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New Trends of Thought in Response to Post-Pandemic Work Precariousness Among Second-Generation Romanian Citizens in Spain

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Abstract: Drawing on 65 in-depth interviews with young Romanians between 22 and 33 years old, the contribution of this article is to offer an innovative analysis of the work experiences of second-generation young people who, having studied and completed their degrees in Spain during the pandemic, are developing their skills and creativity in a difficult labour market. I argue that unlike their parents' generation, who in many cases have returned home or practice mobility, this generation wishes to remain in Spain. Consequently, the (im)mobility experienced by second-generation young people has become a fundamental post-pandemic trend. Three interlinked profiles were identified: (1) young graduates doing work for which they are overqualified, who want to find better jobs; (2) young people who have completed master's or doctoral degrees and now have their own business, are applying for research funding or are unemployed; and (3) unemployed graduates who are making a living from self-employment or aspire to have their own business. The conclusions highlight new trends of thought among young Romanians educated and trained during the pandemic in terms of how to overcome work precariousness and live in Spain.

Keywords: work; Romanians; second generation; precariousness; creativity

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the map of society around the world, particularly affecting the lives of young people in terms of work instability and precariousness [1–3]. Based on 65 in-depth interviews with second-generation young people in Spain, the aim of this article is to focus on Romanian graduates and to capture the essence of their thinking by analysing how they are overcoming work precariousness after completing their degrees during the pandemic. The article's contribution is to examine these experiences and thereby explain how these individuals are struggling with precariousness and seeking new work opportunities to continue living in Spain [4,5]. The pandemic years contributed to a shift in thinking about work and professional life among the young people who were completing their degrees during a difficult period for society. The lockdown period also helped them learn more about the Romanian community and the lives and concerns of their parents and family, examining their roots through a discussion of Romanian traditions.

This research examines the following questions:

How did these young people study in Spain during the pandemic, and how did it affect their way of thinking?
How do they perceive their post-pandemic professional and/or work life? What are their current professional and personal experiences?
What are their work prospects?
What future plans do they have?

This paper argues that unlike their parents, who sought and continue to devise strategies to return to their country or move to other countries, young Romanian graduates

are planning to remain in Spain. This research hence contributes to existing debates on mobility by revealing that second-generation (im)mobility may become a fundamental post-pandemic trend. It is important to note that in contrast to their parents, none of whom had higher-education qualifications, these second-generation young Romanians have completed their graduate studies in Spain. However, unlike their Spanish peers, whose parents have more resources to help them exercise mobility and look for work, young Romanians are having to find employment on their own. Having been unable to find employment that suits their qualifications, they are looking for new ways to achieve success in the labour market. Currently, far from feeling "out of place" [6], these young people are striving for a way of life that allows them to continue living in Spain even after their parents have returned to Romania. Against this backdrop, they are finding themselves living in houses rented or bought by their parents, having to look for new ways to obtain employment that will help them overcome professional difficulties. This article distinguishes three approaches that young people are using in response to the professional situations they are encountering: (1) young graduates working in jobs for which they are overqualified at the same time as they plan to find better work; (2) young people who have completed master's or doctoral degrees and are working in jobs for which they are overqualified while planning to find a better job, create their own business or apply for research grants; and (3) unemployed young graduates who are working for themselves in the search for professional fulfilment, or who intend to open their own business. The desire to live and work in Spain is common to all three groups. Following the theoretical framework, this paper offers a brief overview of the Romanian community in Spain and introduces the second generation of Romanians in the context of the Spanish labour market.

The methodology is then explained, followed by the interviewees' analysis of their post-pandemic work experiences and their future prospects. The conclusions focus on these young people's new approaches to finding work and developing their skills and talents in the country where they arrived as children and where they have been educated.

2. Theoretical Framework: Linking Cultural Integration to Work

The literature examining the second generation of young immigrants focuses on culture and belonging [7], or the reconstruction of identity through work [8]. More specifically, Spanish authors have highlighted this group's degree of linguistic and cultural integration [9,10]. For instance, in their article on the linguistic integration of Romanians in Catalonia, the authors of [11] conclude that second-generation Romanians feel closer to the Catalan than to the Romanian culture, which is practically 'invisible' to them. Authors have also examined the integration of second-generation immigrants, concluding that differences manifest themselves in the exclusion and discrimination faced by children and young people in schools and universities [12–14]. There is agreement regarding the need to eliminate barriers to the labour integration of second-generation young people. Authors have also started to address the issue of dual citizenship, but they have not specifically focused on second-generation immigrants [15].

At the global level, authors have analysed the link between precariousness and work among younger people, emphasising the inequalities in the labour market [16–18]. Transitions between studies and work have been identified as a complex area that can affect the lives of young people when they reach maturity.

However, few authors in Spain have conducted research regarding second-generation Romanian immigrant graduates and their work [19]. Authors [20] have studied skilled young people who have arrived from Romania and noted their strategies involving the mobilisation of universities or social networks, building pathways that fit into the dynamics of the Spanish labour market. Recently, in their work on the career paths of immigrants in the Netherlands, the authors of [21] have argued that there are few differences between the first and second generations, with young people at least initially relegated to work for which they are overqualified despite having completed university degrees. In the specific case of second-generation Romanians in Spain, few of their parents had been to university.

