels of education than the native population of Western democracies. A democrat who insists that people who did not finish high school or college, can bring significant benefits to an economy than the host countries qualified citizens, does not seem to think too rationally.*

Foreign workers might only come here for access to the Schengen area

*The General Inspectorate for Immigration recommended to Romanian employers to be cautious when selecting foreign workers, as **in some cases they merely seek to obtain a residence permit for further illegal migration to Schengen countries.***

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Unfavourable imbalance in workforce's export and import

*We export the most workforce and import the least. If we need to compensate this workforce deficit, we will not be able to do it with selective immigration, because **we have so few migrants and so many job vacancies***

NEUTRAL VOICES

Guest workers avoid Romania due to low wages

*The number of **foreigners from outside the EU who choose Romania is low** because they face several difficulties: **language barriers**, the **limit applied for the average wage for an immigrant worker** and poor registration of foreigners in the statistics of institutions responsible for the labor market.*

Pan-European Narratives | RO

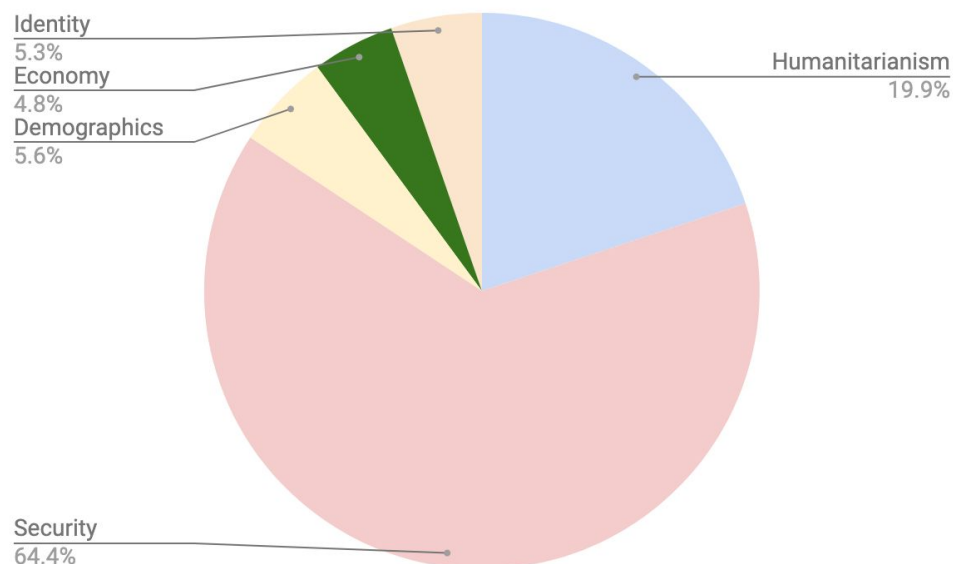
Economy (1)

Due to the small number of **migrants arriving in Romania**, locals find them less of an economic burden and more of an **economic opportunity**, with EU subsidies supporting refugees' integration.

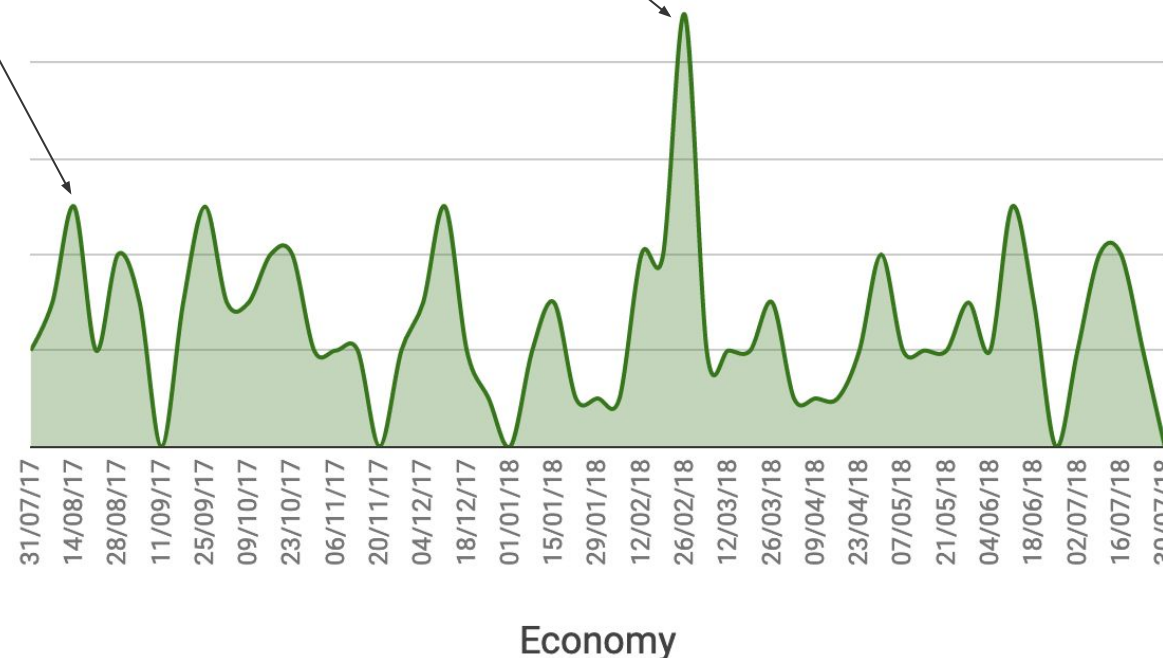
On the other hand, **Romanians are more concerned about the crippling economic consequences of locals emigrating**, may they be highly skilled or without professional knowledge.

