Understanding the Romanian Diaspora
Understanding the Romanian diaspora in the UK:
The Romanians are here, a guide on how to read and engage with a community in the making

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Executive Summary

Is the diaspora a relevant, influential political actor? Is there sufficient political willingness or interest to understand and engage with these communities? How are Romanians appraised and understood by home and host country institutions? If they are, what picture do data and statistics paint, and can they reliably capture realities on the ground? How do Romanian communities associate and why? And what is the impact of diaspora initiatives so far?

In providing an answer to these questions, we aim to mediate a more nuanced understanding of the Romanian diaspora in the UK, mapping its presence, visibility and impact. Examining demographic data, and the way in which it has been structured by various sources (i.e. government bodies) and at different times, proved extremely insightful. Moreover, mapping diaspora interactions enabled us to visualise, even if not comprehensively, trends and patterns in cooperation. Based on our findings and innovative approach, some general recommendations may help guide institutions in both home and host countries, as well as the diaspora. These include:

**Know your target audience** – Establish a bilateral working group that has the knowledge and ability to collect, interpret and transpose data into a coherent narrative, thus providing a departure point for more informed policy-making and diaspora engagement strategies.

**Engage the diaspora**
- Cultivate trust by addressing the core issues facing communities abroad, demonstrating willingness to listen, and upholding good governance norms and practices.
- Strengthen and support through policy instruments the diaspora’s organisational capacity, reprioritising/adjusting funding objectives based on a thorough assessment of community needs, capabilities and potential.

**Accountability, transparency and continuity** – Engage in a systematic review of diaspora governance, thoroughly assessing which policies, initiatives and strategies succeeded or not. Acknowledging failures, vulnerabilities and risks through transparent institutional auditing is a step forward in conveying accountability to communities otherwise dissuaded from civic and political participation.

**As for the diaspora:**

**Trust and cooperate** – Identify like-minded partners, pool resources and coordinate operational modes in order to effectively pursue more impactful, long-term oriented initiatives.

**Share** – Engage in a process of sharing good practices, lessons learnt and expertise to access wider support networks, and coalitions of support around issues that impact the community as a whole.

**Strategic Vision** – Adopt a strategic posture by cooperating to effect change, whether this implies devising self-sustaining funding mechanisms (crowdfunding, diaspora trusts, etc.), developing diaspora knowledge platforms, or pursuing more consistent advocacy in both home and host countries.
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Introduction

By Andra-Lucia Martinescu\textsuperscript{1} & Alina Bala\c{t}chi-Lupascu\textsuperscript{2}

This report attempts to fuse two perspectives, both underexplored. The first is a detailed demographic analysis of Romanian communities in the United Kingdom (UK), touching on aspects such as geographical distribution, participation, dual nationality of Romanian children, and the wider implications of engagement policies and diaspora governance in both home and host countries. If we examine demographic statistics, as poorly structured as they may be, Romanian communities are significant in both size and presence, but they are scattered across most of UK’s regions. Nevertheless, the diaspora’s relevance to and impact on policy in both Romania and the UK seems frail, which takes us to the second part of our inquiry.\textsuperscript{3} The study also seeks to map the way in which Romanian communities in the UK tend to associate and how they interact with other organisations and institutions. Such a mapping exercise of diaspora initiatives and association patterns is informative in several ways.

Firstly, it is a valuable institutional resource. Diasporas have become strategic constituencies, tangibly contributing to the economies, societies and cultures of both their home and host countries. Yet, policies and engagement strategies do not often respond to or reflect the needs and specificities of diaspora communities. Whether in Romania or the UK, a failure to capture the diaspora’s economic, socio-cultural and civic capital into policy agendas not only limits the effectiveness and legitimacy of policy-actions, but also creates vulnerabilities; these may affect the delivery and outreach of public services, the distribution of funding, or the integration of communities. An improper understanding of the context in which diaspora communities live, work and study leads to misaligned institutional responses (from public authorities) when it comes to tackling the malign exploitation of vulnerable groups. Knowledge gaps can create institutional blind spots when trying to identify opportunities for more effective engagement, from grassroots to transnational levels.

In this sense, more determined efforts ought to be made towards effectively integrating knowledge and data gathering practices into policy-making. Perhaps now more than ever, the global health crisis with its manifold implications prompts the need for innovative institutional responses, wider partnerships and collaborative approaches. Diaspora organisations and networks act as a conduit between communities and the public sector, and thus, can vastly enhance institutional capacity building, from the provision of expertise and grassroots insights to facilitating communication and enabling access. More informed policies and inclusive diaspora-oriented strategies would also encourage trust-building within this vast and diverse web of diaspora organisations, groups and initiatives. Whether in the UK, Romania or elsewhere, strengthening the rapport between institutions and this segment of the body politic, the diaspora, requires a sustained commitment to knowledge, transparency and cooperation.

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\textsuperscript{3} There has been sporadic mobilisation, especially for voting, however structured and consistent diaspora advocacy for civic and political causes, which would help advance community interests in Romania and the UK is yet to mature. For example, the diaspora can influence policy agendas (such as better representation) if organisations cooperate and coordinate more effectively, also by identifying common objectives.
Secondly, the study is intended as a resource for the diaspora itself. Although not exhaustive, our research provides a blueprint of how the diaspora ecosystem and the interactions within it can be strategically interpreted. Each diaspora organisation, formal or informal entity would be able to map its outreach and impact within the community and beyond. Connections may not have been captured in their entirety, however this bird’s eye view of networked communities (both offline and online) helps identify opportunities for partnerships, coalitions of support and concerted action. Within an environment long plagued by mistrust, excessive politicisation of diaspora issues and inertia, we believe it is through sustained cooperation and exchange of good practices that communities learn how to organise themselves more effectively, how to advocate and essentially garner better representation.
Part I – Understanding the demography

Is there such a thing as the Romanian diaspora?

In Romania, politicians, scholars and sociologists have long disputed the existence of a legitimate diaspora, putting forward numerous arguments as to whether it should be defined as such. It is widely accepted that the term ‘diaspora’ has no fixed or clear definition. In this paper, we will refer to the International Organisation for Migration’s (IOM) Glossary on Migration, which defines the diaspora as “a people or ethnic populations that leave their traditional ethnic homelands, being dispersed throughout other parts of the world.”4 One should note that a bond with the homeland is preserved, despite the duality of being anchored in host and home country livelihoods, both ‘here’ and ‘there’.

Other substitutes also include the media referring to transnational populations as diaspora, the Romanian Government as Romanians abroad, and the British as EU-2 or Citizens of Romanian origin. Safran’s account of what a diaspora signifies in traditional terms appears to fit the status of Romanian communities in the UK at this particular moment in time.5 It involves dispersal from an original place; has a collective memory and a vision of the homeland; feels that perfect acceptance and integration into the host society is not attainable; contemplates the return to the homeland; is committed to maintain and restore the original homeland, and feels a strong ethnic group consciousness based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, and belief in a common fate.