Those who had studied in Romania had to wait some time for their degrees to be validated, and even then, remained in jobs below their level of training [22]. However, their children have studied at Spanish universities and have or should have the same opportunities as their Spanish peers. This shows the evolution of integration processes for Romanians in Spain over time, and it is also reflected in the literature. For instance, ref. [23] recently noted that while there are three communities of Romanians integrated in Spain—the immigrant associations, professionals and young people—and linked to each other through the same network, the young community is the most dynamic and integrated, and even the most mobile in terms of looking for work. As a result of the pandemic, however, young people have changed their thinking about exercising mobility to find employment.

Authors worldwide have studied the concepts of work linked to the resilience and agency of young people and to job insecurity [24–28]. Conversely, other authors [29] have introduced the concept of social exclusion to explore the precariousness of work for immigrants during the pandemic. They have emphasised social exclusion and inclusion as a multidimensional, relative and structural process and found that migrants can be both included and excluded, not only in the context of their host society, but also in relation to their community of origin.

There is some incipient investigation of work among young second-generation Romanians during and after the pandemic, with a focus on nationality. Research in this regard has been linked to citizens of Roma ethnicity and their integration into the international labour market [30], restrictive measures during the pandemic [31], digitalisation and remote work [32] and social development and impacts on loneliness and mental health among young people [33]. The pandemic years changed trends of thought among young Romanians, and this is the innovative contribution of this article: to connect their thoughts to their careers, reporting creative new job search ideas linked to (im)mobility [34]. Scholars [35] have previously investigated creativity at work and its association with job insecurity, creating the concept of 'flexploitation'. Other research [36] has examined work and precariousness in the cultural sector and invoked the ideals of fun, authenticity and creative freedom. In this regard, authors [37] have analysed and highlighted the agency of young people, specifically women in Aotearoa (New Zealand), and their capacity for innovative thinking during the pandemic, noting how this period "of social disruption affected their future and their imaginations of themselves" [35] p. 1.

This article enriches the existing literature on the second generation of Romanians in Spain, describing how graduates create new trends of thought as they seek employment, overcoming the professional barriers that their parents encountered or continue to encounter in Spain.

3. The Romanian Community in Spain: Towards a New Generation?

The immigration of Romanians to Spain began in the 1990s after the fall of the communist regime and increased in 2002 with the opening of the Schengen border for Romania and Bulgaria, allowing free movement across borders and the creation of immigration networks [38]. The Romanian community in Spain exceeded one million people for the first time in 2007, after Romania joined the European Union (EU), and it has subsequently continued to grow. According to the Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration (2024) [39], the community of Romanians in Spain numbered 1,110,373 people by the end of 2023 (Figure 1), of whom only 339,558 were affiliated with the social security system (51% men and 49% women), while 57,840 (Figure 2) people were unemployed. Romanians generally work under the general regime (227,014), with 23,863 people employed as domestic workers and 46,880 registered as self-employed.

The families that have arrived in Spain in the last three decades continue to practice mobility, remaining personally and professionally active both in Spain and in their country of origin. The majority own homes in Romania for their retirement, while younger families bought homes in Spain. However, a significant percentage of the Romanian community is

fighting against job insecurity [19]. These people are still deciding where they want to live in the future, with potential plans including a return to their country of origin [40–43].

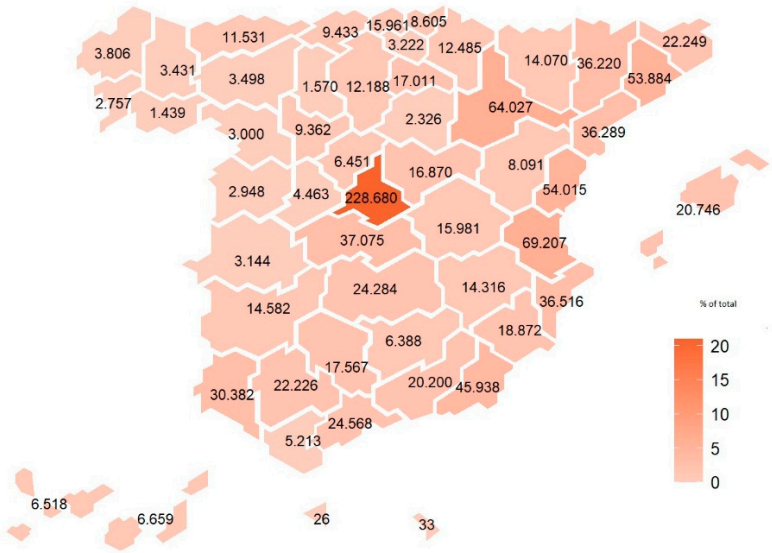

Figure 1. Romanian nationals resident in Spain by Province (2024) [39]. Total and percentage of resident foreigners.

Figure 2. Unemployed nationals of Romania by Autonomous Community, September 2023. Number and percentage of total number of registered foreign unemployed. Source: Author, using data from Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration (2024) [39].

