

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,
LAW AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

**Master's degree in
European and Global Studies**



ATTRACTING AND RETAINING HIGH-SKILLED
WORKERS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Supervisor: Prof. MAURO FARNESI CAMELLONE

Candidate: GRAZIELA CRISTINA BRANDAO

Matriculation No. 2050782

A.Y. 2023/2024

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated firstly to the memory of my dear mother Maria de Fátima Pelloso Brandão, who despite leaving this world suddenly in 2023, had time enough to teach me the value of a good Education across life and how this is going to be the only fair richness we can take with us when we are not here anymore.

Secondly, this thesis is dedicated also to the memory of my great-grandparents Enrico Pietro Pelloso and Giovanna Pasqua Prizzon, and also to the memory of my grandfather Ferrucio Pelloso. To my migrant grandparents for their courage, resilience and perseverance in crossing *l'al di là dell'acqua granda par far la Merica* and to my grandfather who came to be the beautiful intersection between two different worlds.

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EPIGRAPH

“But if you give me the invitation
To hear the bells of freedom chime
To hell with your double standards
We're coming rougher every time”
(Gogol Bordello, 2010)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....6
 Topic, statement of the problem and goal to achieve.....8
 Structure of the Chapters..... 10
 1. NAVIGATING THE GLOBAL COMPETITION FOR HIGH-SKILLED TALENT:
 A MULTIDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS..... 12
 1.1. Global Fight for High-skilled workers..... 19
 1.1.1. Canada and Australia.....23
 1.2. Migration Theory: between neoclassical and heterodox approaches.25
 1.3. Decolonising Epistemologies..... 30
 1.4. Constructivism and the Dynamics of Highly Skilled Migration in
 International Relations..... 34
 1.5. A Critical Perspective..... 37
 2. METHODOLOGY..... 44
 2.1. From determining targets to analysing social indicators.....44
 2.2. Identifying public policies..... 48
 3. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS..... 49
 3.1. Linking Public and Mandatory expenditure on social policies..... 50
 3.2. Linking party policy on Welfare and Immigration sentiments..... 73
 3.3. Supranational and National features..... 80
 3.3.1. European Union and the recast of the Blue Card Directive..... 81
 3.3.2. Sweden’s good practices.....92
 3.3.3. Romania’s challenges.....97
 4. TESTING HYPOTHESIS IN TWO LEVELS..... 100
 4.1. Quantitative findings..... 101
 4.2. Qualitative findings..... 106
 4.3. Intersection of results..... 109
 Conclusion..... 111
 References..... 114
 Datasets..... 120
 Charts.....121
 List of Tables and Figures..... 121
 Annexes..... 122

ABSTRACT

In response to the increasing necessity for technological innovation, while facing population shortages, countries and regions worldwide have been engaged in a global battle for becoming more competitive regarding attracting and retaining global talent. The European Union, while having its eyes on increasing its level of attractiveness, opted to recast the Blue Card scheme, after the first Directive did not represent a culture of change. Through an interdisciplinary approach combining Migration Theory, Decolonial Studies, Constructivism and Critical Theory, this research investigates the intersection of policies, socio-economic factors and migrants' integration. Utilising a mixed-methodological framework, this research intersects quantitative variables and policies, while delving into the aforementioned literature, aiming to provide empirical evidence, but also to promote a philosophical discussion on the matter. The analysis demonstrated a strong correlation between the level of social/welfare expenditure and the level of high-skilled workers' attraction/retention, as well as the identification of good practices and challenges to be faced by the EU and how the migration political discourse tends to be strategically placed in the party manifestos. It was concluded that the more the European countries invest a percentage of their GDP on social/welfare policies and the less Government-based the immigration policies are designed, they tend to increase their level of attractiveness of high-skilled workers. However, the data available offered some limitations, but the theme must be further explored by future research after the first outcomes from the full implementation of the recast EU Blue Card Directive are available.

Blue Card Directive - European Union - Migration - High-Skilled Workers

INTRODUCTION

The XXI century might be configured as an Age of people on the move, while access tends to be facilitated to the medium class to travel, economic

crisis, pandemics and climate change have the potential to shape the shift of entire populations across the globe. On the other hand, some countries and regions are facing shrinking of their population and opting to implement immigration policies designed to attract specialised work-force that can be able not just to counterbalance the number of individuals, but also to help the whole economy to keep on growing and foster technological innovation.

There is no single definition of what is considered high, medium, or low-skilled work, and the notion of talent continues to evolve as the qualifications that are most sought after change. This dynamic contributes to varying immigration policies both over time and across different countries. Hence, countries like Australia and Canada, and even various EU Member States, each have distinct lists of occupations which are considered to require (highly) skilled workers. The categories, though, are usually defined by level of university education and/or work experience. In an effort to harmonise visa policies, an EU-wide definition for high-skilled migration was introduced under the Blue Card Directive. However, for their national schemes, Member States continue to use varying criteria. (Weigle & Zünkler, 2023)

This is a conducted study about the attraction and retaining of high-skilled migrant workers to the European Union and aims to promote the continuation of the debate on the Migration Studies field, but also offering an interdisciplinary approach making an intersection between Migration Theory, Decolonial Studies, Constructivism in the International Relations and the philosophical perspective of the Critical Theory. Moreover, by promoting a dialogue among these theories with the aim to understand better the profundity of the necessity of creating a good structure for third-country migrants, as well as for local people, in order to promote better levels of integration among them. The theoretical discussion must focus on finding possible solutions for reducing prejudices levels and helping the social construction of a new reality that encapsulates social justice and fairness, emphasising also the interplay between knowledge, power, and social change.

The research has its importance relied on the necessity of academically monitoring the changes and co-relations between policies and actors and the necessity of providing insights about the functionality of the existing tools at national and supranational level regarding the attraction and retaining of high-skilled migrants by analysing its core and identifying possible failures, opportunities and challenges to be faced in the future, as well as providing some guidance on possible ways to get a better overview on the future outcomes of the new Blue Card Directive.

Topic, statement of the problem and goal to achieve

The topic of this research is the attraction and retaining of high-skilled migrant workers from third-countries to the European Union. Due to the shrinking of the European population, which encompasses the lower levels of births and the ageing of the population, to attract migrants is an important issue as not just a demographic problem, but also an economic, social and political one at the European multilevel system.

The limitation of this topic is centred in the fact that the Blue Card Directive adopted in 2009 was a big failure to the European Union and after the Migration Crisis of 2015 it needed to be reviewed, but the new Blue Card Directive had just recently started to be implemented. Having the first Blue Card Directive as a failure in implementation does not contribute with relevant indicators and data to show a significant correlation between attracting high-skilled migrants and social and political indicators. It is difficult to analyse the problem at the European level as an unity, and because of that this work proposes to fragment the analyses in specific countries' indicators and policies regarding attracting high-skilled migrants.

The relevance of this topic goes in the direction of providing insights about what is working successfully and what could be identified as problematic and failure when it comes to attracting and retaining high-skilled workers to Europe and perhaps providing also some guidance about good practices of transposition and/or implementation for the recast

Blue Card Directive. The proposed research question to be answered by this study is:

RQ: What European countries can do to improve their level of attracting and retaining high-skilled migrants from third-countries?