IOM also distinguishes between migrants and the diaspora: diasporas are defined as “migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background.”6

No matter what term is being used, the 7.5 million Romanian citizens abroad face multiple realities, and within this collective experience, they each relate differently to their status. They do, however, consider themselves a diaspora and whilst the vast majority yearns to return home at some point, experience shows they are also involved in civic matters deemed relevant at different times (elections, the case of Rosia Montana, deforestations, the Colectiv issue, etc.).7 Subsequently this diversity is reflected in a plethora of strategies and links that each individual or community chooses to maintain with the country of origin and ultimately raises tangible questions of belonging, nationalism, and an overall subtle dilemma of identity.

If there is, why engage it?

The 2014 presidential elections brought a different diasporic dimension into the limelight. Although ‘grey matter migration’ (brain drain) and financial remittances already defined political agendas and discourse, Romanians abroad as a collective actor was only widely acknowledged in that particular context of mass mobilisation for voting. Statistically speaking, the percentage of diaspora votes did

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6 Ibid 3.
not really equate to the tipping point, but the enormous pressure they exercised on the change of mindset and perspective for families left behind did not go unnoticed.

The media did not miss such a catalytic dimension of the nation’s expatriate citizens and subsequently the Government and major political parties went back to the drawing board for programmes targeting Romanians abroad, the social and financial capital, and perhaps most importantly their potential return, through a variety of initiatives and provisions.

The case of the UK

Although initially, the UK was not a favoured migration destination, following the global economic crisis of 2008 many Romanian economic migrants in Italy and Spain chose to re-settle in the UK. The strong-networked dimension of Romanian migration had a significant role to play as family and geographic links induced the strong mobility towards the British Isles, also reflected in National Insurance Number (NINO) applications. In 2007, Romania became a member of the European Union (EU) and the freedom of movement came into force, changing the pattern of migration from short-term, transient and individual into long term, indefinite stays, often premised on family reunions.

Thus, in the UK more than 1.2 million Romanians registered for a NINO, showing the total number of Romanians who have, at some point, registered to work in the country. The situation rose dramatically in 2016, when the number of NINO applications reached a peak (189,023 - Year to December 2016). To contextualise, it was in June the same year that the UK voted to leave the EU. The leaders of the ‘Leave’ movement campaigned on the idea that, among other things, the UK would benefit from tighter control of its borders, which might have triggered a phase of ‘temporary relocation’ for certain migrant communities, more so for economic diasporas.

Otherwise, National Insurance Number applications, by region have remain consistent over time. Otherwise, National Insurance Number applications, by region have remain consistent over time.

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8 Based on data from the Department of Work and Pensions, available at: https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk.
9 Source for EU Migration to and from the UK, September 2019: The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk
So how many Romanians are there in UK?

Even after the 2011 census, despite the multicultural approach and number-driven strategies, UK media and local authorities soon had to admit there were no comprehensive, encompassing and inferential statistics for the accurate number of Romanians in the UK at any one time. Little was known about the true scale and scope of Romanian communities in the UK and the little data available failed to capture the nuances of the group’s structure, amplifying the rift between the government’s outreach plans and their supposed recipients. Different government bodies released various sets of data, which did not necessarily paint the same picture. For example, in 2007 the ONS reported a resident population of Romanian origin of 20,000, whilst the Department of Work and Pensions issued a number of 19,152 National Insurance Numbers, yet in 2008, the resident population recorded is of only 34,000.\textsuperscript{10} It should be noted that a major barrier in the accurate collection of data could also be attributed to the Romanians’ reluctance to register or engage with governmental bodies.

Furthermore, although registrations for National Insurance Number may indicate the size of the Romanian community residing in the UK at a given time, in fact (particularly in 2016) a considerable number of Romanians applied for it without immediate plans for long-term relocation in the UK,

which has been a trait of circulatory migration. This is supported by the numbers reported by the ONS in the following year.

No matter how clearly or reasonably policy-makers articulate integration plans and multiculturalism strategies, results will fail to show in absence of a thorough knowledge-driven approach. Which communities do policies aim to engage? Are policies and engagement strategies sensitive to the diaspora’s cultural traits and specificities? Without rigorous and comprehensive data collection, accurate records of the diaspora’s geographical distribution and participation in the labour market no strategy can be deemed viable.

In 2019, more than 400,000 Romanians declared as living in the UK, with 7.5% born in the UK.\(^\text{11}\) This was an overwhelming number, corroborating other staggering statistics, which revealed a firm demographic increase amongst Romanian populations.\(^\text{12}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Born in United Kingdom</th>
<th>Born in country of nationality</th>
<th>Other Country of Birth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>estimate  CI(^+/-)</td>
<td>estimate CI +/-</td>
<td>estimate CI +/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>34  9</td>
<td>400 31</td>
<td>16  6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Estimates of Romanians born in the UK, Romania and other countries in 2019*

Despite a London-centric tendency, underpinning the economic trait of the migration process, numerous communities sprouted across the UK, confirming the networked facet of settlement dynamics.\(^\text{13}\)

11 According to the ONS, data available: https://www.ons.gov.uk
12 Non-British population in the UK, excluding some residents in communal establishments, by country of birth for the following figures.
13 Population by country of birth and nationality January19 to December 19- ONS, Table 2.6.
Data pointed to a proportionate distribution of both males and females in the community, whilst confirming a sociological reality: most representative was the younger age segment, those having chosen to relocate abroad in search of better-paid work and opportunities.

Thus, if we factor in the age of migrants the fast and consistent demographic surges of Romanian communities should come as unsurprising. The annual statistics on live births including countries of birth for non-UK-born mothers and fathers across England and Wales the number of children born in 2019, whose parents were born in Romania revealed a continuous rise (to 16,069 live births for mothers and 15,211 for fathers). This pattern has been observed since 2012, when Romania entered the top ten nationalities, rising 12 places to become by 2019 the third most common country of birth to non-UK-born mothers. Romania also remains one of the top two most common countries of birth for fathers born outside the UK. The number of live births to Romanian-born fathers continues to rise. Interestingly enough, only 3.7% of the Romanian nationals living in the UK declared as having a British passport, despite a permissive legal context, which enabled children born to parents with permanent residence to acquire British nationality if born in the UK.

Graph 4 – Distribution of males and females in Romanian communities in the UK

Graph 5 – Romanian citizens in the UK by country of birth in 2019
Also significant is the percentage of Romanian nationals born in countries other than Romania and the UK. Numbers includes Moldovan citizens entitled to dual nationality on the basis of descendance, but also children born to what can be deemed an economic diaspora, specifically to those who lived in multiple countries of residence in pursuit of better living conditions or motivated by other factors.

This particular segment, of the first generation of children born to the Romanian diaspora, tends to be a missed opportunity for data collection, left unaddressed in diaspora engagement strategies of both home and host countries. Whilst Romania has often no awareness of the group’s size and geo-location, relying on host-country statistics or religious institutions reports on christenings, the latter fails to build on this social capital, which can also be attributed to ingrained perceptions. Due to their lack of voting power, Romanians born elsewhere may not be deemed sufficiently important in political calculations. Moreover, the circulatory tendency of migration may have instilled perceptions that these groups are unlikely to settle or seek long-term integration in host societies. No matter the reason this institutional myopia provides a basis for exclusion, which may trigger an identity vacuum and further disenfranchisement.