Results:
~17,500
(4.8%)

Romania is with the second biggest number of emigrants after Syria. The active part of the country leaves for studies or due to lack of well paid professional jobs.**



The Government promises a more than **25% raise for doctors for the sake of stopping their massive emigration** from the country.*



Pan-European Narratives | RO

Economy (2)

NEUTRAL VOICES

Economic burden of locals emigrating

*It should not be forgotten that the provision of medical units and the conditions for professional growth are two essential conditions for any young doctor. **Tax elimination by itself will not stop the exodus of doctors** (...)*

*Everyone who owns a business knows that one of its most important resources is the human resource. **Due to the mass emigration of talented workers, Romania is a market where employers are must fight hard for employees** and it is quite difficult for them to form and retain a team.*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Immigrants are an economic opportunity instead of a burden, especially based on the EU funding provided for welcoming them

*Romania has the **capacity to welcome immigrants**.*

*The **EU will reduce the funds** of patriotic **nations that do not accept migrants***

Pan-European Narratives | RO

Humanitarianism (1)

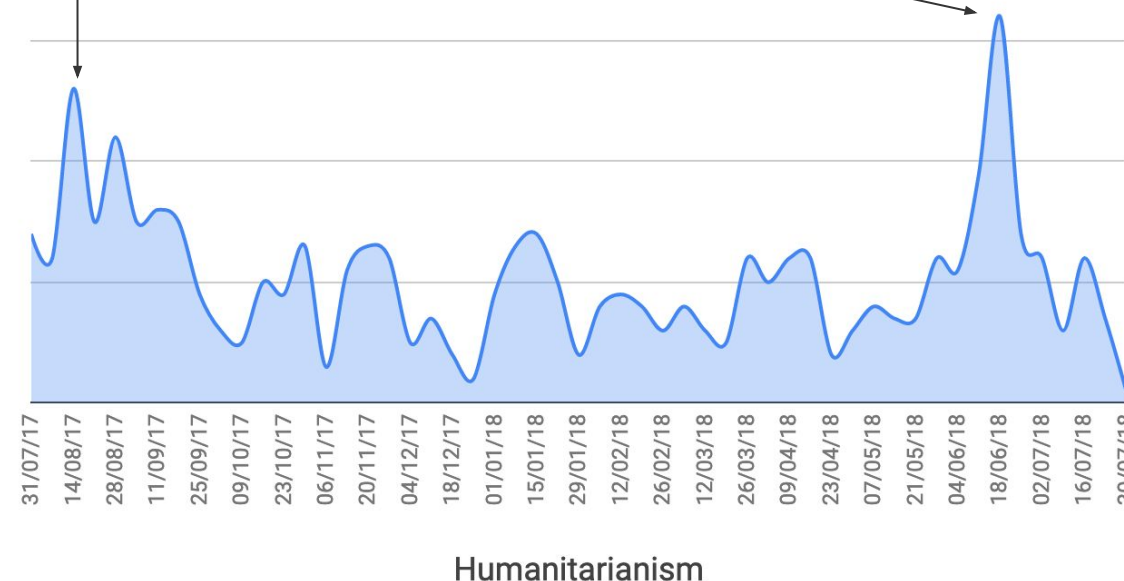
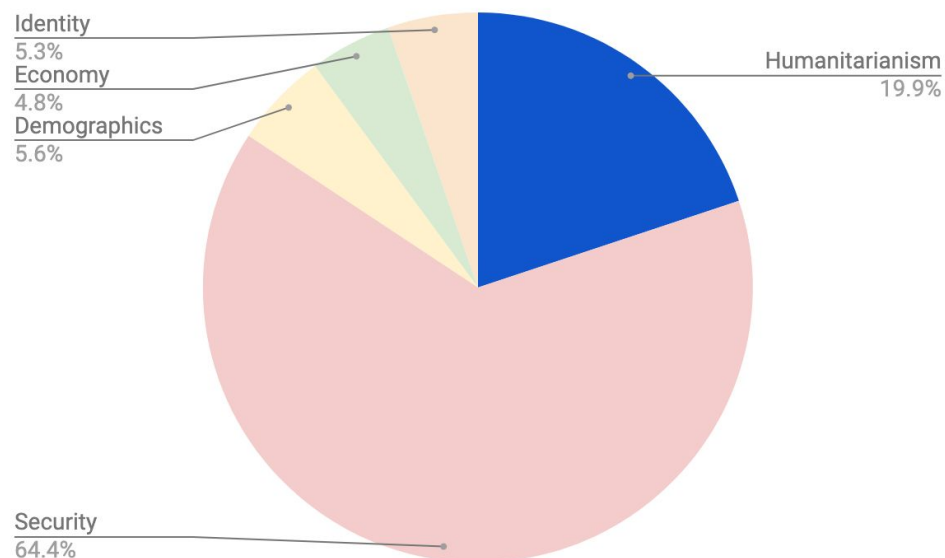
Humanitarianism is the **second biggest narrative** in Romania, with mainly pro-migrant voices.