In order to explore the possibilities of answers to the aforementioned question, this study establishes the following hypothesis to be tested:

H1: Countries with a good level of public and mandatory expenditure in social areas tend to achieve a better level of attracting high-skilled migrants, even with these investments not being directed specifically at them.

H2: The good level of public and mandatory expenditure in social areas does not significantly impact the achievement of a better level of attracting high-skilled migrants, even with these investments not being directed specifically at them.

H3: Countries that present a more positive discourse towards immigration and welfare in their party manifestos tend to attract a better level of high-skilled migrants.

H4: Countries that present a more negative discourse towards immigration and welfare in their party manifestos tend to attract a lower level of high-skilled migrants.

The results achieved can be significant to identify the good practices and challenges that directly impact the perception of high-skilled migrants when choosing their destination and how European countries can shape better transposition tactics of the new EU Blue Card Directive in order to promote better levels of attracting and retaining high-skilled migrants and improved levels of integration and inclusion for newcomers at the host societies.

Structure of the Chapters

In order to develop this interdisciplinary approach, this study will be structured in a manner to present the topic, research question and hypothesis in this **“Introduction”** section, which is divided into the subchapters **“Topic, statement of the problem and goal to achieve”** and the current **“Structure of the Chapters”**.

The State of the Art will be presented at chapter **“1. Navigating the Global Competition for High-Skilled Talent: A Multidisciplinary Analysis”**, which is going to be fragmented in subchapters, starting by concerning the problematization of world competition for talent at **“1.1. Global Fight for High-skilled Workers”** and taking a closer look into competitors' good practices at **“1.1.1. Canada and Australia”**. After giving the context about the talent attractiveness' trends, we are going to delve into an interdisciplinary literature that will place each approach in a different subchapter, starting from **“1.2. Migration Theory: between neoclassical and heterodox approaches”**, which is a chapter that contextualises the history of migration and the dichotomy aspects involved in its analysis. Then, we are going through **“1.3. Decolonising Epistemologies”**, the subchapter that brings to the table the concepts of colonisation and coloniality and their Eurocentric dynamics when it comes to attracting and retaining high-skilled migrants. The next is **“1.4. Constructivism and the Dynamics of Highly-skilled Migration in International Relations”**, which is a subchapter focused on explaining the social constructions towards newcomers and the host society. The first chapter is then closed with the subchapter **“1.5. A Critical Perspective”** through a philosophical approach that encompasses Jürgen Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action and Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition, aiming to reflect about the interactions between newcomers and their host society.

Following the aforementioned structure, there will be the chapter **“2. Methodology”**, which is divided in two subchapters: **“2.1. From determining targets to analysing social indicators”** and **“2.2. Identifying public policies”**. The chapter initiates by explaining the mixed

methodological approach to be used and then uses the first subchapter to explain in detail how the quantitative research will be conducted and the second one to explain about the qualitative method used to analyse public policies concerning the attraction and retention of high-skilled migrants at both national and supranational level.

Arriving at chapter **“3. Empirical Analysis”**, in which it will be explained the definition of an index to identify the best and worst average positioned countries in the Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) and as the mixed methodological approach regards very different ways of dealing with data, this chapter is going to be divided into the subchapters **“3.1. Linking Public and Mandatory expenditure on social policies”** (which will work on the quantitative data analysis of 13 variables from the Comparative Political Dataset), **“3.2. Linking party policy on Welfare and Immigration sentiments”** (which will work on the quantitative analysis of 4 variables from the Manifesto Project Dataset) and **“3.3. Supranational and National features”** (which will work on the qualitative analysis of the current immigration policies shaped to attract and retain talent in the EU multilevel system). However, the third subchapter will be also fragmented in **“3.3.1. European Union and the Recast of the Blue Card Directive”** (which will explore the revised dedicated supranational policy designed to enhance the European attractiveness of global talent), **“3.3.2. Sweden’s good practices”** (which tries to elucidate what are the tools that are working so well at Swedish national immigration policies) and **“3.3.3. Romania’s challenges”** (which tries to understand the difficulties and challenges that Romanian national immigration policies may be facing).

After going through the State of the Art and exploring quantitative and qualitative data, we are going to delve into the hypothesis testing at chapter **“4. Testing Hypothesis in two levels”**, which explains the necessity of separating the quantitative and qualitative tests, in order to obtain a better visualisation of the data to the reader and proposes to close the chapter with an intersection between the both approaches. The fourth chapter, then is divided in the subchapters **“4.1. Quantitative findings”** (in which we are going to understand the results regarding the variables from both CPDS and MPD while verifying their compliance with the hypothesis), **“4.2. Qualitative**

findings” (which we are going to analyse the supranational and national policies in comparison with the hypothesis) and **“4.3. Intersection of results”** (which are going to be used to cross the results from the previous subchapters in order to determine a more holistic answer to the hypothesis).

The study is then finalised at chapter **“Conclusion”**, in which will be presented the answer for the research question, the summarised answers to the hypothesis, while presenting also the critics and limitations faced, as well as pointing out possible further research on the topic. The last chapter is followed by the **“References”**, **“List of Tables and Figures”**, **“List of Abbreviations”** and **“Annexes”**.

1. NAVIGATING THE GLOBAL COMPETITION FOR HIGH-SKILLED TALENT: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS

Europe, as a continent, had faced both immigration and emigration flows, being those inter and intra-continental. Migration itself is in simple words, a human phenomenon with the power to shape and reshape geographies, societies and relations, offering a vast variety of cultural intersections and generating new practices, traditions and socio-economic developments.

In the next subchapters, we are going to explore the state of the art into a more detailed frame, some aspects of the international migration under the light of Migration Theory, Decolonial Studies, Constructivism in International Relations and some of the Jürgen Habermas’ and Axel Honneth’s contributions to the Critical Theory, in special the Theory of Communicative Action and the Theory of Recognition.

Migration Theory defines migration as a permanent or semipermanent change of residence with no restriction placed upon the distance of the move or upon the voluntary or involuntary nature of the act, and no distinction is made between external and internal migration, because no matter how short or long, easy or difficult, every act of migration involves an origin, a destination, and an intervening set of obstacles, but among the set

of intervening obstacles, the distance of the move is the one aspects that is always present (Lee, 1966: 49).

Lee (1966: 49-50) summarised the factors which enter into the decision to migrate and the process of migration under four items: factors associated with the area of origin; factors associated with the area of destination; intervening obstacles; and personal factors. This research aims to connect the outcome of those factors, meaning the higher and lower levels of attracting high-skilled migrants in European countries, to the social and political inputs countries may have.