Nevertheless, precisely these younger age and non-linear migrants (those having resided in multiple countries) tend to identify as Romanian, valuing their ethno-cultural identity to a greater extent than those born and raised in one country. They are also more inclined to learn and use their native language. Moreover, they show willingness to interact and bond with peers of the same nationality as schools become not just places of learning but also micro-sites of socialisation.
The case of Brent

Brent is a borough in northwest London, designated as part of ‘Outer London’. Its major areas comprise Wembley, Kilburn, Willesden, Harlesden and Neasden. At the time of the 2001 census, Brent was London’s most diverse borough and in 2011 it was the second most diverse.\(^\text{14}\)

To be noted, the 2011 Census introduced for the first time a question on national identity, partly to be attributed to a growing interest in how ‘national’ consciousness manifests itself. Deemed a subjective self-identifying measure, the question ‘How would you describe your national identity?’ allowed respondents to express which country/nation they felt most affiliated to and more than one national identity could be ticked.

Back to Brent, in April 2001, 277 residents declared they were Romanian. In March 2011, 6182 residents registered as Romanian nationals, the most spectacular increase among minorities of 77%. Subsequently, in 2017 Brent local authorities recognised Romanians as the largest Eastern European community, even surpassing the Polish.\(^\text{15}\) This trend was promptly reflected in education statistics. The graph below shows the main languages spoken in primary and secondary schools in Brent.

“I spoke about my experience as a governor at a school where 12.5% of the children speak Romanian (compared with 4.5% Polish), where the Romanian children are very much part of the school community with some sitting on the Pupil School Council and involved in the many extra-curricular activities, including music and choir. They are proud of their country of origin but see themselves as now part of the UK. Many have been at the school for 5 or 6 years although their sense of security was shaken by the EU Referendum result.” - Martin Francis, Chalkhill Primary School\(^\text{16}\)

Statistics pointing to the exact proportion of young Romanians growing up in the UK are neither timely, nor consistent. However, according to the 2015 Annual Population Survey estimates their number has been growing steadily (numbers shown in thousands), which is consistent with the annual statistics on births to Romanian parents.

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17 Available, nation-wide data only covers the years between 2011-2015.
18 Source: Annual Population Survey estimates of EU and EFTA nationals resident in the UK, aged 0 to 16 and 0 to 18, 2011 to 2015, Office for National Statistics, November 2016, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/adhocs/006287annualpopulationsurveyestimatesofeuandeftanationalsresidentintheukaged0to16androto182011to2015
In 2020, the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS- aka ‘settled status’) gives a different perspective, one that Romanian community-organisations have attempted to discuss for a long time, yet no one dared to name it. In March 2020, 562,210 EUSS applications were logged in by Romanian nationals (16.3% of the total).

In June numbers jumped to 606,190, also providing a clearer picture of the Romanian communities’ geographical distribution.

Moving beyond numbers, the Romanian diaspora in the UK emerges as profoundly anchored in the homeland, not only sensitive to social issues, but also deeply attuned to home country politics. Although electoral speeches frequently hinted to the full political inclusion of Romania’s citizens, however dispersed around the globe, few actually expected or foresaw the diaspora’s en masse mobilisation to the polling stations.\textsuperscript{19} Even though the Romanian diaspora in Italy appeared to lead

the way, with the largest number of valid votes cast, it soon became clear that actually, Romanians in the UK were the most committed, with the greatest average of votes per section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Number of polling stations</th>
<th>Number of cast votes</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>919343</td>
<td>1101.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GREAT BRITAIN</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>170475</td>
<td>2367.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERMANY</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>154140</td>
<td>1926.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUSTRIA</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28912</td>
<td>1700.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BELGIUM</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>36065</td>
<td>1568.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>52275</td>
<td>1412.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITALY</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>190280</td>
<td>1340.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DENMARK</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12721</td>
<td>1060.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUXEMBOURG</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3100</td>
<td>1033.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZECH REPUBLIC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>976.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYPRUS</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5717</td>
<td>952.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, and particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Romanian community has managed to raise awareness as to its presence, receiving recognition for of its civic engagement.

As the gravitas of the diaspora is increasing and its members are more willing to engage with both home and host countries, this social capital should be attentively nurtured and engaged.

A recent policy objective pursued by the Romanian Presidency is to attract and reunite a network of highly skilled Romanian professionals from abroad in order to benefit from their expertise and talent. Whereas the benefits of such an initiative cannot be disputed, the proposal was ill received by middle and low-skilled expats, fearing that Romanian institutions are not prioritising the reforms they deem necessary for a return, but rather have a ‘pick-and-choose’, short-term policy in terms of its citizens abroad.

This is indeed a turning point and could prove pivotal for engaging the Romanian diaspora in meaningful conversations and outreach, so its contributions, willingness to participate, as well as its aspirations are better understood. Home and host country governments should build on such momentums, not only by actively seeking to understand diasporic contexts but also by mediating and reconciling the myriad perspectives that form the diasporic consciousness. Elites, seasonal/temporary workers, reunited families, or young generations born and raised abroad all constitute the diaspora. Their different grievances and aspirations require not only a nuanced understanding, but also adaptive policies, more responsive to the context. Ultimately, the question of trust cannot be ignored. Trust-building should prevail in strategies, as this will be pivotal to the ensuing sense of responsibility, be it to Romania or the UK.

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Part II – A social network analysis of the Romanian diaspora

The way in which the diaspora tends to organise and why (forming associations, groups, networks etc.), its patterns of cooperation, and the impact of diaspora initiatives, are all topics that remain underexplored, despite their relevance. As the social network analysis of the Romanian diaspora shows, geographical proximity has been pivotal in facilitating interactions between different actors. Different regional geographies inherently prompted hubs of cooperation, sometimes connected amongst themselves, at times less so. Their function builds upon (local) community needs, social and cultural cohesion, political and civic causes, religion, education, provision of services with regard to work and settlement rights etc.

Whether officially registered or not diaspora organisations/associations, charities, ad-hoc/volunteer groups, diaspora (online) platforms, all display, promote and engage in different types and layers of interaction. For instance, those embedded in the wider local community (i.e. not only Romanian speaking) tend to have stronger visibility, outreach, and overall access to host country institutions; hence, better at absorbing local resources and public services. Nevertheless, and a recurring theme throughout this report, the impact of diaspora initiatives and contributions in home and host countries can and should be maximised. One way to achieve this would be through sustained cooperation between diaspora organisations and their willingness to pool resources, whether it is expertise with accessing funding (government or otherwise), public relations and building rapport with institutions, or sharing their respective networks to expand outreach.

