EAST MEETS WEST: GLOBAL LABOUR MOBILITY AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE IN THE ROMANIAN WORKFORCE

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, Romania has become an increasingly attractive destination for migrant workers from various parts of Asia, particularly countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Nepal, India and Bangladesh. This emerging trend, shaped by global labour mobility and internal demographic shifts, has introduced new dimensions to the local socio-economic and cultural landscape. The presence of Asian workers across multiple sectors, most notably construction, manufacturing, and services, has brought about a dynamic space of cultural contact, negotiation, and exchange. This paper investigates how globalization-driven labour flows have facilitated not only economic interdependence but also everyday forms of cultural interaction between Eastern Asian migrant workers and Romanian employers, colleagues, and local communities. Drawing from interdisciplinary perspectives in intercultural communication, globalization studies, and cultural exchange theory, the research explores how cultural values, behaviours, and communicative practices are perceived, adapted, and sometimes resisted in shared workspaces. The aim is to provide a contextual understanding of the mutual (though often asymmetric) process of cultural exchange and to highlight both the opportunities and tensions that arise when different cultural systems converge in localized environments. The study seeks to contribute to broader discussions on how labour migration reshapes cultural dynamics in host societies and what this reveals about the contemporary patterns of globalization in Eastern Europe.

Keywords: globalization, labour migration, intercultural exchange, Asian workforce, Romania

INTRODUCTION

What happens when a historically emigrant country becomes, almost overnight, a reluctant host? Romania, once emblematic of outbound labour mobility within the European Union, now finds itself at the crossroads of global labour realignment. The very demographic exodus that saw millions of Romanians build futures in Western Europe has, in a striking twist of post-global logic, created labour vacuums at home, now being filled by a new wave of workers from Asia. This reversal is more than an economic necessity; it is a cultural inflection point. The arrival of these workers, many from South and Southeast Asia, is rewriting the narrative of national identity, social belonging, and the invisible boundaries of Romanian society.

In recent years, Romania has shifted from being a country predominantly characterized by emigration to one increasingly reliant on foreign labour. This reversal has been

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