The volume of migration varies with the diversity of people, as well as the diversity of people also affects the volume of migration, which can be perceived that where there is a great sameness among people, being this factor in terms of race or ethnic origin, of education, of income, or tradition, it can be expected a lesser rate of migration than compared to places where there is higher level of diversity, in the extent that diversity of people implies the existence of groups that are specially fitted for given pursuits (Lee, 1966: 52). This is an element that perhaps contributes to explain one of the particularities that present the European Union today as an unattractive destination for high-skilled and talented migrants when compared to the rates of attracting and retaining them in countries like the United States, Canada and Australia, which have such higher rates in comparison with Europe and the three of them share a colonial past encompassing the tradition of living in a multicultural society. However the European Union motto is “united by diversity”, this diversity relies on a cohesive white society in general that also shares common values and culture in a higher or lower scale. Even if the Union perceives itself as diverse, and it sure is, perhaps for migrants coming from extra-communitarian countries, different racial perspectives and different ethnic groups, the European diversity may be not too appealing for them, in the sense that through their lenses they perhaps see much more of the same over and over again, or in other words, they maybe perceive Europeans as concisely just western/whites in a whole even in the supranational level.

Coloniality must be sometimes perceived as continuing today to structure the power relations within the former colonies and between the

metropolis and the former colonies, to the extent that the heuristic capability of the concept of coloniality of power is that it lays bare the coloniality that still shapes power in the present (Mendoza, 2020: 49). The European Union, even if not achieving better numbers in attracting and retaining skills and talent, occupies a powerful position in the relation with migrants by offering sometimes the opportunity to former colonised enjoy the benefits of its former coloniser metropole.

Both Quijano and Mignolo emphasise the ominous role played by Eurocentrism in the coloniality of knowledge. Eurocentrism not only colonises lands and bodies, but colonises how we understand the world, our sense of being. Eurocentrism colonised time and space; it denied the multiple ontologies of human diversity and destroyed the ancestral knowledge of the indigenous people. For these decolonial authors, more for Mignolo than Quijano perhaps, decolonization lies in the recovery of epistemic rights, the destruction of Eurocentrism, de-westernization (Mignolo, 2011), and, to a certain extent, the re-indianization of society. Epistemic decolonization, they tell us, will lead us to the decolonization of society. The decolonization of society cannot precede the decolonization of knowledge. Knowledge will set us free. It will decolonize us. (Mendoza, 2020: 56-57)

However the excerpt above has a focus on Latin America's context, it teaches a lesson to European leaders and society, meaning that in order to retain diverse workforce in the Union, it is important to learn from different epistemologies and keep a healthier distance from eurocentrism in order to lower social tensions and frictions, by presenting the European Union as a desirable destination for high-skilled and talented workers from third-countries. Keeping a self-centred approach will not help to achieve a successful transposition of the recast Blue Card Directive and/or any national migration policy when it comes to integration. Understanding the particularities of migrants and their cultures plays an important role for the success of the implementation of migration policies.

One of the most recent debates in the field of Migration Studies encompasses the dispute over applying or not the concept and measures of

integration. The debate took place between 2018 and 2019 and encapsulated responses to the provocative article “Against ‘immigrant integration’: for an end to neocolonial knowledge production” written by Willem Schinkel in the journal *Comparative Migration Studies*, published by Springer Nature. Schinkel advocated in that article for a social science against immigrant integration policy, arguing that integration perpasses the notion of surveillance and that immigrant integration research, while purportedly also talking about the realities of migration, has been ignorant about this kind of work, which doesn’t fit with its approach of using large-scale longitudinal surveys and which over against detailed ethnographic sensibility, such detachment and abstraction is what passes for ‘objectivity’ for those wedded to bureaucratic categories and state money (Schinkel, 2018:14).

(...) we live in an era where we cannot afford to simply reproduce dominant divisions. In a time of resurgent racisms, of widespread populist resentment against fictive ‘mass migrations’, a time when political leaders across Europe and in the United States increasingly take explicit racism on board, but also in which migration policies deemed ‘decent’ and by now thoroughly conventional in fact constitute a deliberate politics of death (think of the Mediterranean Sea), social scientists are forced to take sides. We can no longer afford to claim either neutrality or policy-relevance in the interests of the migrant others whose scores they keep. Anyone now working on migration and immigrant integration should know that whatever choices (s)he makes are on record and constitute a historical archive that will be judged not on its brilliant scientific finds (who’s banking on that?!), but on the extent to which it contributed to forms of knowledge that could contribute to public discourses enabling forms of life outside the registers of an overwhelmingly white dominance. In this sense, our research choices, which co-shape public discourse and are closely entangled with state policies, are always already political. And it is no longer a question of being just a little racist, of insisting just a little bit that those who ‘were here before’ get to set the agenda for those who came later. The agenda of those who insist on ‘immigrant integration’, and who thereby a priori assume that migrants have not really arrived, are not yet ‘members of society’ is in its effects only slightly

removed from the explicit racism of the current white backlash on the (alt-)right. (Schinkel, 2018: 15)

Among the answers addressed to Schinkel, two of them may deserve some highlight, being those from Lea M. Klarenbeek and Sawitri Saharso in 2019. Klarenbeek is pro-integration and Saharso is anti-whiteness (not in a racial perspective, but in the sense of power relations) in their discourses as follows:

Firstly, and crucially, relational integration does not grant 'integration dispensation' to 'non-immigrants'. Because it fundamentally concerns a changing power relationship, its primary focus is not on (categories of) individuals. Instead, it concerns the integration between different (categories of) people within a society of which they are all part. Thus, it does not make sense to speak of the relational integration of migrants into 'society'. By discussing something as a problem of relational integration, it is not the immigrant who is constructed as a problem, nor is the immigrant primarily held responsible for a solution. Similarly, when speaking of integration within a society, and between people, society is not portrayed as a normative standard that the immigrant has to live up to. In researching relational integration, one does not monitor difference or Otherness, but the ways in which people relate to each other, how difference or Otherness is constructed through institutions and symbols, and how this affects people. The power differential in defining 'who belongs', or 'whose citizenship is legitimate', is essential for this analysis. Hence, through this relational shift, we get rid of 'integration dispensation' and 'deindividualized individualization', thereby reducing the risk of feeding in to problematic political discourses of civic integrationism. (Klarenbeek, 2019:5)

Not immigrants and their (in)ability to integrate are the problem; the focus should be on racist structures of power and inequality in society. We should hence study not immigrants, but white society and constructions of whiteness, that create racial exclusions and patterns of inequality along racial lines,

and how these intersect with other axis of inequality. (Saharso, 2019:1)

The three authors contribute somehow to deepen the discussion towards the migrants integration issue, but despite some naive and biased thoughts of them, what can be extracted from this debate as a practical tool is the fact that it is necessary to run research that encompasses not just the migrants themselves and their relation with local society and the State, but to expand this notion in a way to connect both local society and State in the other side of this equation, because the three variables are dependent on each other when it comes to achieve good levels of integration and inclusion. Integration is indeed important and these three actors are all intrinsic to one another and by working together they may be able to construct better new realities than ignoring their interrelation.