As we shall explore in the next sections, the impact of diaspora initiatives and actions largely depends on two sets of factors. One relates to the organisational capacity of each entity, its visibility/exposure (within the community and beyond), fundraising capacity, level of ambition, outlook and embeddedness within community. The other interrelated set of factors refers to types of interaction, patterns of association and tendency towards cooperation. Participating at or organising events carries a different weight (impact) than engaging in or initiating campaigns, which may span wider geographical networks and involve more diverse stakeholders. Initiatives that promote active participation in host-country civic and political spheres would equally benefit the community as a whole by facilitating long-term integration and acceptance. In a similar way, advocacy by disseminating information, engaging with a cause or generating coalitions of support, help solidify communities of interest and practice.

Why and how do Romanians associate in the UK? And what is lacking?

Placed at the confluence of multiple spheres (local and national, political and civic, homeland and host-country) diaspora associations have the capacity to garner influence, their scope and function thus extending beyond social, cultural or religious cohesion. A better representation of community-wide interests, embedded participation in the host country and multifaceted engagement with the homeland can be attained by harmonising operational modes, standardising practices, and through overall sustained cooperation.

Although Romanian diaspora communities in the UK show higher levels of interaction than Romanians in other countries, including transnational (across multiple countries), there is a persistent fragmentation when it comes to formulating broader, long-term oriented community-agendas (policy, strategic or otherwise). This often sees a duplication of efforts and initiatives, with diaspora organisations competing for the same resources, audiences and provision of services, albeit with varying degrees of effectiveness. Unstandardized practices and a departure from basic organisational/operational principles (such as lack of transparency, auditing, coordination and even communication) have paved the way for opportunistic actors, and at the extreme end, exploitation.
This not only impacts cooperation amongst diaspora associations, but also sows mistrust within the community, dissuading participation and wider support for causes that may actually benefit the entire group. Apart from ingrained mistrust, weak or absent cooperation can also be attributed to a lack of awareness regarding similar projects or initiatives that could provide opportunities for partnerships, the pooling of resources and joint actions. Grassroots diaspora organisations, depending on the geographies in which they operate, often lack a wider networking capacity, and ability to connect at policy-levels, which in turn and despite good intentions, may hinder the impact of their actions. A failure to effectively communicate or publicise their efforts (both offline and online) not only limits the outreach, but also the range of engagement opportunities with other entities that may pursue similar ventures. On the one hand, this aspect is reflected in cooperation patterns, or lack thereof, within the Romanian diaspora associative environment (among local/national organisations, formal and informal groups, volunteer networks etc.). On the other, limited outreach and networking capabilities prevent diaspora organisations from accessing broader coalitions of support, stemming from the host country civil society/NGO spheres, other diaspora groups and even wider transnational networks. For instance, liaising with other diaspora groups in the UK, Eastern and Central European or otherwise, in sharing knowledge and good practices remains limited.

An Integrated Approach

There are some exceptions to wider engagement. Certain community organisations and NGOs seek to cater for and integrate in their provision of services multiple nationalities with similar grievances and needs. For instance, this is particularly valid for organisations focused on work/labour rights, living/settlement conditions, access to social security schemes, and other legal aspects, that impact the livelihoods of several diaspora groups, mostly Eastern and Central European. By enabling access to services in different languages, these associations promote effective integration and foster commonalities of interest across a diverse spectrum. Their rapport with host country institutions (national/local) are also stronger, sustained through systematic communication and provision of expertise, which goes in both directions. Firstly, knowledge of host country legal and regulatory systems is paramount in delivering sound advice and accurately disseminating information of public interest, in real time. Secondly, in-depth grassroots experience with diaspora communities (embeddedness) enables informed insights, which in turn (could) assist both home and host country institutions in elaborating/implementing appropriate policy actions. However, there are, of course, limitations.

The various groups’ grievances and needs often surpass the organisational capacity to process the sheer number of requests. With the pandemic exacerbating these vulnerabilities, outreach has been severely limited, forcing some community organisations to adapt and migrate online. Often understaffed, operating on a voluntary basis, and with shortages of funding or institutional support, delivering assistance to those in need, mostly vulnerable groups facing immediate destitution became an even greater challenge. Gaps in communication, particularly with homeland public authorities regarding the extent of the impending crisis triggered multiple failures, that compounded to erode institutional capacities: to effectively coordinate crisis management responses at country levels, to integrate real-time diaspora expertise and community insights in formulating appropriate measures, and to deliver timely support in partnership with frontline community organisations. Some of these caveats could be attributed to ingrained institutional perceptions, as well as rigid bureaucratic cultures and practices, dissociating the diaspora’s output and contributions from policy and decision-making processes. But perhaps more importantly, it is the lack of systematic knowledge regarding the Romanian diaspora itself, and at a more granular level, an inadequate appraisal of diaspora associations, their organisational capabilities, outlook, scope, outreach, and level interconnectedness. This is not to say that some diaspora groups or organisations should be...
discriminated against in their relationship with institutions because of perceived or actual limitations in scope and action. In this case, a context-based, sectorial, approach should inform institutions in their diaspora engagement strategies. Some organisations may have extensive online networks that can facilitate public information reaching wider audiences, without geographical constraints or proximity considerations. Others cater for smaller, more clustered communities, acting as local hubs and socio-cultural support networks, but with limited online visibility or exposure (for instance, religious charities). Besides the online/offline spectrum, Romanian diaspora groups and organisations have varying degrees of access to and interaction with host country institutions and civil society. Therefore, some entities’ capacity to mediate bilateral partnerships is more pronounced. Areas of expertise and scope of action should also inform the configuration of partnerships with homeland institutions. Whilst some diaspora organisations are capable of leveraging material/physical resources (such as funds or human capital), others perform better as facilitators, conduits of promotion in harnessing a larger support base. Legitimacy and recognition within Romanian communities across the country are also reflected in cooperation patterns.

Diaspora Organisations – A View from Within

Over the years, more established, embedded and mature diaspora associations and NGOs have developed long-standing networks, through sustained cooperation; in turn, this helped cultivate a shared modus operandi and coordination of practices based on mutual trust and reputational costs. As the social network analysis reveals, these entities are clustered around Greater London and exhibit higher participation levels in cultural, professional/business networking, and country-branding activities amongst others, often associated with the Romanian Cultural Institute or institutions of diplomatic missions (such as the Romanian Embassy and Consulate). Over the years, these organisations have also mediated a homogeneous understanding of Romanian cultural identity to British audiences, garnering institutional support for various charitable causes, as well as broader recognition for Romanian communities, by promoting narratives centred on professional achievement and academic excellence.

More permissive conditions of access to UK’s labour market after the lifting of transitional controls in 2014 triggered a steady demographic growth and diversification, expanding the geographical outreach of Romanian communities to other UK regions. Simultaneously, these processes sparked a diversification of adaptive practices and patterns of association/interaction mirroring the informal structures of migration support networks. These shifts also translated into more localised and community-centred initiatives, primarily focused on cohesion, socialisation and the preservation cultural belonging - for instance, organising events promoting traditions, and folklore, at local community centres, or the local Romanian Orthodox parish. Furthermore, personalised/individualised interpretations of traditional, as well as religious values somewhat ‘democratised’ the means by which diaspora associations chose to express and promote ethno-cultural and religious identities. Nevertheless, in absence of standardised practices of organising and promoting cultural events, such a dynamic tends to be more inward-looking, serving community-level needs rather than seeking to absorb wider audiences and nationalities into the process. Thus, it is not necessarily conducive towards integration in the host country. As homeland engagement with the diaspora has been contingent on the preservation of language, culture and traditional values, cultural promotion activities continue to drive associative trends, constituting the most frequent

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type of interaction within the diaspora network. Undoubtedly, traditions and cultural belonging fulfil specific collective functions. However, diaspora initiatives mostly focused on localised activities such as organising events (traditional feasts, folk concerts etc.) carry a limited impact, despite the prevalence.

