Socio-Cultural Requirements in Italian Working Life. The Case of Romanian Females in the Caring Sector

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Immigrants in Piemonte

1. *General data*

The foreigners living officially in the Region of Piemonte on December the 31st 2000 were 107.478 (57.384 male, 50.094 female). At the same date 7,3% of foreigners living in Italy was resident in Piemonte.

In the Municipality of Turin the first five national groups according to their dimension are: Morocco (25,8% on the global foreigner residents in Turin), Romania (16,0%), Peru (8,2%), Albania (7,0%) and China (5,8%).

Foreigners in the Municipality of Turin in a gender perspective (first twelve nationalities)

	2002			2001			*Increasing/decreasing in 2002 referring to 2001*		
	M	**F**	**Total**	M	F	Total	*M*	*F*	*Total*
Morocco	**6.949**	**3.847**	**10.769**	6.496	3.351	9.847	*+5,4%*	*+11,7%*	*+7,6%*
Romania	**3.435**	**3.202**	**6.637**	2.735	2.255	4.990	*+21,1%*	*+33,4%*	*+26,7%*
Peru	**1.193**	**2.221**	**3.413**	1.007	1.984	2.991	*+14,5%*	*+8,7%*	*+10,7%*
Albania	**1.664**	**1.248**	**2.912**	1.444	943	2.387	*+11,4%*	*+26,2%*	*+17,3%*
China	**1.268**	**1.178**	**2.447**	1.099	975	2.074	*+13,6%*	*+18,9%*	*+16,1%*
Philippine	**730**	**1.084**	**1.814**	671	1.029	1.700	*+7,4%*	*+4,5%*	*+5,6%*
Nigeria	**479**	**1.122**	**1.601**	420	1.071	1.491	*+12,2%*	*+3,5%*	*+6,0%*
Egypt	**995**	**398**	**1.393**	937	350	1.287	*+6,1%*	*+13,7%*	*+8,2%*
Tunisia	**737**	**298**	**1.035**	702	262	964	*+4, 9%*	*+13,7%*	*+7,3%*
Senegal	**870**	**93**	**963**	811	81	892	*+7,2%*	*+14,8%*	*+7,9%*
Brazil	**370**	**590**	**960**	357	560	917	*+3,6%*	*+5,3%*	*+4,6%*
France	**411**	**509**	**920**	389	491	880	*+5,6%*	*+3,6%*	*+4,5%*

Source: Municipality of Turin

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It is interesting to note the data about the variations registered between 2001 and 2002: considering that the increase for national group has been on average of 11, 3%, Romania has been increasing by 26,7%, Albania by 17,3%, Russia by 59,4% while Morocco just by 7,6% and China by 9,89%. The dimension of immigration from the Eastern Europe is notable: between 2001 and 2002 one out of four new foreigners in Turin was Romanian and one out three was from non-EU European countries. As a consequence of the newest national Law about immigrations, only in the city of Turin, while we have 45.024 permits of stay valid at the end of the year 2002 (31/12/2002), at the same date we have more than 36.000 applications for "surfacing" (as are defined in the text of the brand new Law foreigners requesting regularisation). What is striking of this data is the ethnic composition of the appliers: while Morocco has 1.800, we have more than 9.000 Romanians trying to surface to "legal immigration". The main result is that after decades Morocco is no longer the first nationality of immigrants in Turin, giving way to Romanians.

That's not completely upsetting, for clues were disseminated over the last years immigration flows. According to data provided by the Municipality of Turin, Rumanians'group increased as the chart clearly explains:

Increase in Romanians over the last four years in the Turin area		
1999	2000	*+59,1%*
2000	2001	*+21,5%*
2001	2002	*+26,7%*

Source: Municipality of Turin

2. *The target group*

IAL-Piemonte and ANOLF have mainly interviewed employers and workers in the cleaning and nursing/caring sectors. To get an overall sampling of the situation in Piemonte the interviews have been carried out in Torino, as well as Alessandria and Verbania.