A more explicit analysis of the role that social knowledge plays in the practices of international relations and in the identities of their actors might help us to understand some of the conundrums of constructivism: the relationship between agency and structure, or the balance between contingency and stability. If we study actors' knowledge as produced in particular contexts of interaction, we may understand in precise practical terms how and when actors' understanding of the world is contingent. At the same time, knowledge about the world is clearly a stabilising element in any kind of social order - it provides the assumptions on which routine interaction rests. A greater emphasis on knowledge might help us grasp in more specific terms the tension between contingency and structure. (Lezaun, 2002: 233)

Undoubtedly, relying also on the constructivist approach is the better answer for shaping tools that can lower social tensions on the ground and develop a more welcoming society for migrants by building the bridges of knowledge between who is here and who is coming here. For this purpose, the European Union must invest massively in educating its population on multiculturalism and educating also the migrants towards the local culture, promoting this way, a more understandable relationship between both parts,

which can imply a better rate of attracting and retaining skills and talent from extra-communitarians through the development of a more open and tolerant society. But, in order to achieve such goals, it is important to make an effort to understand the migrants mindset and choices, but to access such kind of information/knowledge it is important to give voice to those who arrive and settle. Analysing quantitative data, indicators and policy content is indeed important until a certain point, because without listening to those who are directly affected by policies and are objects of data collection, the data is simply vague and empty, because humans are not simply robots and the subjective world must be taken into consideration while developing research that deals directly to the causes and/or effects on human relations among themselves and/or with the space/environment they are inserted.

Through the philosopher Jürgen Habermas it is possible to get invaluable insights into the underlying structures and power relations at play when analysing the context of migration in Europe under the scope of attracting and retaining a high-skilled labour force. From his seminal work, "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere", emerges a profound understanding of the role of public discourse and deliberative democracy in shaping inclusive societies and fostering social cohesion. This emphasis on communicative rationality underscores the importance of dialogue and mutual understanding in facilitating the integration of diverse populations within European countries. Furthermore, Habermas' exploration of the normative dimensions of migration policies, as articulated in his book "Between Facts and Norms" offers a critical lens through which to examine the underlying norms and values that inform integration practices, highlighting the need for more inclusive approaches that prioritise democratic legitimacy and the protection of individual rights. Additionally, in "The Theory of Communicative Action", Habermas provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how language and discourse construct social reality, shaping identities, public perceptions, and policy outcomes. However, through Honneth's Theory of Recognition it is possible to deepen the Critical discussion, in the extent that the recognition may be perceived as essential for individuals to develop a positive self-relation and achieve personal and

social well-being and in the other hand the lack or denial of recognition may lead to experiences of disrespect and social struggle.

In this research's theoretical framework, more than one discipline is being taken into account. The framing of this research comes from the Political Science core, but dialogues also with Migration Studies, Decolonial Studies, International Relations and Philosophy. Also the methodologies applied during this research encompasses all the aforementioned disciplines, but this will be explored further in the next chapter. The objective of putting these disciplines to work together is to provide a broader perspective on migration and migrants' choices.

1.1. Global Fight for High-skilled workers

In an increasingly interconnected and competitive global economy, the quest for high-skilled workers has become a pivotal aspect of national and regional strategies for economic development and innovation. This subchapter delves into the dynamics of this global competition, exploring the trends, policies, and implications of the battle for talent.

The modern labour market is profoundly influenced by two major trends: technological advancements and demographic challenges. While the development of new technologies increases the competition for global talent, the demographic changes represent both challenges and opportunities. The challenges are represented by the necessity of addressing shortage of population in certain countries and/or regions, as well as its implications for the local society in regards to fueling the economy's engine, to provide sustainability to the pensions system for next generations and to promote entrepreneurship and innovation. The technological advancements are deeply connected to the idea of innovation and to live in the XXI century is to face how fast new technologies rise and are updated, improved and replaced.

The dawn of technology development is directly connected to the need of human talent able to shape innovative solutions and by doing so, the world of work is impacted and transformed. Digitization, automation, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) have transformed work practices and while some

jobs have been automated, new roles have emerged, reshaping labour markets (Koefler et al., 2020:13).

Considering that the race for talent at global level may characterise a competitive advantage, countries and regions employ various strategies to attract and retain high-skilled workers, focusing on immigration policies, educational opportunities, quality of life, and urbanisation.

While high-income countries distinguish between high-skilled (white collar) and low-skilled (blue collar) migration, policies are tailored to attract high-skilled migrants to address labour shortages and enhance economic growth. For instance, the European Union's Blue Card scheme aims to attract skilled professionals from non-EU countries to mitigate workforce declines and support social security systems (Koefler et al., 2020:24) in order to foster resilience to its economy in future scenarios, but also it can be perceived as a soft tool used to contain illegal migration and also as an attempt to mitigate side-effects of low-skilled migration at the societal level (we are going to explore this specific issue further in this research).

However the attraction and retaining of talent may represent competitive advantages, also it may catalyse challenges for the countries and regions of provenience of high-skilled migrant workers insofar. The challenges encompass from the brain drain phenomenon to the deepening of global inequalities and possible new emerging forms of colonialism maintenance. Because of that, it is important to foster the design of collaborative policies that may contribute to beneficial features towards both sending and receiving countries and favour the brain circulation, instead of brain drain.

Despite the growing participation of women in higher education, gender inequalities persist in accessing well-paying occupations, particularly in executive and technology positions. Companies with more women in leadership roles perform better, yet the proportion of women in such roles remains low, highlighting an underutilised talent pool (Koefler et al., 2020:21). However, the concept of attracting and retaining global talented may be perceived as gender biased sometimes and/or not taking into consideration the societal challenges addressed by the level of gender gap, like for example part of the secondary data analysis regarding the Global

Talent Competitive Index (GTCl) that according to Koeﬂer et al. (2020:21) suggests no positive correlation with the actual participation of women in the labour market, which implies that high participation of women in the labour market of a country does not convert into a higher GTCl.

In the global race for talent, cities also may play an important role, because in comparison to rural areas, they may represent a higher level of attractiveness due to their transport networks and work opportunities.

The collection of knowledge embodied in people in a central location has become a factor in increasing economic growth, innovation and well-being in a society. Thus, the debate on the highly skilled is also connected to questions of power and wealth in nations and regions. Therefore, it is essential to discuss the location factors that are important to retain and attract highly qualified people. Economically strong countries and urban areas usually have locational advantages. (Koeﬂer et al., 2020:59)

A shift of power to the employees pointed by Koeﬂer et al., (2020:61), demonstrates that people with various skills and knowledge can choose where they want to go, meaning that skilled workers enjoy greater freedom of movement than others and are more internationally mobile.

An attractive economic environment is and will be a prerequisite to attract and retain highly skilled or more educated people, but social and cultural aspects along with the possibilities to learn from others should not be underestimated (De Blasio, 2005; Kämpf, 2010). (...) The highly skilled may not simply ‘follow jobs,’ as advantages other than wages are also important selection criteria. Cities offer a wide range of public goods, such as transportation, health and schooling services or cultural and leisure activities that are not available elsewhere (De Blasio, 2005). (Koeﬂer et al., 2020:64)

It is important also to consider the challenges also to be faced at the societal level in regards integration measures for newcomers, raising awareness for the local population in order to elevate the level of tolerance

towards migrants as a tool that can pave the way for peaceful and respectful coexistence.