It seems apparent that Romania's openness, on one hand, is **due to the low number of incoming refugees**, and on the other, is sometimes inspired by the **anticipation of economic gain** (i.e. European Union funding per asylums granted).

Results:
~72,500
(19.9%)

The Foreign Affairs Minister, Teodor Melescanu announces that **Romania made an offer to relocate and welcome 1942 refugees** from Greece and Italy.

After comments from the US that the children of immigrants should be shot, **articles discuss the separation of children from their families**, Melania Trump visiting separated children; news about the Trump administration's actions.





PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Romanian authorities support immigrants arriving to the country by boat

*A **boat with 69 migrants** was identified Sunday morning at 10 miles from Mangalia by the officers of the Coast Guard. The Turkish-flagged ship had technical problems and was taking water, so **the Romanian authorities intervention was on time.***

Integrational events between locals and refugees

*„Refugee Welcome”: **Football match between young people and refugees** from the Maramures Regional center*

Eastern and Western perspectives on globalisation

*In my world, opening up to the West means exchanging ideas. In theirs, foreigners buy and control our country. In my world, **Syrian immigrants represent a humanitarian crisis,** and to them, a **group that threatens their safety.***

Pan-European Narratives | RO

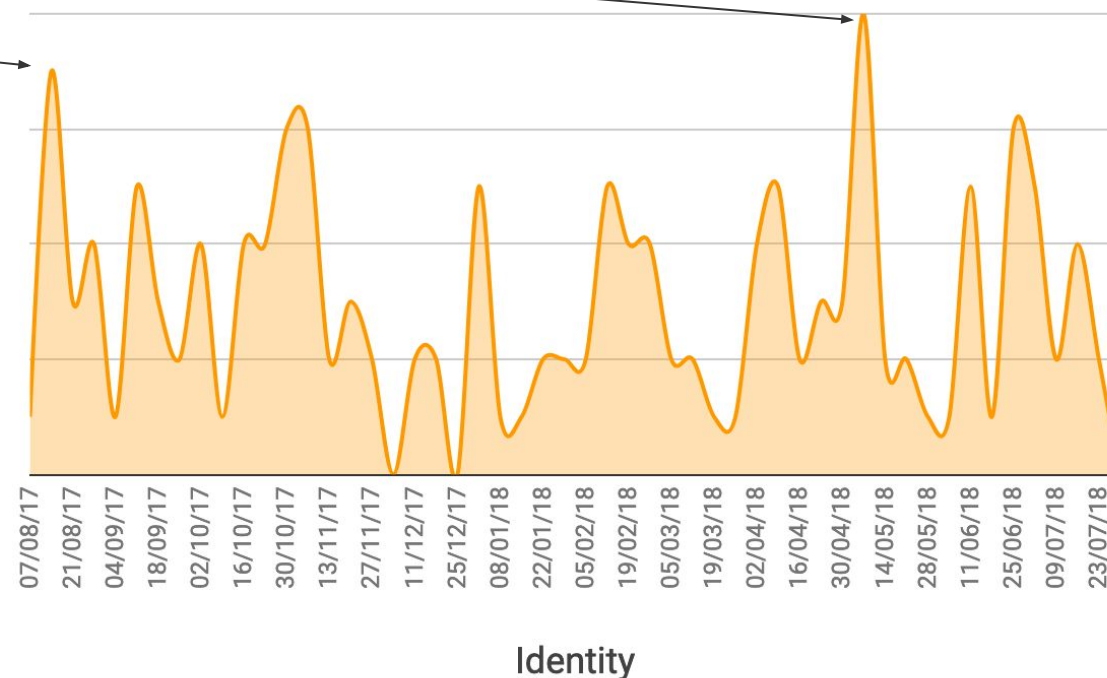
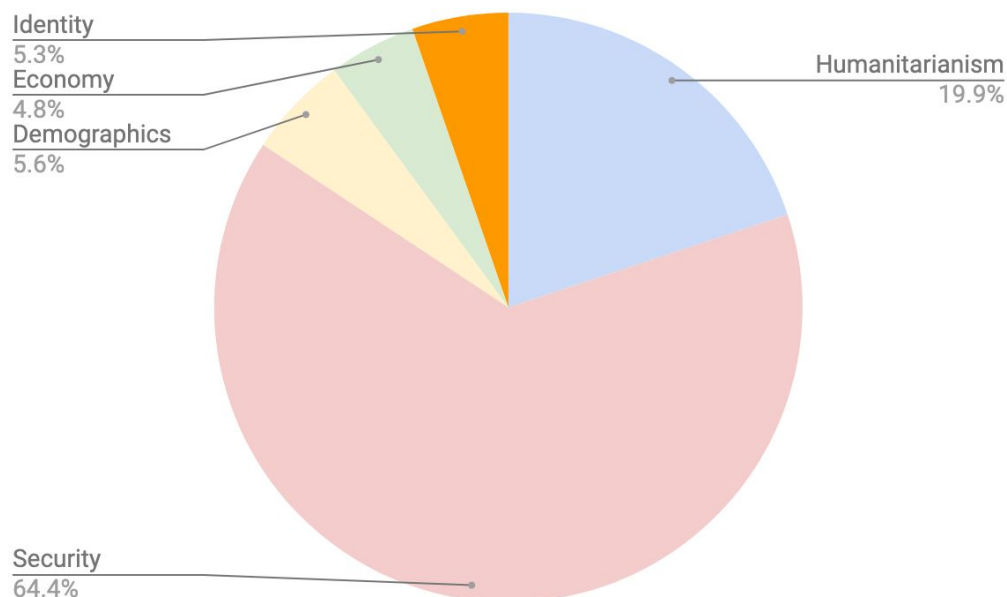
Identity and Customs (1)