Interviewees' role in the labour market			
Nurses	Caring sector	Cleaning	Employers (Italians)
4	4	5	6

Most of the Romanians are hired by Social Cooperatives (9 out of 13), while the others are working in families as care-taker or cleaner.The interviewees have been selected in order to present widely different working situations both for the kind of job and for the nature of the employer. Moving in the same direction the interviewees selected are both Romanians and Italians, with the aim of gathering different points of view for the survey.

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Survey method

Each partner involved in the survey interviewed employers and workers belonging to their own target groups.The method was an un-structured interview. The interview was divided into three parts:

1. A set of open questions;
2. A table of given competences to be valued by the interviewee;
3. A moment dedicated to a free discussion with the interviewee in order to get their opinions/ideas/experience about the topic of the survey and let them express their satisfaction/lack of satisfaction about the interview.

All the interviews were recorded and the tapes destroyed after transcription, respecting the Italian Law about Privacy 675/96. None of the interviewees had anything against recording. On average the interviews took about an hour: often a little more, rarely less.

The interview started with a short explanation about the project (Softimmigrants) and the purpose of the interview (also written information). The interviewee had the possibility of commenting and asking additional questions.

The first approach to the interviewees was made with a questionnaire, the aim of which was to collect information about the employers, a sort of profile of the persons interviewed: where they come from (town, country, etc), age, level of education, motivation, expectations, etc. The actual interview began with the open questions and the interviewee was free to bring up other things that he/she thought would be important. A set of questions was:

1. Next autumn IAL-Piemonte will train 15 Romanian ladies (maybe men too) for coping in employment in the Italian cleaning/nursing/caring sectors. What do you think is necessary to train them in?
2. What would you like to know about potential workers coming from Romania – the branch, occupations, working methods, customs and living in general?
3. Are there, in your opinion, any differences in the attitude to work, in working methods, attitudes in general, and so on comparing Romanians to Italians?
4. What are the unwritten rules in your sector of employment that a person to be trained should know about?
5. Describe a person (possibly a Romanian) that you would like to spend some leisure time with –what would you do, what would be the topics of a discussion, what would be necessary for him/her to know about the Italian way of living?

After discussion the table of given competences was presented and the interviewee was asked to assess the importance of the characteristics on a scale from 1 to 5: 1 = means little important, 2 = fairly important, 3 = important, 4 = very important, 5 = essential. (Based on the training programme of long-term unemployed by Dutch Laborel. Adapted in Amiedu in spring 2001).

During the interviews this table was utilised as follows: the Italians interviewed were requested to give two marks: one referring to the importance of each characteristic in the Italian context of employment, the other the Romanian workers' abilities in responding to these characteristics. Also the Romanians interviewed were asked to give two marks: one their idea of the importance of each characteristic in the Italian

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employment context, the other their ability to respond to these characteristics. The interviewees, both the Italians and the Rumanians, were also asked if any of the issues are, in their opinion, culture-bound, and which ones.

This way of using this check list comparing answers from the employers and the Romanian workers about their ideas (how important such a characteristic is in Italy) and perceptions (up to what point they are able to meet these characteristics), has meant the possibility to identify elements of reciprocal incomprehension which tuned out to be absolutely useful in the developing of a vocational training course to fill the gap in socio-cultural skills.

The table of Competences

1. *Bearing the responsibility for one's own work*

Bearing responsibilities for one's own work either performed alone or as a member of a group, and for the results of the work.

2. *Giving and receiving feedback*

Meaning mainly what one thinks of another person's work, working manners and its results, or the general practises of the working place. Giving praise – 'well done' –, and negative feedback in particular – 'we don't do it like that'– can be very culture-bound. Feedback is one of the difficult communication and interactive skills in a strange environment.

3. *Communication and interaction skills*

Understanding directions and rules, knowing what to do. Can and is not afraid to ask. Communicative skills in general: what to speak in coffee and lunch breaks, how to make acquaintance with fellow workers. Whether there are recommendable topics of conversation, whether there are taboos etc.