There is a growing phenomenon in Spain that the literature on the Romanian community has scarcely addressed: the second generation. According to [44] p. 1 "...the second generation of immigrants is made up of people born in Spain to foreign parents or brought to the country before turning 12". In the specific case of this study, all of the interviewees arrived with their parents when they were 6 or 7 years old and were subsequently educated as part of the Spanish culture, studying and living alongside Spanish classmates as schoolchildren and university students. But despite this process of integration into Spain, these second-generation young people remain in a state of professional precariousness, as well as having their own idiosyncrasy: they are Romanians and do not know their own language; they speak Spanish without an accent, but they are not Spanish. As ref. [10], p. 1 rightly argues, "belonging, sense of place and feelings of identity among young Romanian

immigrants in Spain are a crucial issue at the current time". This group is looking for a "compass" so it can find its place in Spain. This explains the need for this research to pave the way for second-generation Romanians in Spain to develop a particular type of "mixed" identity.

4. The Second Generation of Romanians in the Context of the Spanish Labour Market

This research was conducted in the context of the Spanish labour market for young people, considering that young second-generation Romanians are citizens of the European Union. The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated precarious circumstances that young people were already facing [45]. Spain has had the highest level of youth unemployment among developed EU Member States in recent years, although the percentage of unemployed young people did fall from 40.7% in 2020 to 32.3% in 2022 [46]. In the case of young Romanians between 20 and 33 years old, data from the [39] only record 20% as being unemployed. They are usually found working in jobs for which they are overqualified, or working without an employment contract. Young people face issues including the key triggering factors of high rents and low salaries, preventing them from becoming independent and leaving the parental household. Their emancipation rate is stagnant at 15.9%, below the average European rate of 31.9% [47].

High levels of temporary employment represent another notable characteristic affecting young people. According to ref. [47], 42.1% of second-generation young people have temporary employment contracts. In this context, university and post-university training is far from being in line with the demand for labour. Romanian graduates who have completed their degrees and are living in Spain are in the same situation [48]. Although there are no official Spanish quantitative data on how many of them are in jobs for which they are overqualified, data provided by the [49] Romanian Embassy in Spain in collaboration with the [50] report that more than 60% of Romanian graduates living in Spain are working below their level of training.

Statistics from [39,46] do not include specific data on the total number of Romanian graduates in Spain during the pandemic. However, according to the information offered by ref. [49], in the last three years, 270 young Romanians have completed undergraduate degrees, 45 have obtained master's degrees from Spanish universities and 15 have obtained their PhD (Figures 3–5).

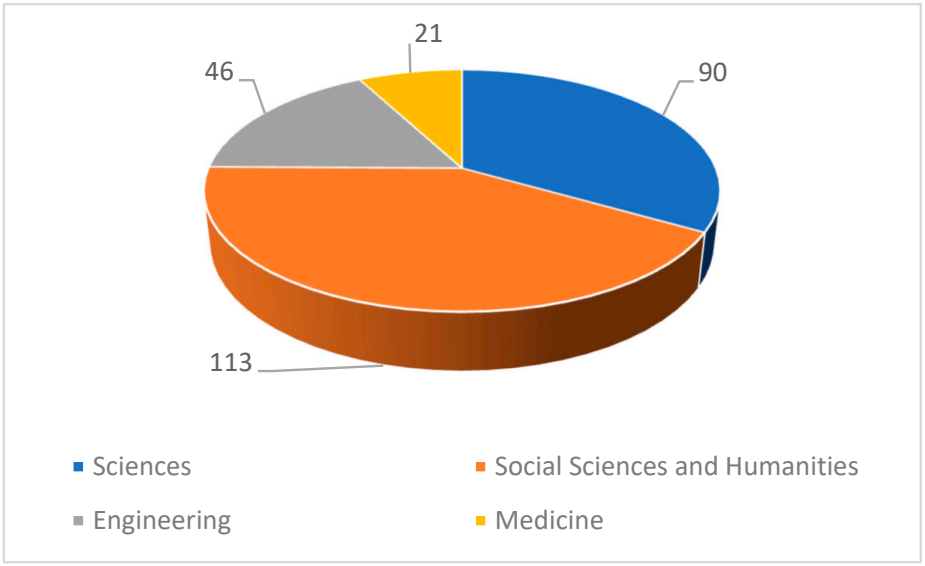

Figure 3. Romanians completing undergraduate degrees during the pandemic. Source: Author, using data from the Romanian Embassy in Spain (2024) [49].

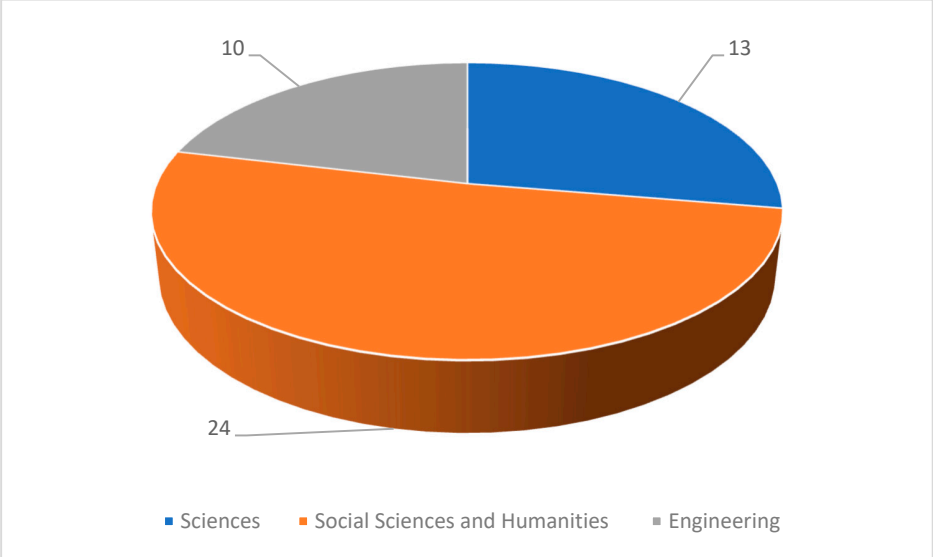

Figure 4. Romanians completing master's degrees during the pandemic. Source: Author, using data from the Romanian Embassy in Spain (2024) [49].