Similarly to demographics, the narrative is present in Romania inversely: **local identity is not shrinking due to migrants influx but due to Romanians' constant emigration**. Local musicians, doctors, even priests emigrate to work in countries with better economic prospects, preventing Romanian culture from thriving.

Results:
~19,300
(5.3%)

The shrinking identity: in mainly Hungarian minority regions, **Romanians ask for the help of the state** cause they feel it is hard to practice their national identity, **since more and more of them emigrate**.

Besides the mass emigration from the country, **people talk about the shift from rural areas to urban ones**, thus making them agglomerated and overwhelmed, for example in case of Bucharest and Cluj





Pan-European Narratives | RO

Identity and Customs (2)

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migration poses challenges for the Christian identity in Europe

*During the meeting matters such as the **social and pastoral challenges of migration**, accelerated secularisation and the need to reaffirm Europe's Christian identity, were further discussed.*

*The **integration of Muslim refugees** or of those who come from other cultures is **impossible**.*

Immigrants are not willing to integrate into Romanian society or follow local regulations

*The **DESTRUCTION** of Europeans by governors and the "civil society" is to fill the continent with Islamists: first Germany, then the rest, including Romania. **Will Islamists refuse the Romanian identification system?***

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

A diverse Romanian society will only benefit the country

*The three topics proposed in plenary sessions were: **Identity and diversity in an intercultural society**; How prepared are we as a society for the integration of immigrants and refugees? and **The contribution of different cultures to Romanian cultural heritage**. All of which has generated extensive discussions among participants, fact that stands as testimony to the **growing interest and need to bring these essential social topics into the public agenda**.*

There are other groups in Romanian society who pose bigger threats than immigrants

*The approximately **4,000 former prisoners who will burst through the streets without any preparation to this situation are infinitely more dangerous to society than some people**, be they from a different culture, fleeing bombs, just wanting to survive.*

Pan-European Narratives | RO

Security (1)