4. *Cooperation and teamwork skills*

How is one adjusted to a group, and how does one comprehend one's own tasks and the common task, rules and division of work. In other words: perceiving the roles of oneself and others, and taking them into consideration in the work.

5. *Independent work*

Completing one's tasks unprompted and without control, asking for advice when needed, but being sufficiently self-steering.

6. *Taking initiative*

Observing what needs to be done, can and is not afraid to get down to work without directions and orders, making own suggestions and coming up with ideas of new working methods. Being active as to one's own work.

7. *Working in a strange environment*

Being able to function in a new job, adapting things relatively easily, having a good control and understanding of one's working environment, learning to find the tools and to maintain them, learning to understand the unwritten rules, 'the name of the game' of a working place. How is this taught?

8. *General knowledge of working life*

Knowing the basics of the field's labour legislation and safety at work.

9. *General knowledge of culture*

Being interested in a country, its people and their customs. Wanting to learn to know people and the circumstances of the country.

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Results of the survey

1. *Profile of interviewees (foreigners)*

The sample of interviewed Rumanian women (13 persons) were composed of people between the ages of 24 and 35 according to table below:

Interviewees' age (in years)				
24	28	29	33	35
3	4	3	2	1

Upon analysis of the questionnaires we have divided our sample into two groups:

– Group A (7 persons): young (between 24 and 29); well educated, with experience within universities and fluent at least in one foreign language, without considering Italian; they left high qualified and prestigious jobs in Romania; they showed a bias about joining Unions.

– Group B (6 persons): not so young as group A (between 28 and 35); modest level of schooling; no knowledge of foreign languages; they have not left important jobs; they are all union members.

Although this big difference was evident the results from the questionnaires are homogeneous as regards motivation and background.

From an analysis of the questionnaires it emerges that:

1. origins of the immigrants whether urban or rural has not particularly influenced past decisions (the reason for leaving the native country) nor future prospects;

2. 11 out of 13 people interviewed gave the Romanian economic crisis as their main reason for leaving the country;

3. In Italy they all carry out low qualified jobs. Nurses may seem to be an exception, but those nurses who managed to gain recognition of their qualifications (3 out of 4), still hold a position which is inferior to the one they had in Romania;

4. the most common reason for choosing Italy is the already existing migration between the two countries: family and friends are a good point of reference for finding a job;

5. another reason is the similarity of the two languages, although only one of the people interviewed could speak Italian well;

6. Italy was the first country of immigration (12 out of 13) for nearly all persons interviewed.

Another interesting feature is that nearly all had remained in the area where they had first arrived. This could indicate: a) no particular problems of integration (considering also the language problem); b) ease in finding/changing work (in fact, 9 of the persons interviewed have changed their jobs quite often without difficulty since arriving in Italy).

We have also noted that full-time workers prevail over part-time workers (8-5) and only 7 of the interviewees have planned to return to Romania. The others are determined to set up their lives and families in Italy, possibly with an Italian. Finally none of the interviewees came from the various ethnic minorities present in Romania (Hungarians, Rom etc.).

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2. *Open questions*

Training program: Next autumn IAL-Piemonte will train 15 Romanian workers for coping in employment in the Italian services sector. What do you think is necessary to train them in?

ITALIANS' REPLIES: it is necessary to focus on legislation, on workers' rights and duties (and on employers' too).

ROMANIANS' REPLIES: language learning is necessary (some accused the Italians of racism, and they define the reason for this in the lack of the foreigners' knowledge of the language). It is also necessary to teach about Italian labour legislation.

According to some of the persons interviewed it would be better to treat the subject of interpersonal relations in the work place, explaining to Romanians the need to learn how to relate according to the Italian 'rules'.

Background information: What would you like to know about them – the branch, occupations, working methods, customs and living in general?

ITALIANS: The employers agreed that knowledge of the life style of Romanian workers might reduce the problems encountered during integration into employment.