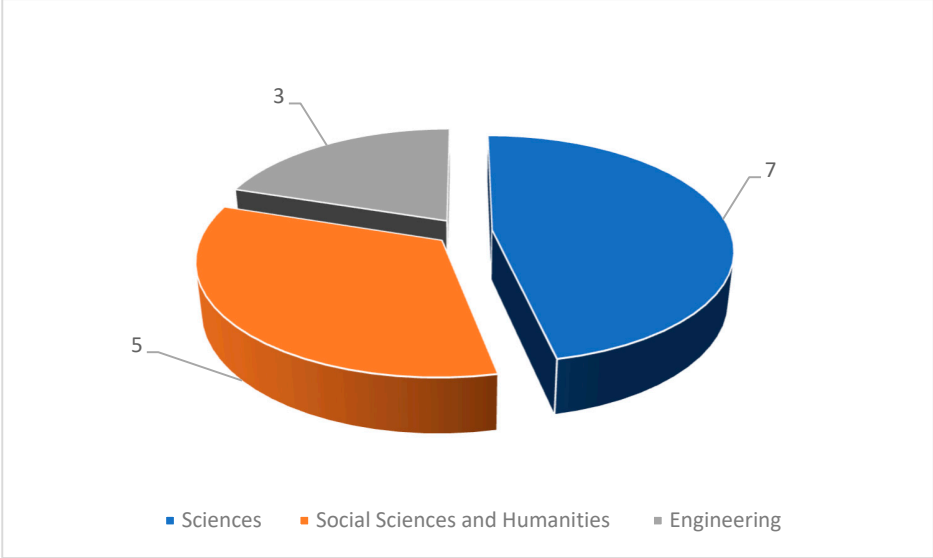

Figure 5. Romanians obtaining a PhD during the pandemic. Source: Author, using data from the Romanian Embassy in Spain (2024) [49].

In 2021, the Spanish government launched a 'Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan' in response to the pandemic, stressing that young people must come first (p. 3) and that they needed job opportunities in new professions and specialisations aligned with their needs and potential, especially in areas suffering from the phenomenon of brain drain [51] p. 6. But three years after the publication of the plan, young graduates continue to suffer from high levels of unemployment: at the end of 2023, the country's youth unemployment rate (for people up to 29 years old) was the highest in the EU at 40.1%, almost 10 percentage points higher than the previous year (30.5%) [46].

One of the structural problems affecting the Spanish labour market is this inability to absorb qualified people, meaning they end up in jobs for which they are overqualified [47]. Although people with university degrees have better working conditions than those without, the economic benefit of acquiring institutionalised cultural capital (university degrees and achievements) is much lower than in countries like Germany and the United States [52]. This affects young second-generation Romanians too, because they have also been educated

at Spanish universities and are seeking the same opportunities as their Spanish peers in the search for employment.

5. Methods

A qualitative methodology was applied to carry out this research, involving 65 in-depth interviews with young Romanian graduates and postgraduates distributed as follows: 25 with people holding undergraduate degrees (13 women and 12 men); 25 with people who had completed master's qualifications (15 women and 10 men); and 15 with people who had completed a PhD in Spain (7 men and 8 women).

My fieldwork was ethically approved by the Spanish Council Scientific Research Committee in the context of a project that I coordinate. Between January and August 2023, I conducted interviews in Madrid, Barcelona, Murcia, Cartagena, Zaragoza, Bilbao, Valencia and Seville, in the Spanish language (since the interviewees expressed themselves best in Spanish). The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 min.

To find young people to interview, I first contacted their parents, whom I had interviewed for other research projects. I also contacted Romanian immigrant associations, and the "snowballing" technique subsequently worked very well. Furthermore, I visited the Romanian Embassy in Spain several times over the course of two years to complete my fieldwork by attending meetings between young people and Romanian diplomatic staff.

Of those interviewed, 33 participants were working in jobs for which they were overqualified at the time of the interview, and 25 were unemployed. Six interviewees had recently started to develop their own businesses in sectors close to their level of education, and one was working remotely for a foreign company. All of the interviewees were living with their parents, being unable to become independent or change cities to look for work owing to a lack of resources. All interviewees were given pseudonyms to guarantee their anonymity. The respondents provided the images used in this research and gave permission for their use.

The interviews involved the discussion of participants' current professional status and their period of training. The interviewees remembered their first years in school in Spain, the ease of learning the language, and their integration into school environments. At the same time, they recalled their home country, Romania, with nostalgia and stressed that they would love to learn the Romanian language well so that they could converse with their grandparents and not feel like foreigners in their own country. They discussed the pandemic in detail, describing how they had handled the restrictions together with their families in small apartments. While the interviewees regretted the long period they had experienced without classes and even having to present their end-of-course projects from home, they were happy at having the time and opportunity to get to know Romanian customs better, such as the food they cooked together with their parents. Finally, the interviewees were asked about the current period: how they were looking for work in the post-pandemic era, and their future prospects and plans.