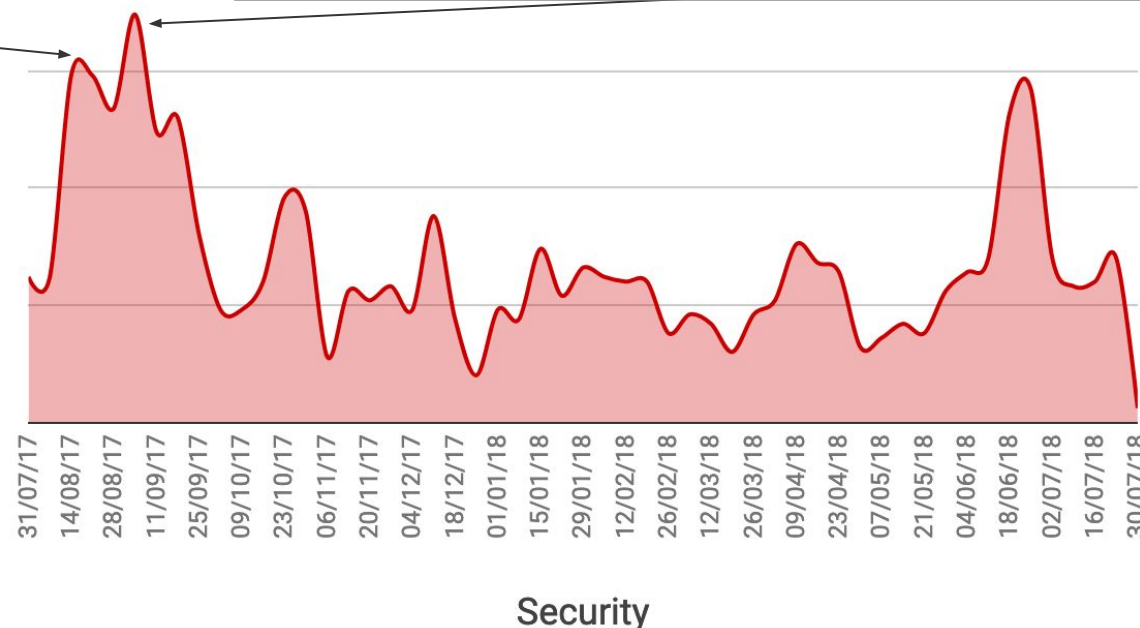
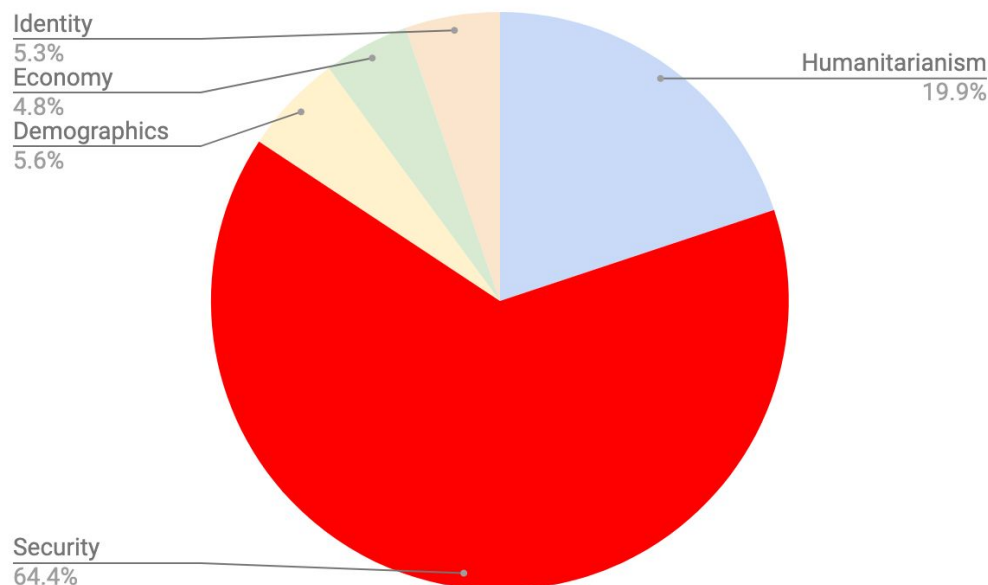
Security is the strongest narrative in the Romanian conversation, but, since the actual number of refugees arriving in the country is one of the lowest in the EU, locals perceive the threat posed by migration as distant.

Illegal border crossings and **isolated attacks** are the most discussed topics in this narrative.

Results:
~234,800
(64.4%)

While visiting Romania, **Macron said that he is open to add Romania and Bulgaria to the Schengen area**, but there is a need to further talks.
People argue pro and contra

Around **35 refugees from Iraq and Syria were caught in the city of Timisoara**, south of Romania





ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Illegal border crossing is the top issue in terms of security threats in Romania

*A ship with immigrants was **intercepted on Sunday by Romanian border police.***

*3 days after Hungary and Bulgaria closing theirs, **Romania and the Black Sea are at risk to become the next major route for migration.***

*It is not the first case of illegal entry across the maritime border of Romania this year, it is already the sixth. **So far 482 migrants were rescued from the sea.** The 66 persons identified today were taken by the General Inspectorate for Immigration, and then were sent to various reception centers in the country.*

*After preliminary checks, border guards established that the persons concerned are citizens of Iran and Iraq, four adults, aged 26 and 38 years and two minors, aged 3 and 16 years, seeking asylum in our country. **The persons concerned have stated that they intended to illegally cross the border, in order to reach a Schengen state.***

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Sexual assault committed by immigrants

*It started in Romania too: **a refugee sexually harassed a little 12 year old girl** close to the Hurmuzach high school in Radauti.*

NEUTRAL VOICES

Romania is a transit country

*F Cenad (names are changed) appeared to be wanting to **help T.M, an Iranian citizen aged 43 with refugee documents from Sweden, to exit the country,** driving a vehicle registered also is Sweden.*

*Romania is a **transit country**, the number of refugees is relatively small.*

+ *Local Issues in Romania Around Migration*



2.