ROMANIANS: question not asked.

Differences: Are there, in your opinion, any differences in the attitude to work, in working methods, attitudes in general, and so on comparing Rumanians to Italians?

ITALIANS: as far as work is concerned, from a point of view of technical and professional abilities, the level of preparation is satisfactory. There is no need for technical training. The problems are encountered at a cultural level with interpersonal relations. It is the attitude towards work that is very different. There are clearly differences which make really profitable collaboration rather difficult. In particular as far as nurses are concerned a negative dynamic has emerged; in Italy the number of nurses is certainly insufficient; the Romanians are aware of this and know they can count on their expertise, which is needed in Italy, for obtaining special treatment and behaving in a manner that might easily be defined as ill-mannered.

In a few cases the employers complained about the Romanians' sense of duty.

ROMANIANS: strangely the Romanians interviewed consider themselves as low qualified (except the nurses) and want more training. This is because they consider Italian employment much more specialised than the Romanian, where workers are required to adapt to any type of employment rather than specialise in anything particular.

Nurses find no difference between Italy and Romania.

Unwritten rules: What are the unwritten rules in your sector of employment that a person to be trained should know about?

ITALIANS: The employers consider themselves too 'far' from the workplace to make a judgement.

ROMANIANS: The main unwritten rule about Italian employment is "in Italy you get good money if you are a good worker. The employer pays us because he is satisfied

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with the way we do the job." Unwritten rules are also important in relations between colleagues and superiors.

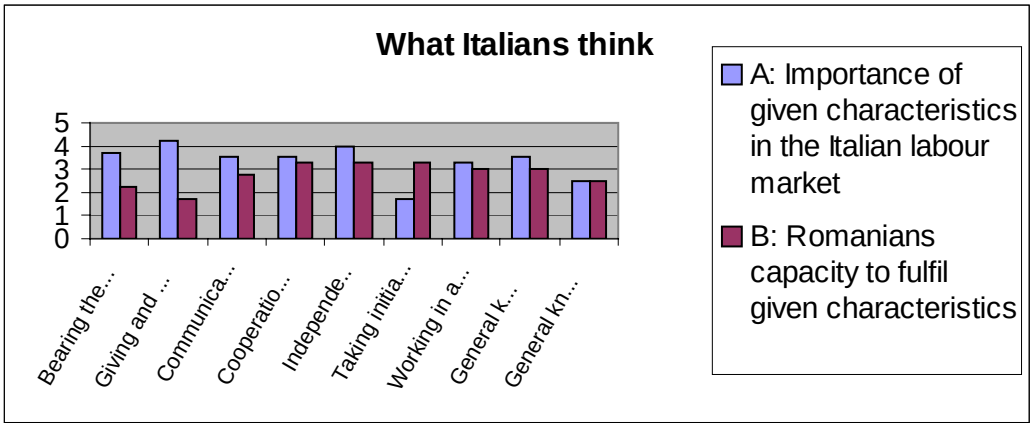
Leisure time: Describe a person (possibly a Rumanian) that you would like to spend some leisure time with – what would you do, what would be the topics of a discussion, what would be necessary for him/her to know about the Italian way of living?

ITALIANS: Employers have not given opinions.

ROMANIANS: few of the people interviewed had something to say: some work alone, others in multicultural environments (foreigners of various nationalities, mainly Africans and South Americans as well as Italians) not relevant for the research. The only element that could be interesting is the fact that the Italians are talkative while the Romanians are reserved.