An exploratory view of the network shows the frequency and weight of interactions between actors; however, this does not necessarily reflect the way in which diaspora organisations conduct such activities, or whether norms and good practices are being observed. The proliferation of opportunistic actors has been and continues to be an inherent vulnerability, for instance diaspora associations syphoning funds by overestimating the cost of organising events or not delivering the services that form the scope of their activities. In absence of more rigorous scrutiny that could dissuade nefarious behaviours, corruption will continue to plague not only the relationship between diaspora organisations, but also their overall rapport with institutions. By tolerating, overlooking or failing to scrutinise and sanction dishonest conduct public institutions effectively enable the spread of exploitative practices.

Considerations on Diaspora Governance

Diaspora governance shapes considerably the outlook, level of ambition and impact of diaspora initiatives and contributions. A long-term outlook and higher level of ambition presume goal-oriented cooperation as well as effective coordination between diaspora groups entering partnerships. Numerous diaspora organisations lack the expertise, knowhow and capacity to access funding (from Romania and the UK). Bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of transparency, and mistrust in institutions dissuade organisations from pursuing more ambitious collaborative projects or from engaging in broader partnerships that demand substantial resources. This dynamic becomes visible in the network, with cooperation mostly limited to short-term, localised pursuits that do not require time-consuming administrative costs, oversight or compromise. Financial support mostly comes in the form of private donations and sponsorships for specific events or charity initiatives. Nevertheless, with no transparent auditing procedures in place and poor accountability, funds can often be mishandled (and have been). In order to instil accountability both at institutional and community levels, a standardisation of basic operational procedures (including financial auditing, transparent reporting, data privacy etc.) should become a prerequisite governing the interaction between institutions, funding bodies, civil society, diaspora associations, as well as community donors.

Moreover, diaspora governance in the homeland ought to be guided by harmonised norms, which could provide a basis for wider bilateral, multi-sectorial engagement with the host-country. Strategic dialogue can mobilise resources and support capacity building at all levels and for all stakeholders involved, from grassroots organisations to institutional bodies and other operational partners. Devising integrated bilateral mechanisms that sustain diaspora initiatives based on context, capabilities, impact and outlook (continuity) would most likely foster a different collaborative environment.

The way in which the diaspora network is shaped at this point in time equally stems from a fragmented institutional approach. Poor coordination between the different branches governing the diaspora shows that at policy and decision-making levels there is (still) no unity of vision or action.
Rigid norms and other administrative inefficiencies encumber the provision of government support, disincentivising a large spectrum of diaspora organisations from accessing funds. These structural barriers limit the scope and span of diaspora collaborations, as well as partnerships that could potentially involve a variety of themes and implementation partners. Such partnerships should include NGOs and civil society in both home and host countries, thus encouraging an exchange of ideas, knowhow and good practices. Linking diaspora organisations to NGOs with solid experience in fundraising (in both countries) would gradually increase the operational autonomy and networking capacity of smaller associations. Through concerted action, these communities of interest would be able to push and advocate for a broader, more impactful policy agenda. However, in absence of a harmonised framework it becomes prohibitive to coordinate and manage such a process, since requirements and guidelines are vastly different for each country, and even within the same country. For example, in the UK local authorities have their own funding mechanisms. Moreover, diaspora associations mainly operate on a volunteer basis and with limited resources. For volunteers working day-jobs whilst being involved in grassroots community activities, engaging the bureaucratic apparatus can be a time-consuming and alienating experience. Consequently, a more ambitious outlook simply exceeds the capabilities with which they have to make do on a daily basis.

What emerges instead is a patchwork of initiatives with different budgets, agendas and knowhow, acting separately despite obvious commonalities of interest. Furthermore, nuanced partnerships involving multiple stakeholders from different countries for instance cannot be easily accommodated within existing frameworks. For the diaspora, this diminishes opportunities for transnational engagement with other organisations, a process that accelerates the flow of information, learning and sharing of good practices. A case of opportunities missed equally applies to institutions. The systematic failure to exploit the benefits of a wider, more diverse portfolio of diaspora projects, and to encourage ambitious, uncharted collaborative efforts, demonstrates a lack of strategic vision. A more flexible, informed and context-sensitive approach would go a long way towards unlocking types of cooperation not yet captured in the guidelines. If institutional resources and communication are mostly oriented towards processing, administering applications (for funding) and navigating the different institutional layers (for approvals), there is little room left in this pathway dependency for a systematic review of what has worked/works, of current objectives, limitations and vulnerabilities, whilst integrating diaspora feedback into the process.

For host country institutions a more granular appraisal of diaspora communities is necessary so that the different institutional layers are informed, effectively coordinated and policies responsive to the context. So far and as a consequence of how data gathering is structured, the Romanian diaspora has been grouped with other diaspora communities in local council schemes, which may not reflect the size of the population, its specificities and level of representation. A knowledge-driven approach combining quantitative as well as qualitative methodologies (i.e. focus groups with local diaspora organisations), local diaspora intelligence and public consultations would alleviate current gaps and raise awareness.

**Is the Diaspora an influential political actor?**

Despite the demographic size and geographical dispersion across the UK, the Romanian diaspora is not yet relevant or sufficiently integrated at policy, decision-making levels. This can also be attributed to how the diaspora is organised, its networking capabilities and overall tendency to cooperate. The ability to meaningfully influence policy agendas in both home and host countries depends on two interrelated pillars. One reflects the diaspora’s level of coordination, outreach and participation. The more diaspora organisations cooperate and pool resources, encouraging participation and involvement from their support base, the more they will push forward a unified agenda through concerted action. For instance, two or more diaspora groups/associations
initiate/implement a campaign (i.e. civic, awareness, status after Brexit, work rights etc.) that requires multifaceted engagement with institutions and civil society in both home and host countries. Such an initiative would entail coordination across several dimensions: defining the scope and stakeholders, accessing funding, convening upon an integrated communications approach by harmonising media/public relations strategies, outreach and engagement with the community, liaison with institutional bodies, and expertise. This can happen locally, nationally and transnationally, the latter indicating cooperation amongst Romanian diaspora associations from two or more countries of residence working towards the same goal. The other pillar reflects the degree of access to political opportunity structures and thus, the diaspora’s ability to attract coalitions of support around an issue, in Romania, the UK, as well as transnationally. The effectiveness of civic and political advocacy is largely dictated by the level of participation and engagement with the public sector. Moreover, the types of actions diaspora groups or organisations pursue in mobilising for a cause becomes equally important.