Beyond labor-related migration, the main challenge lies in integration measures, which can only succeed when working conditions and opportunities are carefully considered. Intercultural competencies of entrepreneurs and human resource responsible can be helpful for attracting high-skilled about the special features of a location. This poses a double challenge for regions: on the one hand creating conditions to encourage high-skilled workers to stay, and on the other attracting them. A detailed understanding of the location-specific strengths, and communicating this, is decisive. Diversity, for instance explicitly considering and supporting women in the work world, will be essential in the future when it comes to creating regions that are also attractive for global labor markets.” (Koefer et al., 2020:101)

Weigle & Zünkler (2023) states that the global race for talent is on and the frontrunners are easily identifiable, being Canada, Australia, and the United States the ones that lead the way on talent attractiveness, according to OECD indicators. Though some European countries (like Sweden, Germany, and Finland) also rank at the top, Weigle & Zünkler (2023) believe that the EU overall finds itself trailing far behind in the war for talent.

Following the global trend for attracting and retaining talent, the European Union has recognized immigration as a crucial strategy to counteract the challenges of a declining workforce and the overburdening of social security systems in its member states. In response to these demographic challenges, the European Commission prioritised the development of new legal migration policies as early as 2007. These policies, while unrestricted for EU citizens, primarily target third-country nationals to attract them to Europe, being a key component of this strategy the EU Blue Card Directive, which was designed to make the Union an attractive destination for highly qualified workers by facilitating their entry and integration and by prioritising the attraction of high-skilled labour, the EU aims to bolster its economic competitiveness globally while ensuring that migration policies also benefit the countries of origin, for instance, by easing

remittances and supporting sustainable development (Koefler et al., 2020: 24, 74).

The global fight for high-skilled workers is a defining feature of the contemporary economy, as also a reflection of not just the liberalisation of markets, but also their interdependence. Countries and regions that successfully attract and retain top talent tend to assume a leading position in innovation and economic development. However, this competition must be managed to address challenges such as brain drain and global inequality as previously mentioned. By adopting comprehensive strategies that encompass immigration policies, education, quality of life improvements and promoting gender equality, nations can better position themselves in the global marketplace and contribute to a more balanced and just distribution of high-skilled talent.

While visa and labour policies are important components to promoting labour migration, additional factors include the overall environment (such as the openness of respective societies), diaspora engagement, cultural aspects, and other circumstances related to integration. Although policies that favour labour migration are not alone sufficient to attract talent, disadvantageous policies could certainly deter individuals. The EU, consequently, could stand to benefit from adapting its migration management system and pursuing a different battle strategy in the race for talent. For inspiration, why not turn to those who excel in this area? (Weigle & Zünkler, 2023)

The next section tries to take a closer look at trying to understand better the good practices under the question proposed by Weigle & Zünkler (2023) above, by identifying some features used by Canadian and Australian immigration policies concerning the efforts to attract and retain global talent.

1.1.1. Canada and Australia

Canada and Australia share a common history of colonisation by Great Britain and to some extent, also culture. Maybe because of that, both countries share similar values, objectives and procedures in their national programmes.

The Multiculturalism Policy Index, a research project that monitors the evolution of multiculturalism policies in 21 Western countries, found that Australia and Canada rank 1 and 2, respectively, for an inclusive approach to immigrant integration. They were cited for having an official policy of multiculturalism as reflected in the school curriculum, ethnic representation/sensitivity in the media, exemptions from dress codes of the mainstream culture, acceptance of dual citizenship, funding of ethnic groups and language education, and affirmative action for immigrants. In contrast, countries that espouse an assimilation approach to immigrant integration were ranked much lower, with the US coming in at 11 and Germany and France at 14 and 16, respectively. (Multiculturalism Policy Index Scores; Ng & Metz apud Chand & Tung, 2019: 344).

However their national programmes have a predominantly merit-based approach, both countries seek for employer input into their historically points-based immigrant selection decisions, which opens the floor for some demand-driven elements, leading to thereby prioritising migrants' employability in the context of a more flexible notion of human capital (Kerr et al. apud Chand & Tung, 2019: 345). Their experience shows that the design for an effective policy and the decision making process towards it encompasses the collaboration on the ground with employers and the demands of the market should be taken into consideration as well.

In the Canadian experience, the program is not just collaborating with employers, but also with states/provinces, giving a voice to their needs also, which seems to have alleviated the strain on the most popular immigrant destinations, as well as in managing the ageing and in some cases the shrinking populations of rural and less popular immigrant destinations (Chand & Tung, 2019: 346). Concentrating the destinations in just a few places directly impacts on the increasing strain in terms of infrastructure

and housing prices, which can be observed in the Australian cities of Sydney and Melbourne combined with the desire for more immigrants in other states and territories in the country (Chand & Tung, 2019: 346). Undoubtedly, the Canadian and Australian experiences can point out to the growing importance of decentralised migrants settlement.

It is indeed important to pay attention to the countries that are already winning the race for talent and to be open to learn from their good practices, but it is also important for the EU to pay attention to the emerging competitors in the international system, such as China and the United Arab Emirates, which have increased their efforts in the last years towards presenting new tools and policies shaped to attract foreigner high-skilled workers.

1.2. Migration Theory: between neoclassical and heterodox approaches

Humans are a migratory species and from time to time, the type of human migration, the destinations, the inputs and outcomes may vary according to the interests of the actors involved, causing an impact on those who migrate, but also in the host societies and in the role of policymakers. As well as when the cold season starts and groups of birds migrate every year from the European continent to find a warm weather in the African continent, which shows the natural cycle of life looking for a better opportunity to keep flourishing, also the human species was, is and will be on the move across the planet searching for better life conditions, which can encompass a better education, an improved career, a higher quality of life or just a better wage.

According to Douglas Massey (2021), the Modern Era faced two eras of globalisation described as follows. The first one was between 1500-1914 and it comprehends the globalisation under mercantilism and industrialism. European mercantilism, from 1500 to 1800 comprised the European colonisation, extractive economies and plantation economics fueling African slaves trade. The European industrialisation, from 1800 to 1914 displaced rural populations – which led to an internal labour migration driving

urbanisation of Europe and international migration driving urbanisation of European settler nations – and spurred accumulation of capital – which reflected in a domestic investment accelerating European industrialisation and foreign investment spurring industrialisation of settler nations (United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Argentina, etc...). The second global era is described by Massey (2021) as the roots of re-globalisation from 1945 to 1979 with a progressive decolonisation, with Breton Woods institutions doing their work – IMF insuring convertibility of currencies and liquidity; World Bank financing rebuilding of Europe and Japan, then financing development in newly decolonised nations; and United Nations avoiding global warfare – with GATT gradually lowering trade barriers, with barriers to immigration being lowered in the 1950's and 1960's – guestworker programs enacted, post-colonial migration, immigration reforms in the United States, Canada and Australia – and with US dollar being decoupled from gold standard in 1971 and freely floating fiat currencies by governments.

After these two eras, Massey (2021) describes the period of 1979 to 2020 as the Full-Blown Globalisation, that shifted from analog to digital communication and computation, shifted from manufacturing to knowledge-based service economy and encompassing a revival and expansion of international migration with new destination areas in Europe, East Asia and Pacific, as well as new sending areas in Latin America, Africa, Middle East and South Asia.