3. *Socio-cultural Competences*

What Italians think



		A	B
1.	Bearing the responsibility for one's own work	3,75	2,25
2.	Giving and receiving feedback	4,25	1,75
3.	Communication and interaction skills	3,50	2,75
4.	Cooperation and teamwork skills	3,50	3,25
5.	Independent work	4,00	3,25
6.	Taking initiative	1,75	3,25
7.	Working in a strange environment	3,25	3,00
8.	General knowledge of working life	3,50	3,00
9.	General knowledge of culture	2,50	2,50

For Italians responsibility, feedback and independence are the most important characteristics. Romanians are usually just about able to respond to the need for independence, while they are totally unable to respond to the need for personal

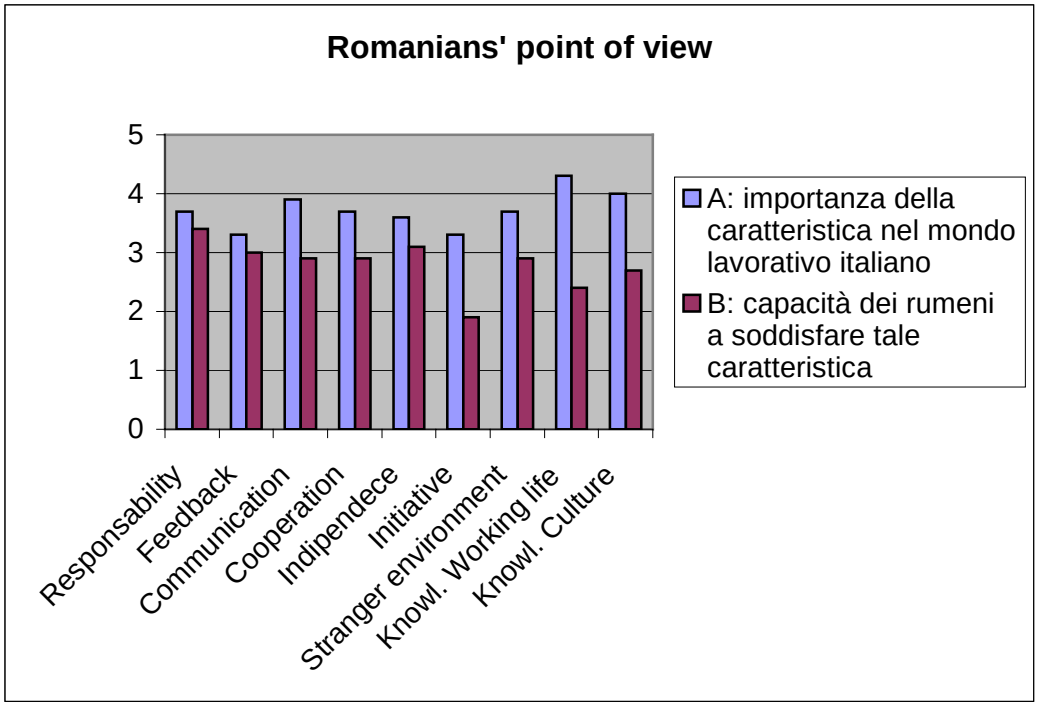
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responsibility (importance 3,75 – ability 2,25) and above all in feedback (importance 4,25 – ability 1,75).

Initiative, considered one of the less important characteristics by employers, is paradoxically the area where the Romanians are described as more prepared.

Strangely the Italians consider the importance of general knowledge of culture relatively low (even though with 2,50 points it results the eighth characteristic out of nine) although some of the people interviewed disagreed. One final but important note the Romanians are considered 'insufficient' in each of the characteristics by about 0,5 and 1 points.

What the Romanians think



A: Importance of given characteristics in the Italian labour market
B: Romanians capacity to fulfil given characteristics

		A	B
1.	Bearing the responsibility for one's own work	3,7	3,4
2.	Giving and receiving feedback	3,3	3,0
3.	Communication and interaction skills	3,9	2,9
4.	Cooperation and teamwork skills	3,7	2,9
5.	Independent work	3,6	3,1
6.	Taking initiative	3,3	1,9