A Civic Identity – Diaspora Advocacy

As we have previously explored in the policy series, the diaspora, in its formal and informal modes of association did demonstrate a capacity to mobilise for political and civic causes. In such instances, mobilisation tended to be ad-hoc and in response to political turmoil in the home country; elections (or their improper organisation by homeland authorities) as well as the protest movements against corruption acted as vehicles for the diaspora’s organisation around civic and political causes. Mostly starting online, and with strong connections to the civil society and NGO sector in Romania, diaspora groups also coalesced offline, organising protests, awareness campaigns, generally reacting to the political environment in the home country.

Whereas homeland politics provided an impetus for diaspora mobilisation, structured cooperation around civic and political advocacy is noticeably lower for issues facing Romanian communities in the UK. This relatively low level of involvement is a symptom of how Romanians have experienced and internalised politics, which often compounds mistrust in institutions. Moreover, an enduring politicisation of diaspora issues, and the way in which national political parties recognised engaged with diaspora mobilisation splintered communities even more. Although there are some structured forms of cooperation around civic and political issues such initiatives are limited in scope, span and level of coordination.

There is potential for concerted action and the high levels of mobilisation, even though sporadic, indicate that commonalities of interest amongst diaspora groups and associations do exist. To effectively influence policy agendas in the host country diaspora initiatives, need to overcome sectarian divides within the community (by developing a more structured collaborative approach). A sustained exchange of knowhow (i.e. lessons learnt) and expertise would also encourage a wider outreach. Therefore, diaspora groups, formal and informal ought to engage in a process of trust-building, defining common goals and implementation strategies, whilst coordinating organisational practices.

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Data, graphs & network

Without delving into methodological considerations, certain aspects related to our dataset require interpretation for a better understanding of the network. The diaspora network (mostly from UK and Romania) comprises 1056 nodes or entities, a web of diaspora associations, online groups, businesses, institutions, NGOs, media etc all interconnected to variable degrees, based on the scope, place, duration, and frequency of cooperation. The weight (strength) of an interaction depends on how often and with what purpose two entities (or more) form relationships. This networked approach enabled us to explore the key question: **what types of actors shape the diaspora ecosystem?**

It is not sufficient to solely examine how diaspora associations (formal and informal) interact amongst themselves. Mapping their relationship with institutions, civil society or the private sector is equally important when determining the outreach and impact of diaspora initiatives. This also shows the scope of cooperation and where it tends to occur, whether relationships are anchored in the homeland, based on the prevalence of connections with institutions and organisations from Romania, in the UK, or transnationally. The graphs below explore the types/categories of actors and their number/proportion within the overall network.

*Figure 1 - Shows the proportion/number of entities within the network, based on category*

The prevalence of the private sector category shows that businesses provided ample scope for structured and sustained cooperation, bilateral as well as transnational. Embedded in both countries and analysed as a separate entity within the network, an example of structured bilateral cooperation would be the British-Romanian Chamber of Commerce.
For a more granular appraisal, the diaspora and civil society form two separate categories. A further division into sub-categories helps identify by location as well as type. Despite significant connections with other countries, most actors are primarily located in the UK and Romania. Apart from businesses, UK-based diaspora organisations (formal/informal, online/offline) are the most prevalent within the social network dataset, followed by the NGO sector in Romania, and religious institutions (including Romanian Orthodox churches or parishes in the UK). The Public Sector (Romania) subcategory (Figure 3, right) also comprises UK-based diplomatic missions (the Romanian embassy, consulates and honorary consulates).
Romanian communities in the UK tend to associate both online and offline. Most diaspora entities have online visibility, through websites and/or social media pages, as well as offline presence (i.e. physical headquarters, traceable activities on the ground). Others, however, operate almost exclusively online (i.e. social media groups, media outlets, diaspora community platforms). These online groups are means for socialisation, promotion, but at times provide a solid basis for mobilisation (for instance, voting or protests). In the graph below (Figure 4), diaspora organisations (formal/informal) and the subtypes are dominant. In Figure 5, the geographical distribution by counties indicates that most are concentrated in the Greater London area, whereas ‘0’ suggests no specific locality. Certain online diaspora groups visibly cater for a particular region, county or city (i.e. Romanians in London, Voting in Coventry etc.), in which case a geographical location has been assigned.

Figure 4 - UK-based diaspora entities by sub-category, type & medium

Figure 5 - UK-based diaspora entities / Location (County)
How do entities connect within the network? What relationships do they form? And, based on the frequency, location and scope of cooperation, what is the strength of such interactions?

The initial dataset comprises 69 UK-based diaspora entities (formal/officially registered associations, NGOs, informal online diaspora groups, diaspora platforms, religious charities, Romanian Orthodox churches and parishes, Romanian schools, businesses, professional and business associations etc). The sample may not be exhaustive, since entities dissolve (no traceable activity), transform or rebrand over time. However, in compiling the relational database and to be as comprehensive as possible we triangulated between several sources (including the Romanian Embassy/Ministry of Foreign Affairs websites, funding bodies, online registries of UK charities and companies, as well as snowball sampling and web-crawling techniques). For each entity (node), we mapped connections (edges) with other actors, partitioning the network based on the scope and types of interaction. We applied queries (filters) to the global network to discern patterns in cooperation, observing for instance, how diaspora associations interact with institutions, whether connections with the public sector in Romania or the UK are more frequent etc.

Apart from frequency, the strength of relationships (weight) is also conferred by the scope, location and type of interaction, which can partly indicate the level of coordination between two or more entities. Online promotion activities (website, social media) carry a lower weight than participating at or organising an event, the latter implying higher degrees of coordination (resources, physical presence). Moreover, factoring in location and scope, the same type of interaction/relationship can take different weight-values. For example, associations from different countries organising an event, implies cooperation at a transnational level, hence higher impact. Whereas, associations from the same country organising an event is an instantiation with lower weight.

Receiving financial support, grants, sponsorships (in fact, any material contribution) from another entity and engaging in fundraising initiatives (charity) translate into stronger, more pronounced...
connections (edges), since they tend to indicate a certain level of organisation, outreach and higher impact. The same applies to other types of relationships: organising/initiating campaigns, charity/civic spin off initiatives, subsidiary/branch of the same entity. If over time repeated interactions between the same entities occurred, the type of connection with the higher-weight value was recorded.

Apart from exploring partitions (subsets of data corresponding to the scope and type of interactions or entity categories) a visualisation of the entire network may reveal influential actors (nodes) with high connectivity, hubs of cooperation (i.e. high density of connections based on geographical proximity), bridges (entities or nodes that connect clusters, groups).
Figure 7 - Renders the global network - the UK Romanian Diaspora entities

The colour of the nodes (entities) represents the main categories and proportion. The size shows the level of interconnectedness (based each entity’s number of links/relationships/interactions).