6. Data Analysis

The interviews were analysed using the Atlas.Ti (Version 7) analysis programme (version 7) and translated into English for subsequent analysis using the transcript content, which covered the responses of the interviewees. Codes, concepts and categories were used to analyse the information and identify key relationships between the data obtained and conclusions reached [53]. The sample saturation point occurred when other elements stopped appearing after a wide range of responses had been covered, and the interviewees were offering information with a similar content.

Qualitative coding offered the opportunity for a process involving in-depth reflection and a way of interacting with and thinking about the data. After several systematic readings of the interviews, I identified the main categories and subcategories related to the topic, which I then clarified and defined, creating the coding framework for my analysis. I subsequently coded the interview details belonging to each subtheme. If new categories

were identified during coding, I started the coding process again. As I coded, I identified important sections of the text, highlighting the "best codes" to capture the richness of my interviews.

Due to the considerable quantity of information, I used thematic analysis, which is a useful method for examining interviewee experiences and different perspectives as a decisive factor in the analysis [54], highlighting similarities and differences [55] p. 3.

The analysis ultimately distinguished three approaches that young people use to overcome the professional precariousness they are currently facing, as outlined below.

7. Results

7.1. Fighting to Find Work and Living in Spain

This section analyses young people working in jobs for which they are overqualified, at the same time as seeking better employment.

Interviewees described their early years in Spain, their childhoods, their rapid assimilation of the Spanish language and their academic achievements. All of the interviewees finished their degrees in 2022, coinciding with the end of the pandemic. They emphasised the professional precariousness they faced and the fact that "you graduate and then what?", explaining that "in Spain it's not hard to find a job if you agree to work in sales without a contract", but that they aspired to find work that matched their level of training. They felt professionally unstable, explaining their view of precariousness as "the lack of resources for young people to get ahead". Some of the interviewees distinguished between young Spanish people and themselves, but others did not, pointing out "the entire generation of young people is in a precarious situation".

Claudiu explained the following:

> I think my whole generation is in a precarious situation. I finished my degree in 2022 when the pandemic ended. For a whole year I was scared when I went to class, wearing a mask, not knowing what would happen. And now I have an unstable job and it is precarious, the pandemic contributed to that. I'm working as a salesperson in a shop, full-time but without a contract. Luckily, I can help with the bills at home, because my father went to look for work in Iceland after he ended up unemployed here, and my mother lost her job during the pandemic and wants to go back to Romania. She was taking care of an elderly lady who died from COVID, and she hasn't found anything since. I'm living with her, I'm a shopkeeper. I could leave, but where would I go? I have to fight to change it and find work in Spain in my field of study (Claudiu, 24 years old, geography and planning graduate).

Claudiu recognises that he is in a precarious situation, confirming that the pandemic exacerbated experiences of precariousness among the young [24]. However, he does not expect support and help from his family. Instead, he supports his mother by helping to pay the bills, while his father has had to exercise mobility to find employment in Iceland. In her research on the 'linked lives' of immigrant families and children, ref. [56] notes that young Romanians have the ability to support their parents through different strategies, whether involving mobility or working in Spain.

The interviewees emphasised that their thinking changed during the pandemic. They now feel a need to reinvent themselves daily to anticipate what will happen tomorrow, rather than making long-term plans as their parents did. Only two interviewees expressed frustration at not being in the same position as their Spanish colleagues and not receiving support from their families, one being Alexandra:

> I am a journalist, I graduated in the middle of the pandemic, within the four walls of my parents' small apartment. I'm working in a wood workshop and I do feel foreign, because I work 12 h a day with no insurance and I earn very little, doing the same work as someone here who earns almost double and has a permanent contract. And I am frustrated because my mother wants to go back to

> Romania, she lost her job... and they don't let me have dual citizenship, when young people like me have spent our whole lives here. But I won't leave, no. I'll fight to be a journalist, the job I studied for, and if I have to change I will, but it will be something similar (Alexandra, 23 years old, journalism graduate).

Alejandra's interview (Figure 6) shows that there are young Romanians who are working in jobs for which they are overqualified at the same time as feeling exploited due to not having insurance and making insufficient money. Their precariousness is related to employment conditions, with jobs characterised by insecurity and low wages [57]. The interviewee also described the status of her parents, who were unemployed during the pandemic and want to return to their country, just as many members of the Romanian community did during and after the pandemic [58].

Figure 6. Source: Provided by the interviewee: at her workplace. Used with her approval.

In fact, almost all interviewees stated that at least one of their parents was unemployed at the time of the interview. Furthermore, the thorny issue of dual citizenship that the Romanian community in Spain is seeking from the Spanish government was brought up in many interviews. Young Romanians believe that they should have Spanish nationality, having grown up and studied in the Spanish education system rather than in their place of birth.

In my visits to the Romanian Embassy in Spain, I attended meetings involving the active participation of young second-generation Romanians, who expressed their ideas and thoughts on this issue and how it was linked to their future in Spain.