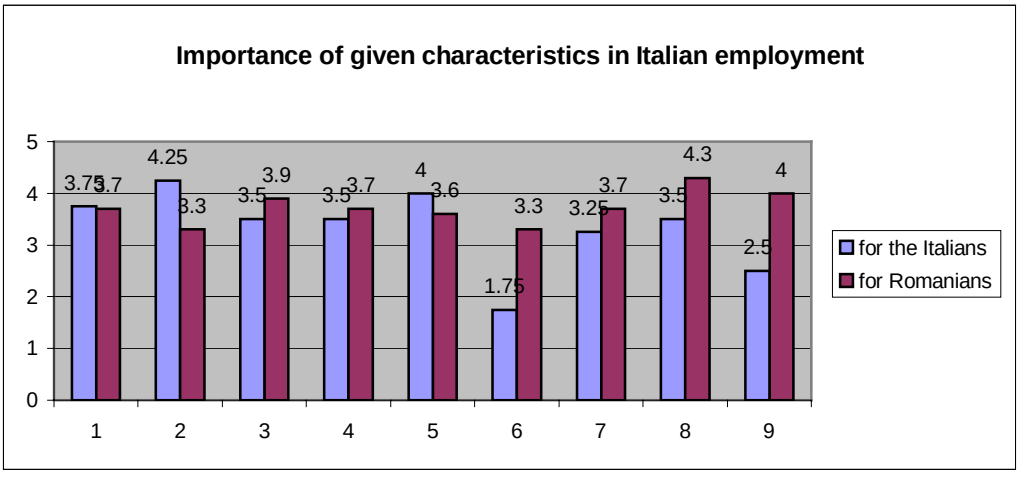
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7.	Working in a strange environment	3,7	2,9
8.	General knowledge of working life	4,3	2,4
9.	General knowledge of culture	4,0	2,7

From the research-study we can note that the Romanians consider themselves to be inadequate for the Italian labour market. Even though during the less formal moments of the interviews they tended to define themselves in a more positive manner, from the resulting data we can clearly see that the Romanians consider themselves insufficiently prepared in *all* characteristics.

It appears that the more they consider the characteristic important, the less they consider themselves to be prepared in that characteristic: in the three characteristics they consider to be of more importance in Italian employment (working life with 4,3 knowledge of culture with 4,0 and communication with 3,9) we find the worst marks as regards their ability to respond to these characteristics (only the initiative, for reasons that will be examined in the 5.3.2 "cultural influence", obtains a mark that is even worse).

How important are the characteristics in question considered in Italian employment

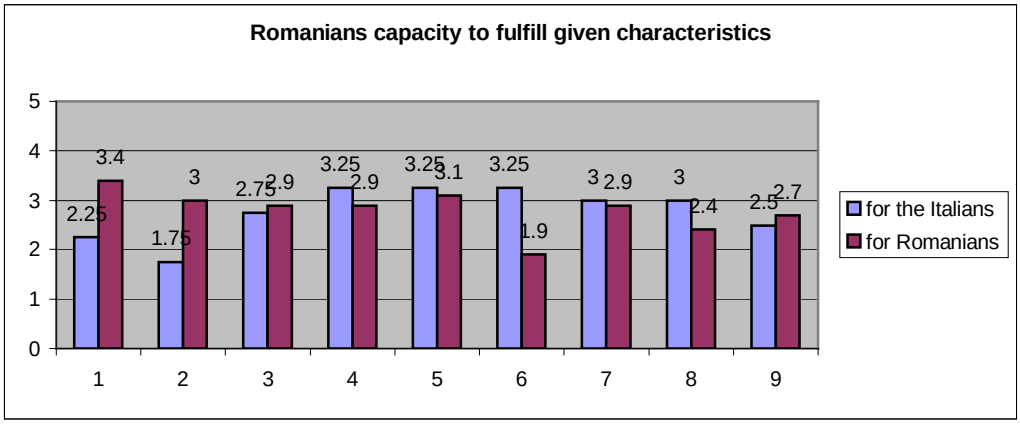


Although there is a tendency for the Romanians to give more importance to characteristics than the Italians, the judgements given by the two groups appear to be balanced.