Figure 8 - Renders the network based on Eigenvector Centrality

This visualisation of the network shows which entities are influential (by colour intensity & size of nodes). It is computed not only on by the weight of a node (number of links), but also the importance/ connectivity of its neighbours.
This visualisation indicates the degree to which entities (nodes) in a network tend to cluster together (tightly knit groups characterised by a relatively high density of links, showing how well connected is the neighbourhood of a node. In our UK-based Romanian diaspora network, blue nodes take a value of 1 (or close to), which means that the neighbourhood is well connected, whereas null or close to 0 (red) means there are hardly any connections. This may indicate cooperation based on geographical proximity (same area, city), which facilitates certain types of interaction and coordination. Overall, we notice high density of links in certain areas, whereas other neighbourhoods are less connected, which in turn may help identify opportunities for cooperation. However, a qualitative dimension would complement the networked approach given that an entity’s drive to interact may be influenced by various factors: poor online presence, activities are not publicised or known to the network; the scope of interaction is localised (area, region, city); reputational costs and mistrust (how an entity is perceived by others); poor organisational capacity, limiting the type/scope of interactions; or simply, entities do not know about each other. Although, clustering may indicate cohesion at community-levels, better connectivity can maximise the impact of engagement between two or more entities.
This rendering of the network enables us to visualise, which entities act as bridges (between nodes). Predominantly, these actors broker connections/interactions to otherwise less connected entities. In our case (red nodes), the diplomatic mission, (bilateral) business association, as well as diaspora organisations and groups bridge relationships and generally demonstrate high outreach capacity within the network. The Romanian Embassy largely facilitates connections between diaspora entities (by organising events and pursuing community engagement strategies). Geographically, most are located in the Greater London area. Observing how the network is structured may help increase the scope of cooperation, with more entities assuming a facilitator position, linking different geographies and garnering impactful initiatives (with a long-term outlook, broader partnerships and effective coordination).
In this representation of the diaspora network, we can observe modules or groups of entities that have a high density of relationships. These groups however are not very well connected to other clusters/modules. Detecting communities within the network helps identify patterns in cooperation, showing both limitations and opportunities. Entities may form stronger relationships based on geographical proximity. In some cases, cooperation tends to be more structured if actors fall under the same category, for example, the Religious Sector. Romanian Orthodox churches and parishes show higher integration and levels of engagement within the same category. In other cases, communities (based on cooperation patterns) are shaped by the level of embeddedness – how familiar are organisations with each other. The following graphs will focus on three modules/communities (see Figure 11 legend - 14, 5, 15) for an in-depth analysis.
Cluster / Community 14

Based on the type of entities interacting (see Legend above, label colour indicates category), we notice dense interaction within the same category, for instance between Orthodox churches and parishes (Religious sector).

As for geographical distribution (see encased graph below), proximity matters. Entities from the same region or close exhibit higher levels of cooperation. In other cases, the scope of interaction (why entities form relationships) drives engagement.
Cluster / Community 5
Based on the type of connected entities (see Legend above, label colour indicates category), we notice dense interaction across Civil Society and Diaspora categories, with high levels of cooperation between the local/national UK NGOs and diaspora organisations. Sustained cooperation with the UK public sector, local and national institutions, also appears to be significant.

As for geographical distribution (see encased graph below), proximity matters, although scope of action and effective coordination seem to drive cooperation more poignantly.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION: Greater London Area, Oxfordshire, Tyne and Wear etc.
Understanding the Romanian Diaspora

Cluster / Community 15

Based on the type of connected entities (see Legend above, label colour indicates category), we notice dense interaction across the Religious sector category. Most Romanian Orthodox churches/parishes developed charity/community spin off initiatives, such as play and after-schools, weekend classes in Romanian or pursuing other educational activities. The outreach is mostly local, with interactions geared towards community engagement. There are also significant connections with Romania (i.e. with hospitals, care homes, as well as orphanages), based on fundraising initiatives for charity. Local communities (i.e. diaspora associations and local businesses) equally engage in offering support (material, financial etc.) to churches and parishes. Used for sharing, promoting and disseminating religious content, religious media platforms are prevalent. Most Orthodox churches/parishes share infrastructures (venues) with the Anglican Church, which may indicate capacity for outreach towards & engagement with other denominations.

Generally, the religious sector displays a network of its own, formed not only of churches and parishes, but also of religious/ecumenical organisational, charities, schools etc.
Network partitions based on types of interaction and categories of actors

In mapping interactions between actors, we have identified the following:

**TYPES OF INTERACTION**

![Diagram showing proportions of network partitions]

Figure 15 - Shows the proportion/number of entities within the network, based on types of interaction

Promotion activities encompass (social) media mentions (i.e. mutual tags), publicising events, campaigns, disseminating/relaying public information etc. The membership category includes subsidiaries, branches of the same entity/organisation, as well as membership (for example, founding members of a business association). Material/financial support refers to one entity (institution, organisation, funding body) supporting the activities, initiatives of another, whether through sponsorships, grants, institutional funding, or material donations (i.e. venues). The Spin Offs category includes charity or civic initiatives pursued by the same entity, whether formal or informal. For example, a religious charity attached to a church, an afterschool, foodbank etc. Organising/Initiating Campaigns designates a long-term oriented type of cooperation, with multiple organisations working and coordinating to achieve common goals, activities as such having a higher impact. For example, a transnational campaign to promote voting abroad was initiated by diaspora civic organisations from different countries, its successful implementation dependent on how effectively coordinated these entities were, their outreach and capacity to liaise with institutions.

The prevalence of ‘organising/participating at events’ type of relationship/interaction, shows that the main driver for community engagement is somewhat limited in scope and outlook. Although important for cohesion and socialisation, events tend to be mostly localised and do not carry the same impact as more sustained or structured forms of cooperation. The following graphs render the network across several dimensions of cooperation. We chose to focus on less prevalent types of interaction, organising campaigns, fundraising, material/financial support and spinoff initiatives. Moreover, we wanted to explore relationships across different categories of actors, between diaspora organisations and civil society, as well as their rapport with home and host country institutions. Even if not all interactions can be thoroughly analysed in this publication, the mapping analysis provides a departure point for future, more applied inquiries.
There is a charitable dimension driving interaction between diaspora organisations, however, with a few exceptions the network appears somewhat fragmented. Associations, groups receive support from different sources, often not interconnected, mostly from local/diaspora businesses, followed by local/government funding. Compared to other countries, the Romanian Department (Ministry) for Romanians Abroad has not been a preferred source of funding for diaspora organisations in the UK.

Some organisations have been more effective than others in leveraging funds (fundraising) towards (at times) common, charitable causes. Access to a wider pool of funding sources, geographical proximity, visibility or organisational capacity may indicate why Greater London has higher density of interactions compared to other regions. An integrated diaspora funding mechanism (i.e. a trust) that transparently manages and distributes donations, strategically supporting diaspora initiatives and charitable causes, would relieve dependency on government/local support. Although there are some notable Donors’ Circle initiatives and networks operating across several countries, the process is not sufficiently mature or ingrained.
Within the overall network, at this point in time ‘organising/initiating campaigns’ is not a preferred mode of interaction, nor the basis for sustained engagement between diaspora associations. Whilst many organisations/entities have spin off initiatives, these are fragmented, whilst the impact is predominantly local. Religious institutions are highly embedded within communities also because of spin offs that cater for various community needs: after school, provision of weekend classes in Romanian, publications/media channels, charities that mobilise contributions. Volunteer networks amid the pandemic are becoming increasingly common, with broader partnerships, outreach and engagement (including with institutions, particularly for accessing local funding schemes). Nevertheless, there is little integration and cooperation within the network when it comes to pushing forward a policy agenda, with initiatives that aim for long-term civic and political impact. ‘Organising/Initiating campaigns’ is mostly prevalent amongst civic diaspora associations/groups, that initially started as protest/informal movements and gradually developed a broader scope – engaging with local communities and UK-NGOs on specific projects (awareness and outreach campaigns on topics of interest).