I met Diana at the Romanian Embassy and subsequently interviewed her:

> I am an idealist. I'm hoping for a dual citizenship that may never come (...) I graduated in engineering from my home [laughing]. When the pandemic began, I had just started an internship at a youth centre, I designed a project, an "escape room". It was the first time I'd done a project by myself. But the pandemic came and my dream was lost. Now, I see how difficult it is. I have to search, do something, the Embassy guides us, but then we have to go back to our lives. And I have to fight, I'm dreaming of opening my own company, but my father tells me that it's impossible with no capital. I have nowhere to go, I can't go back to Romania, it's hard for me to understand when people speak fast in Romanian. I'm not even thinking about leaving here (Diana, 24 years old, engineering graduate).

Interviewees like Diana are not satisfied with the harshness of the professional life experienced by their parents in the past and present. They are trying to move forward and transform their own ideals into reality. However, there was recognition among interviewees of the interaction between their efforts, their resources and also the context they are living in: "we saw how much our parents fought for us to get us ahead"; "I heard them when they counted the money for me to go to university"; "I learned humility from them, the meaning of having few things, valuing them, taking care of them and fixing them"; "now I want to show that it was worth it"; "they have given everything to educate me in Spain"; "during the pandemic I heard my mother crying, because she could not take it anymore"; and "I want to help, and show them that I can".

This was the step taken by the Romanian master's and PhD graduates whose thinking and approaches to finding work are analysed below.

7.2. The Best Is Yet to Come

This section examines interviews with young people who, having studied for a PhD and/or a master's degree, are working in sectors that they consider inappropriate, applying for research grants or trying to create their own businesses. Only six of those interviewed have achieved their aims to date in this regard. According to the data collected with the support of the Romanian Embassy in Spain, 47 young Romanians have presented master's theses at Spanish universities in the last three years, while 15 have obtained their PhD. These people have adapted and pursued their vocations despite the vicissitudes that their families often experience. Their lives continue to be a struggle, as was true of the pandemic period when they were completing their thesis. Many of these interviewees presented doctoral theses from their own homes, with Nora explaining her experience as follows:

> The pandemic changed our lives, definitely. I have a PhD in law, with a scholarship obtained through an Andalusian agency, and I presented my thesis from my home. We organised the living room, my mother closed the door, but I saw that she was behind it, crying... She's out of work, the pandemic took that right away from her because she cleaned houses. And my father went back to Romania because of the lack of employment; that's where we have our flat. Now, I'm work with a partial assistant contract at the University of Murcia and I want to continue with my career. I know there are lots of us, but that won't stop me fighting. I've just applied for a "Juan de la Cierva" scholarship. From my own experience I know that if you have a good CV you have to get ahead, no matter where you were born. The best is yet to come... (Nora, 33 years old, PhD in law).

Nora (Figure 7) emphasises the difficulty of the pandemic and the precariousness of her family, stressing that they continued to support her studies despite those conditions.

When explaining how she presented her thesis, Nora burst into tears as she recalled the image of her mother behind the door. But Nora has not lost hope; she has applied for a postdoctoral grant in Spain despite knowing the tremendous competition she faces and she insists: "the best is yet to come".

Vasile offered his experience:

> I have a master's degree in computer science and I couldn't find a job. But I was lucky to have good university friends, and together we have started an online business. I can see it's still working. Sure, we do it at the house of a friend with more resources than me, and even at the university, but I think it's fine for everyone. We can strengthen ties and we can earn... we're self-employed, and I also help my brother who's still a student, and my family. My father is a truck driver, but my mother is unemployed. The pandemic helped me change my mentality. I wanted to go to another country to do a doctorate or something, but now I see that I can also get ahead in Spain (Vasile, 24 years old, master's degree in computer science).

Figure 7. Source: Provided by the interviewee: presenting her doctoral thesis from home. Used with her approval.

Vasile (Figure 8) emphasises that the pandemic made him grow as a person and change his mentality regarding moving elsewhere when he struggled to find employment in Spain. Mobility is known to be the main characteristic that distinguishes the Romanian community in Spain from other immigrant groups [19,56]. But while young people accumulate the experiences of their parents, they are able to progress at the same time by using their own agency to create new pathways. In this case, Vasile has created his own business: a technological and design products company. This supports the position of [59] p. 963 that agency is "a (. . .) process of personal engagement in which past habits (. . .) and future possibilities are envisaged within the present moment". Vasile and his partners are reconstructing their lives through their own innovations and agency. One can also see how Vasile finds incentives to build a world in which his family has a place, at the same time as promoting his own integration in Spain.