There are big differences only as regards to culture, overvalued by the Romanians respect to the Italians, while as regards feed back the situation is inverted (important for Italians, decidedly less for Romanians)

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The ability of the Romanians to fulfil characteristics



The first element to emerge from comparison is a discreet similarity of judgements, in fact for 5 of the characteristics the difference between the two opinions is not over 0,3. There are big differences in three characteristics; responsibility, feedback and initiative. As regards the latter it is discussed later (5.3.2), while for the first two characteristics it is easy to define the reason for the different levels of importance given by the two groups. Considering them by far the most important, the Italians are more demanding than the Romanians who consider these characteristics not particularly important for integration into the Italian labour market. This is why the Romanians think they respond to the need for these characteristics very positively (3,4 e 3) while the Italians consider them insufficient. (2,25 e 1,75).

The second point which emerges from this research regards the fact that in at least 5 characteristics (out of 9) the Italians have a higher consideration of the Romanians than they have of themselves. This further confirms the idea, previously expressed, that the Romanian workers greatly undervalue their abilities.

4. *Interviewees' Comments on given characteristics' cultural influences*

1. Bearing the responsibility:

The Romanian labour market, still influenced by years of Soviet regime, would appear to have produced in the Romanians the lack of ability to assume their own responsibilities.

2. Giving and receiving feedback:

The Romanian workers often demonstrate a reduced ability to express their own opinions in a manner that is considered by the Italians as educated, they often use tones and manners that are a bit too 'energetic'. They often feel object of racist attacks, taking a simple rebuke about work as an aggression at a personal level. What clearly emerges is what some Romanians affirmed to be a consequence of the dictatorship: the lack of direct superiors (as the State was the only employer) has meant that the Romanians have not had the possibility of getting used to collaborating with superiors.

3. Communication and interaction skills:

Mostly as the previous point.

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4. Cooperation and teamwork skills:

The Romanian workers are rather rigid in group relations in the work place and they show notable difficulty in collaborating with others.

5. Independent work:

No differences found.

6. Taking initiative:

Once again it would appear that the origins of the Romanians have had a notable negative influence. Most of the persons interviewed considered the Romanian employment system one that left little or no space at all for taking initiative.

7. Working in a strange environment:

Afraid of the new working and social context, uprooted from their homeland in a new place they don't know, blocked by a language unknown to them, the Romanians encounter quite a few problems for integrating into the Italian context. The situation improves when they only change employment after a first job in Italy.

8. General knowledge of working life:

The Romanian labour market would appear not to be interested in the subject of work legislation, thus leaving Romanian workers with a lack of awareness of the importance of respect of legislation and little interest in the subject.

9. General knowledge of culture:

No differences found.

Conclusions – *Some elements to develop a vocational training focused on socio-cultural skills for migrants and their receivers*

When the Romanian workers arrive in Italy they encounter a labour market which is regulated by laws that are very different from the existing ones in their country. With its State model of Russian influence, the Romanian labour market until recently guaranteed a job for everyone, the quality of work was not a determining factor in the success of employment for each worker; one of the workers interviewed repeated a popular way of saying in Romania, that represents the distance of the State, the only employer in the Romanian labour market: a worker says to his colleague "I'll pretend that I work, you pretend to pay me, that's it!". Responsibility for one's work, and the ability to relate to superiors were completely unknown to Romanian workers, because of the context they were used to working in.

The habit of being evaluated for one's work results is totally lacking in Romanian workers, which means that often when criticised they react with aggressive or unjustified behaviour.

From here the suggestion to teach Romanians the importance of taking one's own responsibility for work carried out, that must respond to criteria of quality, and the importance of cooperation and teamwork skills. Another difference that needs to be faced regards the attention paid to work legislation in Italy; not used to giving importance to this subject in Romania, the Romanian workers do not give importance to this factor in Italy, whereas the employers consider fundamental an interest in this area.