The world entered the XXI century facing a global economy with free movement of capital, goods, commodities, information and services, but on the other hand, facing a restricted movement of labour with strict barriers to workers, more permissive barriers to those in possession of human capital, growing levels of undocumented migration, slavery and servitude (Massey, 2021). It is a new century shifting from labour-intensive production to deindustrialisation in the developed world; and the growing scale of markets in an information-intensive economy shifting income distributions (rising inequality within nations / declining inequality between nations) (Massey, 2021).

According to Sinning & Tani (2023:337), two distinct theoretical approaches have characterised studies of labour migration since the 1960s, being the first a neoclassical economic approach, modelling labour migration as an optimisation choice carried out by individual agents or households. The neoclassical lenses perceive labour migration as being “determined by the economic incentive of higher discounted earnings available in the place of destination once transport/lodging, psychological/social (e.g., no friends and family), and uncertainty costs associated with the move are netted out (Hatton and Williamson 1998; Borjas 1994; Chiswick 2005; Freeman 2006 apud Sinning & Tani, 2023:337).

The second approach is heterodox, encompassing at the same time an economical, historical and structuralist perspective, as outlined by Sinning and Tani (2023:337) and it posits that the development of capitalist production systems creates a relentless demand for migrant labour, which unlike traditional economic theories that emphasise individual rational choices, highlights the role of institutional and systemic forces in shaping labour markets. Capitalist institutions, in their pursuit of profit maximisation and economic growth, set conditions for an environment that necessitates a steady influx of migrant workers and this demand can be driven by the structural requirements of the production system, such as the need for flexible, low-cost labour to sustain competitiveness. Consequently, the migration of labour is seen as a response to these broader economic imperatives, embedded within the fabric of capitalist economies, rather than merely the outcome of personal decisions by individual workers.

From an economic perspective, migrant workers do not only constitute factors of production but are also consumers, and their arrival in the destination country may increase demand for all factors of production, including migrant labor. By paying taxes and receiving state support, they may also have a sizeable impact on the fiscal balance of the destination country. In addition, labor migrants have the potential to foster technical progress by the introduction of new ideas and knowledge. On balance, empirical studies on the impact of immigration on these outcomes have generated mixed results

(Bodvarsson and Van den Berg 2009). (Sinning & Tani, 2023:337-338)

While the economic aspect of the Migration Theory brings the difference between the level of wages to the table, the neoclassical studies focus on differentiating the type of job offers that are present in both countries of origin and destiny. However, it is the narrative towards migration that impacts directly in its societal perception.

Networks also transform existing categories. Emigrants take with them their ethnic identities, which change in the context of migration, in relations with the destination society and with other groups of migrants. Thus, some elements of the country of origin's identity are elected, negotiated and reconstructed in the context of migration. Therefore, instead of a collective “transplant”, there is a selective recreation of social ties. (TILLY, 1990: 86 apud SASAKI & ASSIS, 2000: 11 - own translation)

Skilled migration is increasingly recognized as pivotal for economic growth and innovation in developed countries (Bailey & Mulder, 2017: 2689). This influx underscores the competitive global demand for highly skilled workers, prompting policies across nations aimed at attracting and retaining talent from the Global South (Bailey & Mulder, 2017: 2690). However, skilled migrants, particularly from the Global South, encounter inequalities in host societies influenced by gender, social status, and integration levels (Bailey & Mulder, 2017: 2698). Unfortunately, in this sense, Migration Theory cannot offer alone a deeper perspective towards the interaction between the Global South and the Global North. Because of that, this study will try to intersect the migration trends under the Decolonial Studies perspective in the next subchapter.

Critics set caution against the repercussions of skilled migration on developing countries, often citing brain drain and the loss of invested human capital (Bailey & Mulder, 2017: 2689). This phenomenon underscores the complex dynamics where developed economies benefit from the ready-to-work skill sets of migrants while contributing to potential human

capital depletion in their countries of origin (Iredale, 2023: 325). Nevertheless, the concept of brain circulation emerges as a potential mitigator, advocating for skilled migrants to return or virtually contribute to their home countries' development (Iredale, 2023: 330).

The economic value of skilled migrants is indisputable, evident in enhanced productivity, innovation, and labour market readiness (Bailey & Mulder, 2017: 2690). Nations like the USA, Canada, and Australia pioneered targeted skilled migration programs, followed by the EU's introduction of the Blue Card scheme to streamline mobility and skill transferability within the Member States (Bailey & Mulder, 2017: 2690). Despite these initiatives, challenges persist, including unemployment and overqualification among highly educated immigrants in OECD countries (Bailey & Mulder, 2017: 2693).

In recent years, the big picture about globalisation is beginning to look precarious with populist backlashes (Brazil, United States, Mexico, Poland and Hungary), uncontrolled outbursts of violence perpetrated by the State (Syria, Myanmar and Venezuela) or non-governmental actors (ISIS, Al Qaeda, populist militias, rise of cartels and organised crime), the weakening of multilateral institutions, the political polarisation (Brexit and authoritarian regimes within the EU) and all of that being complicated by the issue of climate change (Massey, 2021). When it comes to international migration in the XXI century, the four main drivers of it are demography, economy, governability and climate change, being the last one a new player in the scenario that affects both the economy and demography (Massey, 2021). The future portends migration growing outside a stable system and being driven by climate change, rising of violence and forced migrants rather than labour migrants (Massey, 2021). Perhaps, it is time for the global fight for high-skilled workers to take into consideration also the implications of climate change into their equation.

1.3. Decolonising Epistemologies

The discourse on high-skilled migration often orbits around economic growth and innovation, as explained in the previous chapter. At the same time it emphasises the benefits to host countries while marginalising the broader epistemological and historical contexts that shape migration patterns. Decolonising epistemologies towards high-skilled migrants involves recognizing the deep-seated colonial legacies that may form part of current migration policies and practices. This subchapter explores the need to shift from an Eurocentric worldview to one that embraces epistemological plurality, addressing the intricate connections between colonialism, migration and global justice.

It is important to differentiate between colonality and colonialism:

Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breath coloniality all the time and everyday. (Madonado-Torres, 2007: 243)

Colonialism established a global order predicated on the dominance of European powers and the subjugation of colonised peoples, being this dominance justified and maintained through the construction of racial hierarchies, where non-European peoples were deemed inferior and their knowledge systems marginalised (Castro-Gómez, 2010: 282). These hierarchies did not disappear with the end of formal colonialism; instead,

they transformed into structural racism, which encompasses a system of policies, practices and cultural norms that perpetuate racial inequalities.

Through migration features, it is possible to identify structural racism manifesting itself in various ways, from discriminatory immigration policies to labour market inequalities. In the case of high-skilled migrants coming from the Global South, this means facing barriers not just in accessing opportunities but also in recognition and validation of their skills and experiences. These are barriers that can be perceived as an intrinsic continuation of colonial practices that sought to control and exploit, also configuring as not merely bureaucratic but rooted in racial prejudices that devalue the education and professional experiences of non-European migrants (Mignolo, 2010: 341). In a context like this, the main challenge is to combat structural racism while not just valuing the differences among peoples, but also trying to learn from differences without adopting exclusionary practices based on dominant epistemologies.