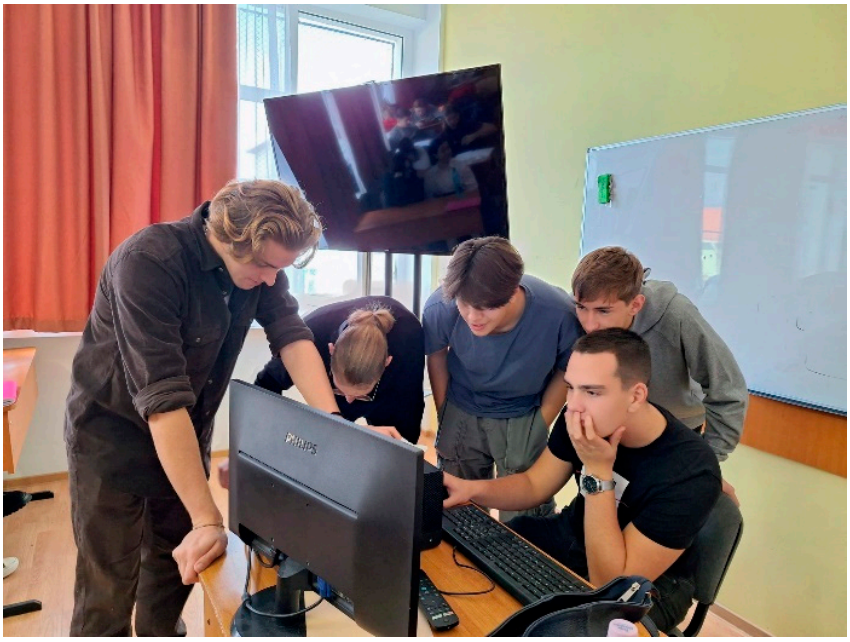

Figure 8. Source: Provided by the interviewee and used with his approval.

Perhaps the key point to emerge with respect to this category of interviewees is that these young people want to remain in Spain and are not considering mobility. Neculai, a young man who works from home for an American computer company, explained the following:

> Before the pandemic I thought that leaving Spain was an option, but after spending time writing my thesis at home and talking to people from all over the world from my room, I learned that moving virtually is also an option. You can work and earn money from home. There's no need to move to another country. So, I think that Spain is my place. I'm a foreigner, I'm not Spanish yet, although I would like to be... I've already lived abroad, I've experienced mobility with Erasmus and exchanges. I don't really think about leaving, I hope to build a future here, in this country. I'd like to work in my field. . . (Neculai, 32 years old, PhD in humanities).

This quote shows how young second-generation Romanians are looking for ways to find work in their field of study and stay in Spain, which they see as the best available option. Furthermore, Neculai notes that the pandemic has shown him that work can be found in the virtual world, which offers a way to 'move' and work at the same time without having to travel. Online activities hence replace some travel by allowing people to participate in activities remotely, but may generate other types of travel via the time and money saved from this replacement [60].

Other interviewees expressed similar views to Neculai: "you can work from home without going to another country, sometimes it's hard to send a CV and wait for a response, but I'll manage it"; "I come from a tough background, I don't plan to return there"; "I had a grant, I travelled halfway around the world, but I'm happy in Spain even though it's not the best country to find work nowadays"; "the sun helps me, finding the sun every morning"; and "the reason to live, that's why I want to look for a job here and stay". This approach is analysed further below.

7.3. Searching for "The Reason to Live": Work as a Passion and Ideal

The young graduates whose interviews are analysed in this section did not have jobs or receive unemployment benefit. However, some of them wanted to have their own business or were developing their talents, hoping to make a living by putting their skills and passions into practice. This is perhaps the most creative, most innovative category of interviewee; the most eager to change their own lives. The 26 respondents who were looking for employment were living through their dreams and ideals, creating and contributing the results to society. Despite their position at the time of interview, these interviewees were the most rooted in Spain and expressed the most excitement about bringing their ideals and passions to bear. According to Carmen:

> I presented my master's thesis in experimental chemistry during the pandemic. I don't have a job, but I'm going to open a coffee shop that has my personal touch. Mixing substances, some experimental cooking... In the end, chemistry is like a kitchen. It's been 20 years since I left Romania, I was 6 years old, and I feel like Spain is my home now. I'd like to stay with my family, we're together, my parents and I. And the idea of a cafe using less sugar, and knowing how to mix the ingredients properly, I think it can definitely work in a city like Cartagena, where people want to experience new things, it's friendly, happy and fun. I'll do it, I'm sure. It's what I dream about every morning (Carmen, 26 years old, master's degree in chemistry).

Carmen's ideals are manifested in a desire for creativity, to seek new forms of fulfilment in life, in a field of work that is different from her own, but which she sees as linked to her training. Carmen is unemployed but lives with her parents and feels supported by them, and she wants to open a cafeteria to make full use of her talents. She has no resentment at not finding work in her field of chemistry. To the contrary, and despite her living conditions,

she wants to remain in Spain together with her parents and she emphasises the pleasantness and happiness of its people.

Another interviewee was Marian (Figure 9), a photographer whose art has been recognised by national and international organisations and who has been awarded several study scholarships.

Figure 9. Source: Provided by the interviewee: in a Romanian village with his grandmother. Used with his approval.

He explained the following:

> I have a master's degree in photography, which I completed during the pandemic. I'm a Romanian photographer in Spain, I do what I like. I move between two worlds, I'm a little dark, because I bring sad images of Romania, the country of my birth, but I can't do anything else. I look for the "I" in every photo I take, I look for my world. I feel good here, although I also travel a lot, and I want to learn Romanian well so I can talk to my grandmother. But I like Spain, I want to stay here, and show Romania to people through my photography. And although I'm not rewarded as I would like, and actually, despite winning awards, I'm unemployed, I can't stop doing what I like most. Photography is my reason to live, and it's why I get up every morning (Marian, 25 years old, master's degree in photography).