Also the subject of hierarchy in the work place would appear to be frail: the employers interviewed stated that the Romanian workers learn quite quickly about work levels and the limits of their own job, but they deliberately choose not to pay attention to

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them when convenient. It will therefore be necessary to work not so much on the perception of hierarchic levels but more on the respect of levels. It is also necessary to take into consideration the Romanians' lack of ability in cooperating and working in a team, which they are not used to doing and as a consequence are too rigid in relations with colleagues.

Another important element that has emerged from interviews is the 'fear' of the older workers who lived under the Ceausescu dictate of being denounced for what they say, how they behave and their ideas. This element is interesting for our research at a continental level because it could be encountered in all the eastern European area beyond the iron curtain. This widespread 'worry' that often becomes 'fear' could be one of the reasons for the Romanians' difficulty in integrating into the Italian 'work mentality'.

From these conclusions there is certainly an environmental feature which influences the behaviour of Romanians in Italy every day and not only in the field of employment. Finding themselves in a new context (work and cultural), considered quite different from what they are used to, only partly understandable; forced to use a new language to move around in their job and to sort out Italian bureaucracy; without suitable practical and psychological back up from family and friends. This means that the Romanians (like any other foreign newcomer to Italy) felt as though they have been thrown into a hostile environment, where they react, as a form as defence, in a way that seems aggressive (often finishing up considering normal rebukes and criticisms as racist attacks) It is of particular interest to our research the fact that the employers are aware of these dynamics. They know that the foreign workers find difficulty and are willing to help on one condition. To quote one of the persons interviewed "as foreigners they have made a very difficult choice and we are willing to admit this and help them, but they must develop a positive attitude of collaboration and cooperation: they must 'eat humble pie' and admit that they have a lot to learn because they are in a new context. It could be interesting to dedicate a part of the vocational training on analysing and managing conflicts that arise in the work place because of this type of aggressive defensive behaviour.

As we have already seen, the Romanians consider themselves to be totally inadequate for the Italian labour market. In fact they have defined themselves unprepared on each characteristic mentioned. The more important they consider a characteristic the more they consider themselves insufficient. But not only: for 5 characteristics out of the 9 proposed, the Italians have a higher opinion of the Romanians' ability than the Romanians themselves. It is therefore obvious that the Romanians undervalue their own abilities. With regard to this consideration it could be a strategic move to include psychological counselling to help the Romanians improve their self esteem, this as well as supporting them from a personal point of view, would be helpful for reducing their insecurity and as a consequence the aggressiveness that they use for defending themselves in the workplace.

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Le competenze socio-culturali richieste nel mondo del lavoro italiano. Il caso delle donne rumene impiegate nel settore dei servizi alla persona

Questa ricerca è stata realizzata all'interno delle attività previste dal Progetto Pilota *Softimmigrants*, finanziato dall'Unione Europea nell'ambito del programma Leonardo da Vinci, cui hanno partecipato tre coppie di paesi: Italia-Romania, Finlandia-Estonia, Austria Ungheria.

Il quadro politico di riferimento del progetto è l'allargamento ad Est dei confini dell'Unione Europea e del conseguente ampliamento del mercato del lavoro.

Softimmigrants mira a promuovere la mobilità dei lavoratori in una dimensione europea, l'integrazione delle persone in contesti sociali diversi e la prevenzione dei conflitti e delle incomprensioni tra cittadini italiani e stranieri sul posto di lavoro, nella misura in cui queste siano dovute alla diversa cultura delle persone immigrate o alla mancanza di conoscenza delle abitudini della cultura del lavoro nel paese di ingresso.

Per inserirsi in un mercato del lavoro straniero i lavoratori immigrati devono possedere tre diversi tipologie di competenze: linguistica, professionale, socio-culturale. Queste ultime rappresentano il *focus* di *Softimmigrants* e della ricerca qui pubblicata.

Il reperimento dei dati è avvenuto attraverso: questionari e interviste a donne rumene impiegate nel settore della pulizia, infermiere o assistenti domiciliari; interviste ai loro datori di lavoro italiani e ai responsabili del personale o chi all'interno delle imprese ha il compito di seguirle.

Turin, Italy

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