That is, some identities depict superiority over others. And such superiority is premised on the degree of humanity attributed to the identities in question. The 'lighter' one's skin is, the closer to full humanity one is, and viceversa. As the conquerors took on the role of mapping the world they kept reproducing this vision of things. The whole world was practically seen in the lights of this logic. This is the beginning of 'global coloniality'. (Madonado-Torres, 2007: 244)

For instance, the perception that certain racial or ethnic groups are less capable or more prone to welfare dependency can influence immigration policies, making it harder for high-skilled migrants from these groups to enter and thrive in host countries. This racial bias reflects the colonial logic that devalues non-European knowledge and contributions, continuing the marginalisation of these groups in global migration narratives.

Today, however, as immigration changes the demographics of industrial countries and industries move beyond previous borders to Mexico, China and the Philippines, racism, the foundation of the colonial matrix of power, is back with a vengeance and no longer eclipsed, as it was for a short

while, by class differential as the ultimate form for the understanding of exploitation of labor. What is at stake, in the last analysis, is the correspondence of race and class. While class refers mainly to economic relations among social groups and is, thus, strictly related to the control of labor in the spheres of the colonial matrix of power, race refers mainly to subjective relations among social groups and is related to the control of knowledge and subjectivity.” (Mignolo, 2010:341)

The economic contributions of high-skilled migrants are often highlighted, yet their epistemological contributions are frequently overlooked or undervalued, which reflects a continuation of colonial epistemic violence, where only certain types of knowledge are recognized and valued (Castro-Gómez, 2010: 295). High-skilled migrants bring diverse perspectives and knowledge systems that can enrich host societies, but a rooted structural racism limits the recognition and integration of these contributions and collaborations.

Moreover, high-skilled migrants often face the brain waste phenomenon, consisting in their skills being underutilised in the host society and they agree to work in positions below their qualifications, which not only represents a personal loss for the migrants but also a systemic failure to leverage the full potential of these individuals due to racial and institutional biases (Iredale, 2023: 326).

In order to promote the decolonization of high-skilled migration, it is important to dismantle the rooted structural racism and colonial legacies that often shape current policies and practices. It is an effort that requires recognising the historical context of migration across the time, valuing the diverse epistemologies of migrants (even taking into consideration that this can enrich the innovation process), and creating equitable systems that can allow the full utilisation and recognition of the skills of newcomers.

Quijano’s concept of *desprenderse* (delinking) calls for an epistemic shift that moves away from Eurocentric frameworks and embraces intercultural communication and knowledge exchange (Mignolo, 2010). This shift is essential for creating migration policies that are just and inclusive, reflecting the true value of high-skilled migrants, being those from the Global South or the Global North.

Castro-Gómez (2010: 282), questions if we live in a world where the old epistemological hierarchies made rigid by modern colonialism have disappeared or if we are witnessing a postmodern reorganisation of coloniality. His question is an interesting one and if we try to reflect upon it and even try to link it also to the campaigns on attracting and retaining talent from third-country nationals in the EU, we may catch ourselves thinking about how the migrant can be accepted and integrated into European societies while having his/her background and epistemologies respected and considered as something that has the potential to contribute to a more tolerant environment, but at the same time the structures of power in place and perhaps unconscious concepts of superiority at the societal level may influence negatively in the integration and inclusion of newcomers. Migrants' arrival cannot be just about the arrival itself, but it has to be seen as an opportunity to decolonise the minds and promote collaborative learning.

In an Habermasian type of scenario, liberation would be subservient to emancipation; and, decolonization, likewise, would still be covered over and managed by the emancipating rhetoric of modernity, either liberal or Marxist. In other words, if 'emancipation' is the image used by honest liberals and honest Marxists from the internal and historical perspectives of Europe or the US, then looking at the world history from outside of those locations (either from a country geohistorically located beyond both or from the perspective of immigrants from those countries to Europe and the US) means coming to terms with the fact that there is a still further need for 'liberation/de-coloniality' from the people and institutions raising the flag of 'emancipation'. Thus, in this precise sense, emancipation cannot be the guiding light for liberation/de-coloniality but the other way round: liberation/de-coloniality includes and re-maps the 'rational concept of emancipation'. (Mignolo, 2010:312)

The interconnection present between structural racism, colonialism, and high-skilled migration highlight the need for a profound transformation in how we understand and manage global migration. The tolerance of

cultural diversity has become a politically correct value, but only in the sense that diversity is useful for the reproduction of capital, according to Castro-Gómez (2010: 295). By addressing these interrelated issues, we can move towards a more equitable and inclusive world where the contributions of the so-called high-skilled migrant workers are not just recognized, but also valued, free from the shadows of colonialism and racism and perceiving the movement of people across the globe as the movement of human beings in their totality and not some sort of commodities or empty cold robots, destined to the capital exploitation. In the extent that Humanity is plural, different epistemologies should converge to each other and learn from one another, enriching the human experience instead of perpetuating aggressive domination (concrete and subjective).

1.4. Constructivism and the Dynamics of Highly Skilled Migration in International Relations

The Constructivist Theory understands the international reality as socially constructed. Under this scope, we need to understand how the scenario and interactions orbiting the migrant are going to be shaped through his/her interaction within the host society. Moreover, Constructivism occupies a unique middle ground in the spectrum of social theories, positioned between the rationalist models of decision-making found in Liberalism, Realism, and Marxism and the interpretivist viewpoints of postmodernist, poststructuralist, critical, and feminist theorists that doubt the potential for rational human behaviour (Counihan & Miller, 2006: 265).

The newcomer elements and the native elements of a territory tend to interact and share common spaces within the society. The product of this interaction finds the basis for both objective and subjective realities that will emerge between these elements, in the extension that by elements it is possible to understand people and/or institutions and/or countries. Attracting global talent to a country or a region may imply shared common spaces and intercultural interactions.

One of the biggest exponents of Constructivist Theory in International Relations is Alexander Wendt (1999: 1), who emphasises that the structures

of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, which suggests that the identities and interests of actors in the international system are constructed by these shared ideas, rather than being innately given and this approach contrasting sharply with materialist views that prioritise biological, technological, or environmental factors.

Constructivism is also classified as an idealist approach to social life and highlights the role of shared ideas in shaping social structures, positing that these structures, in turn, have emergent powers that influence the behaviour of actors within the system, but the holistic or structuralist perspective opposes the individualist view that social structures are merely reducible to individuals, which in this sense may portrait Constructivism as a form of structural idealism that emphasises the importance of shared ideas in the formation and functioning of social structures (Wendt, 1999: 1).

Once this study proposes an interdisciplinary approach to analysing the issue of attracting and retaining high-skilled workers in the European Union, it is important to clarify that even if the idea is to offer a broaden holistic analysis, Constructivism bringing individuality to the table contrasts the features of the analysis, but also it may deepen the study by offering a different perspective that explores the subjective characteristics that could be in place for migrants.