Local Issues | RO

The Romanian Exodus

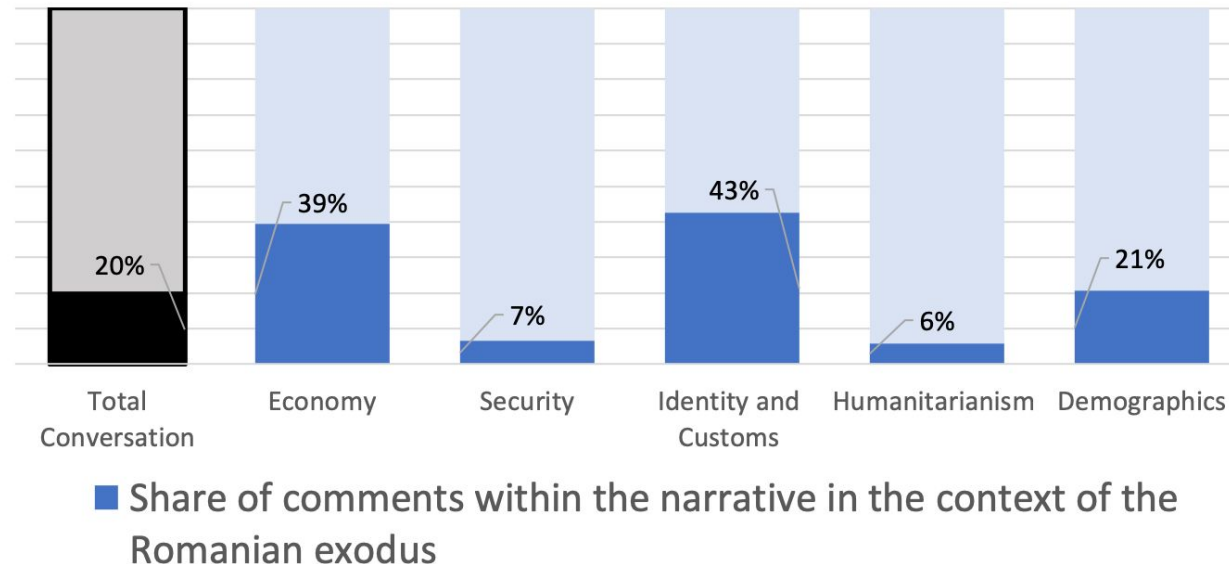
Almost 3 million Romanians emigrated from the country in the past 10 years (minus 5 Romanians in each hour), to live and work in other Southern- or Western-European countries. People in Romania are more concerned about who will populate the country in 100 years than the miniscule number of asylum seekers arriving in the country.

Estimates on the number of Romanians who left the country from 2007 to 2017 are about 3.4 million people, a figure that places Romania second in the world after Syria, regarding emigration, according to the UN (...)

*Romania has one of the lowest percentages of residents from outside the European Union, 0.3%, thus ranking the last in the EU in this respect, along with Slovenia and Slovakia. **Of foreigners immigrating to Romania, only 9% hold a labor contract.** The main reasons for foreigners coming to Romania are family reunion (43%) and 23% for studies.*

Romanians' emigration to other countries is widely discussed, and the topic infuses almost a fifth of all conversation around migration.

In this context, Romanians are most concerned about a **shrinking local identity**, and the **economic consequences of skilled workers' emigration**.



+ *Migration in the Context of European- and Domestic Politics*



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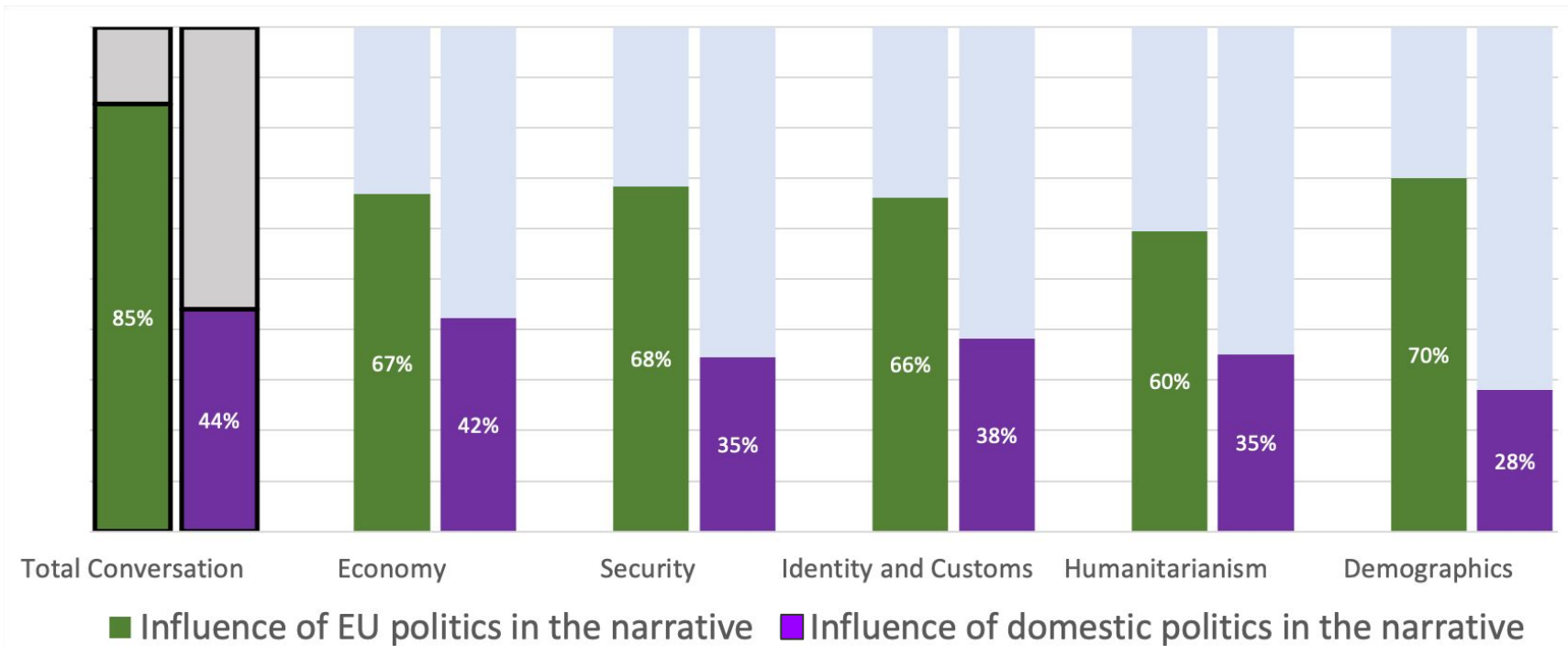
European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | RO

