Following the refugee relocation scheme: Ideological interpretations of inter-state responsibility in Romania | Raluca Bejan

The number of irregular migrant entries within the European Union (EU) increased by 546% in 2015. Sea arrivals totalled 1,015,078 in 2015, 362,753 in 2016 and 172,301 in 2017 (UNHCR, 2018). No workable policy has addressed this humanitarian crisis- partially because the deep divisions existent within the EU vis-à-vis the local implementation of the proposed relocation system.

This project presents on preliminary interview data (n=14) that explores how Romanian policy makers and elected representatives interpret the idea of interstate shared responsibility in relation to the EU's relocation system for internally re-distributing refugees. Following the 2015 levels of irregular migrant entries to Greece, Italy and Hungary, the European Commission (EC) adopted two procedural decisions intended to transfer 120,000 people in need of international protection from the aforementioned 'burdened' nations to the least affected Member States. A distribution key was apportioned between the 28 states on several indicators: GDP (40%), population size (40%), unemployment rate (10%) and past numbers of asylum seekers applications (10%) (EC, 2015). The relocation decisions stirred an outspoken political brawl with a pair of states (i.e., Slovakia and Hungary) bringing their complaints to the European Court.

The scholarly research on relocation is scarce. Most literature engages with analytical dialogues on responsibility-sharing mechanisms, on various distributive scenarios, or on the norms of fairness grounding these schemes. There is no empirical data on ideological interpretations of intra-EU solidarity efforts as they particularly pertain to the local implementation of the relocation scheme. This paper will discuss how distributive ideas and ideals of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility are understood within the political and legislative context in Romania and will explore what constitutes a fair distributive mechanism in the development of interstate responsibility sharing in matters of asylum and migration management.

Findings will advance heterodox conceptualizations of responsibility-sharing within the EU. A future workable relocation system will lead to fewer interstate frictions and will better support asylum seekers with service provision and care arrangements within the host countries.