When looking at Marian's work at an exhibition in Madrid, I observed how his photographs capture the migratory process of the Romanian community in Spain. In our discussion, Marian highlighted his 'I', his cultural duality and movement between two worlds [10]. As a young second-generation immigrant, Marian focuses on two essential themes that define him: a raw family portrayal of Romanians, and particularly his relationship with his grandmother, who he visits every year. This is how he finds his reason for living. Marian likes to remain in Spain and show people his art, even though, as he admits, his world is 'sad.' He regrets not knowing the Romanian language well, despite traveling a lot "because it means I save some money, living with my grandmother while capturing the life of Romanian peasants in my photos".

Raluca is another interviewee in the same line of unemployed creators (Figure 10). She explained:

Figure 10. Source: Provided by the interviewee: painting at the FITUR Tourism Fair, Madrid. Used with her approval.

> I finished my degree in history but I can't find work in my field. So I paint and give painting classes to children at the Romanian Embassy. I dream of making a living from this. For now, I'm acting as a bridge between Romanian and Spanish culture through my painting. I organise exhibitions wherever I'm invited, and they've invited me to FITUR to paint live. My painting is colourful and shows Romanian peasants, popular dress. . .. I give it a go. I'm living with my parents; I'm unemployed but I got used to it. I prefer to live with my own light. (Raluca, 26 years old, degree in history).

Raluca produces masterful compositions portraying scenes from Romanian life. However, she has become used to living with her parents and facing labour insecurity. This illustrates how "for young people seeking careers in creative occupations, the expectation of insecure employment conditions has become normalized" [35] p. 398.

Along similar lines, unemployed interviewees observed that "I don't have a job, but I don't plan to leave Spain either"; 'Yes, there is unemployment, but we don't have hurricanes or crocodiles on the beaches"; and "There are always many things to improve, but if you know a little about what lies beyond, you realise and appreciate that although you don't have a job, you have a passion. . . a family". These interviewees wish to remain in Spain despite their current situation. Therefore, the members of this generation have different expectations from their parents. Far from causing them to exercise mobility and go to other countries or back to Romania, the stormy pandemic period has helped them to reflect and create their own voice in terms of developing a professional and personal life in Spain.

8. Discussion and Conclusions

This article examines new trends of thought among young second-generation Romanians, through the prism of their work and life experiences after having completed their university degrees during the pandemic. The analysis shows how they have overcome increased job insecurity [24,45] through new ways of acting that are different from those of their families.

The article addressed the research questions by first noting the form of educational integration of second-generation Romanians in Spain and how they perceive themselves.

(1) First, they aspire to have dual citizenship, at the same time as wanting to become closer to their country of birth. Although some of them acknowledge a sense of frus-tration at facing unequal opportunities in the workplace, what is most striking is their willingness to reinvent themselves and look for incentives to help them live in Spain.
(2) Second, the pandemic has changed their way of thinking. In particular, the lockdown period helped them recognise their family values and caused them to reflect on their present and future in Spain.
(3) Third, and as a consequence of the pandemic, these second-generation young people face a daily struggle to move out of jobs for which they are overqualified or escape unemployment. However, by living with their families, they can consider how to face reality and look for employment that matches their education or passions [35]. They are also prepared to live off the occasional income they earn as artists. Rather than "postponing" reality, this represents a way of perceiving life as it presents itself to-day.
(4) Finally, the interviewees did not report future plans to exercise mobility to other countries or go back to Romania. They recognised that this, too, is a consequence of the pandemic, because while they had previously considered studying or look-ing for employment in the United States or EU, they currently see it as preferable to remain in Spain, because "mobility can also be practiced anywhere in a virtual way" [60–63]. Second-generation (im)mobility has hence emerged as a fundamental post-pandemic trend.

Consequently, young people working in jobs for which they are overqualified, the unemployed and entrepreneurs all share an incessant search for self-realisation according to their own interests and desires, distinguishing them from their parents' generation. They are clear that they studied because they wanted to and they are also sure that Spain is their country, where they hope to stay with dual citizenship if possible so as not to lose their roots or identity [10,64]. The new trends to escape precariousness are hence closely linked to the concepts of 'enjoying work' and 'living a full life' in the country where these young people arrived as children, grew up and were educated [65]. In conclusion, this research highlights the agency of young people and their capacity for innovative thinking during the pandemic, and how this period has affected their future and self-perception [36,66]. To conclude, it is important to give young people a "voice", to fully integrate them into the labour market according to their training and skills and to improve integration policies for second-generation young people, not only in Spain, but throughout the world. These people need direct Spanish public policy attention if they are to find inclusion as full citizens in the country where they studied and grew up. New public policies should involve specific initiatives where cultural diversity is treated as a fundamental element of society itself. Public policies should not ignore these issues, considering the potentially negative outcomes of experiences of discrimination or social exclusion (see the French example) and, above all, the fact that discrimination is the main obstacle faced by immigrants and their families in host societies. Descendants of these immigrants see those host societies as their own, having been born into them, and their expectations of integration, greater than those of their parents, can be truncated by experiences of discrimination [67].

In the specific case at hand, it is also important to highlight the critical need for dual citizenship to be approved so that second-generation young people can understand their place in the world and have the chance to (re)construct a mixed Romanian–Spanish citizenship and identity.

Finally, this research opens up avenues for future research on second-generation immigrants in Spain, whether Romanian or from other nationalities. It is to be hoped that both researchers and political actors will take into account the lives of these young people, their potential, and their growing contribution to society. The Spanish example could also be followed by countries in Europe and around the world.

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