Migration Perceived As an Issue of Foreign Countries

In each Pan-European narrative, migration is most often discussed in context with the EU's member states and key politicians.

This reflects that due to the low number of refugees and the distant perception of the issues caused, **Romanians mainly discuss migration as a foreign issue that affects other countries more than the homeland.**

Albeit to smaller extent, this also holds true for the local narrative of Romanian emigration.



+ *Discussion Tone in Romania*



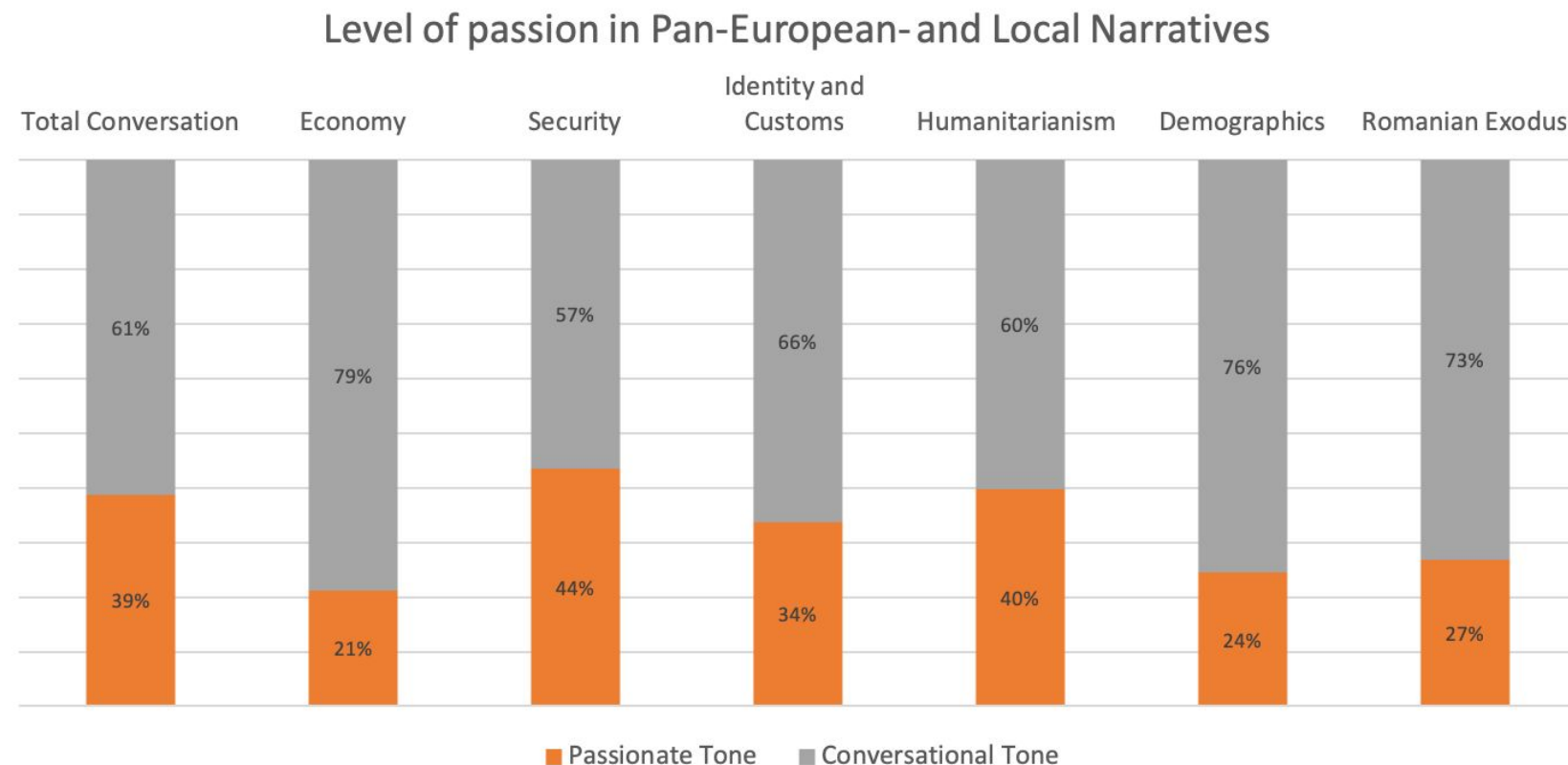
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Discussion Tone | RO