Although diaspora mobilisation for political causes has been significant, civic and political advocacy as a sustained form of cooperation in the host country is yet to gain ground.
Understanding the Romanian Diaspora

Figure 18 - Interactions between Diaspora Organisations & the Romanian Public Sector (including diplomatic missions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participating/Organising Event</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidiary/Branch</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising/Initiating Campaign</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Promotion</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion/ Civic Campaign</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Support/Grant/ Sponsor</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official Partnership (website, etc.)</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spin off Initiative</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spin off Charity Initiative</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising Initiative/ Event</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Partnership</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative Promotion</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spin off Civic Initiative</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within the network, diplomatic missions provide an interface between diaspora organisations, Romanian institutions and the public sector at large. The high density of connections clustered around the Embassy, the Romanian Cultural Institute, the Ministry/Department for Romanians abroad, and the Romanian Presidency also indicate the different layers of diaspora governance (from Romania), with the Embassy acting as facilitator within the network. Nevertheless, diaspora organisations also engage institutions both local and national in various projects and initiatives: from cultural events and charity contributions to civic campaigns and protest. Engaging Romanian local authorities may also reflect the place of origin; if community members are from a specific region or county, their contributions tend to target that locality.
Interactions with the UK public sector mostly occur at a local level and with variable degrees of engagement. Some organisations access local funding schemes, others cooperate with local authorities in promoting and disseminating public information. Interestingly, there is more impactful cooperation with host country institutions (compared to the homeland) when it comes to organising/initiating campaigns (i.e. civic). Nevertheless, overall engagement with UK public authorities depends on the size and geographical distribution of Romanian communities (see Harrow, Brent, Barnet). Most are concentrated in the Greater London area.

Despite visible interactions between the diaspora and UK institutions, there is scope for wider, more impactful partnerships. For instance, instead of localised, disparate initiatives, a diaspora advocacy network could integrate community grievances in a unified agenda, raising public awareness and political interest.
Conclusions and recommendations

Perhaps the most recurring theme when analysing the Romanian diaspora is a persistent lack of trust. Mistrust in institutions and public authorities in either country, is equally present in peer-to-peer interactions, or when it comes to (Romanians abroad) joining an association, initiative, campaign or project. Within the larger framework, it has a trickle effect on the way diaspora organisations cooperate, amongst themselves, with institutions or civil society at large.

Although statistics are not as scarce, depending on the source or institution, if analysed independently they paint diverging contexts. Data does not capture grassroots realities, nor provide sufficient evidence for truly informed, adaptive policies. Therefore, an integrated approach remains a key challenge. Whether it is the process of data collection that requires a systematic review, or a better framework for information sharing between institutions and countries alike, aligning data-gathering practices and policy-objectives is necessary now more than ever. One needs to ask the right questions and record realities on the ground before reaching out or seeking to engage diaspora communities.

There should also be a duty of care from both home and host countries towards their citizens, particularly considering the future of young generations. Often perceived as in-betweeners they are ultimately the most vulnerable segment of this community, and at great risk of growing up alienated from home and host societies. In order to mitigate the lack of institutional appraisal and support, an integrated approach should become a priority for both countries.

In fact, there are two interrelated dimensions in shaping the outlook and impact of diaspora governance, in both the UK and Romania. One has to do with institutional practices and coordination, the other relates to how the diaspora itself is organised. Mapping diaspora interactions enabled us to visualise, even if not comprehensively, trends and patterns in cooperation. Although diaspora organisations have significant local outreach and capacity to engage the public sector, there seems to be limited incentive (still) for more ambitious (i.e. nation-wide, as well as transnational) policy-driven collaborative approaches. Pervasive mistrust and sectarian divides within the community have fostered a competitive environment, rather than long-term oriented cooperation.

This unfortunate trend also stems from a process of intense politicisation of diaspora issues, mainly from the homeland. Political affiliation, bias and opportunism, whether electoral or otherwise, long dictated how funding was to be distributed, what diaspora initiatives took precedence and whom to engage, based on perceived (political) support. The challenge ahead, particularly when it comes to homeland politics and institutions, is shedding these practices altogether, whilst engaging in a trust-building process, commensurate with the task at hand: revitalising diaspora engagement across all of its segments. From elites to vulnerable groups, issues, aspirations and grievances all require informed and adaptive policy tools.

Some general recommendations for institutional audiences in Romania and the UK.

**Know your target audience** – Establish a bilateral working group that has the knowledge and ability to collect, interpret and transpose data into a coherent narrative, thus providing a departure point for more informed policy-making and diaspora engagement strategies.

**Engage the diaspora:**
- Cultivate trust by addressing the core issues facing communities abroad, demonstrating willingness to listen, and upholding good governance norms and practices. A means to
achieve this would by intensifying the tone and scope of public consultations, more engagement with grassroots stakeholders, as well as sustained bilateral engagement across topics of mutual interest (i.e. the status of Romanian communities in the UK after Brexit; tackling exploitation networks etc.).

- Strengthen and support through policy instruments the diaspora’s organisational capacity, reprioritising/adjusting funding objectives based on a thorough assessment of community needs, capabilities and potential.

**Accountability, transparency and continuity** – Engage in a systematic review of diaspora governance, thoroughly assessing which policies, initiatives and strategies succeeded or not. Acknowledging failures, vulnerabilities and risks through transparent institutional auditing is a step forward in conveying accountability to communities otherwise dissuaded from civic and political participation.

**As for the diaspora:**

**Trust and cooperate** – Identify like-minded partners, pool resources and coordinate operational modes in order to effectively pursue more impactful, long-term oriented initiatives.

**Share** – Engage in a process of sharing good practices, lessons learnt and expertise to access wider support networks, and coalitions of support around issues that impact the community as a whole.

**Strategic Vision** – Adopt a strategic posture by cooperating to effect change, whether this implies devising self-sustaining funding mechanisms (crowdfunding, diaspora trusts etc), developing diaspora knowledge platforms, or pursuing more consistent advocacy in both home and host countries.

In effect, surveying how the diaspora is reflected in data and statistics, exploring patterns of cooperation and engagement within the diaspora ecosystem, and identifying future trajectories, all pave the path towards a better understanding of Romanian communities in the UK. There is scope for further, more applied diaspora research, which could tackle the nuances and structures of diaspora groups across different geographies, and even, reassess transformations within the existing network, since it is a continuously evolving structure. To be continued…
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