Romanians Are Indifferent To Migration

Most Romanian posts, comments and articles discuss migration in a neutral tone. People are neither anti-, nor pro-immigration – they are **more concerned about immigrated Romanians**, and the country's economic circumstances in general.

Romanian emigration is discussed factually in the context of the migration crisis. Without expressing a lot of passion, people claim that immigrant influx might provide remedy for labour shortage due to the Romanian exodus.



+ *Conversation Channels*



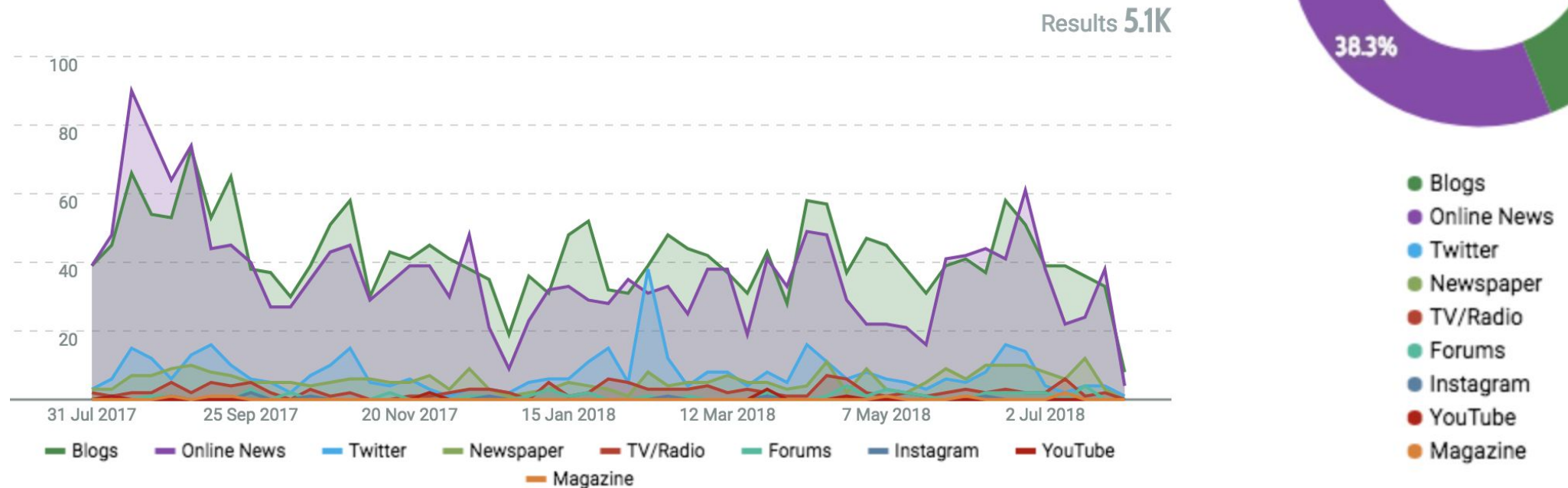
5.



Channel Distribution | RO

Blogs and Online News Are Most Prevalent

Majority of the Romanian online public conversation about migration takes place on **news sites operating as blogs and other online news platforms**. Twitter, forums, and Instagram account for less than 10% of the conversation.





Most Influential Authors | RO

Journalists' Posts Trigger Highest Engagement

Apart from the central news agency and local news driving the conversation on migration, there was also a number of interlinked websites, some now offline pushing immediate international news regarding the subject, often in an alarming, passionate fashion through direct-to-reader channels.

Most Active Sites in the Overall Conversation	Description
centruldepresa.ro	news aggregator, agency
discard.ro	news aggregator, now offline!
ziara-pe-net.ro	online news
adevalarul.ro	online news
agerpres.ro	central news agency
blacknews.ro	International news” scaremongering
stiripesurse.ro	breaking news and notifications, connected to blacknews.ro