The international system is a hard case for constructivism on both the social and construction counts. On the social side, while norms and law govern most domestic politics, self-interest and coercion seem to rule international politics. International law and institutions exist, but the ability of this superstructure to counter the material base of power and interest seems limited. This suggests that the international system is not a very 'social' place, and so provides intuitive support for materialism in that domain. On the construction side, while the dependence of individuals on society makes the claim that their identities are constructed by society relatively uncontroversial, the primary actors in international politics, states, are much more autonomous from the social system in which they are embedded. Their foreign policy behavior is often determined primarily by domestic

politics, the analogue to individual personality, rather than by the international system (society). (Wendt, 1999: 2)

In this sense, it is possible to differentiate between what are the Supranational Powers' embedded objectives to achieve and what are the States' wishes and choices. This may represent a difference in the EU multilevel system when it comes to establish Directives that need transpositions by the Member States. Once the EU institutions may be perceived as detached from the immediate claims of European society, but on the other hand, the Member States must deal with their national citizens in a closer relationship in which the interests may converge or diverge from Brussels. The success of transposition relies also on how the domestic policies determine and/or influence State behaviour through the constructivist concept of national identity.

A Constructivist vision should not present societies as static 'objects', but rather expects that all social realities will be subject to constant reappraisal and reinvention. An investigation of highly skilled migration informed by Constructivism, should not see the cultural and social interaction that accompanies the migration of expertise as either a zero-sum game which contrasts the gains of one culture by the losses of the other or as a clash between cultures whose result is predetermined by the relative power positions of the two. In a Constructivist view of the cultural interaction that accompanies the process of highly skilled migration, there are no 'sides' but only a constantly shifting interpretation shared by all those interacting in one particular point in history and at one location in space. (Counihan & Miller, 2006: 265-266)

Assuming that there is an interaction of epistemologies in place when people from different cultures share the same space, what might determine if an exchange between these epistemologies or the domination of one of them, will be the level of Education from both sides towards tolerance. The product of this interaction can represent something new (the newcomer, the native and/or both) and the society keeps evolving and paving the way to construct

new interactions and behaviours at the societal, national and international level.

1.5. A Critical Perspective

After understanding better the issues concerning the global race for attracting and retaining talent, it was necessary to analyse this phenomenon in detail. In order to go further into the analysis and delve into the more specific topics concerning the high-skilled migrant workers, a literature review towards Migration Theory, Decolonial Studies and Constructivism in the International Relations took place. All the three theories offered a different approach that pointed in the direction of different solutions, but somehow complemented each other by deepening the analysis into other layers of the problem.

However, it is also important to reflect upon the issues identified in the previous sections and bring a philosophical approach that can make it possible to link the previous theories. This study considers Critical Theory, also known as Frankfurt School, as the most suitable philosophical perspective that can be capable of connecting the previous approaches under the scope of interdisciplinarity.

The theories of Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, respectively authors from the second and third generation of Frankfurt School, offer complementary frameworks for understanding social interaction, justice, and the necessary conditions for a democratic society. The initial idea was to propose an analysis concentrated in just Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action, perpassing also into his studies concerning the public sphere, but then it was decided to add Honneth's Theory of Recognition as a complement for what was starting to be more of a Habermasian chapter. Both authors together may offer a more profound understanding of the high-skilled migrants' portrait, as well as his or her struggles to fit into a new environment and society while the host society also may struggle to adjust and adapt itself to a new reality interacting with something strange to its everyday life. This subchapter explores the intersections between these two theoretical perspectives, highlighting how

they collectively enhance our comprehension of the dynamics of social integration, legitimacy, and justice.

However, after delving into Decolonial Studies in subchapter 1.3. it is not possible not to mention some critics concerning Habermas' work as follows:

In the ensuing discussion, Habermas was accused of reifying the 'system' by conceptualizing the capitalist market and the bureaucratic state as functionally necessary and supposedly norm-free systems that lie beyond the theoretical reach of critical social theory and the political reach of emancipatory politics (Honneth and Joas 1991), of idealizing the lifeworld in ways that largely ignore the domination and exploitation of women and minorities (Fraser 1985), of subscribing to a progressivist theory of modernization and history that is Eurocentric and insensitive to the continuing effects of colonial domination (Allen 2016, Ch. 2), and of underestimating how deeply power penetrates into and distorts the very heart of communicative reason (Allen 2008, Chs. 5–6). (Celikates & Flynn, 2023)

The Theory of Communicative Action emphasises the role of rational communication in achieving mutual understanding and coordination within society and according to Habermas, communicative action is based on the principles of reciprocity and mutual respect, which are essential for reaching consensus and resolving conflicts. In this sense high-skilled migrants may bring diverse perspectives and expertise and different ways to proceed enriching public discourse. By fostering communicative rationality, host societies can create an inclusive environment where migrants feel valued, understood and heard. Habermas asserts that "communicative rationality refers to the cooperative search for truth, rightness, and comprehensibility" (Habermas, 1984: 10). The communicative action in order to be meaningful, it can include an appeal by using regular language, by saying or writing on something, but also simple actions that can be gestures which hold some meaning such as a handshake or a greeting, because these gestures may have a purpose to start or to maintain conversation between two or more people (Edgar, 2006:21 apud Sharlamanov & Jovanoski, 2014:366-367).

Habermas differentiates the communicative action from the instrumental action, by understanding that the latter has an approach centred in the work environment, encapsulating a technical feature that promotes the maximum efficiency towards economy (profit), politics (power) and science (efficiency). On the other hand, the communicative action is perceived by him under different features, as it is not centred in promoting dominance, but concentrates on the life-world, in promoting sociability, comprehension, well-being and communities. The problem here is that instrumental action tends to colonise the life-world, while causing impoverishment of the subjectivity and the effective relationships. The dichotomy relation between instrumental and communicative action resides in the sense of efficacy versus justice and technical values versus ethical/political values.

Most previous studies on highly skilled migrants have been carried out in the fields of economics, regional studies and international relations (Cerna 2011; Docquier, Lohest, and Marfouk 2007; Ho 2011). Most of these studies focus on return on skills, impact on the economy, moving into and out of regions and the effect of changes in migration policies. Consequently, research on highly skilled migrants has been limited in focus by mainly examining highly skilled migrants as economic agents moving only to maximise the return on their human capital (Beverstock 2012; Ho 2011). (...) First, highly skilled migrants are not just economic agents but also social, cultural and political agents marked by race/ethnicity, class and gender. (Bailey & Mulder, 2017:2691)

The differentiation between instrumental and communicative action, when related to the issue of attracting and retaining high-skilled migrants, does ring a bell. It is important that the policy design concerning the so-called high-skilled migrant workers adopt a vision towards communicative action, because it could be a trap if policymakers focus just on the technical market-oriented aspect of the issue, which could represent not just a decrease in the numbers, but also a decrease of moral and ethics.

Finally the concept of communicative action refers to the inter-action of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or by extra-verbal means). The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. The central concept of interpretation refers in the first instance to negotiating definitions of the situation which admit of consensus. (Habermas, 1984:86)

When it comes to the public sphere, Habermas thinks of it as a space where individuals come together to discuss and deliberate on matters of common interest. "The public sphere is a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed" (Habermas, 1962 [1991]: 231), and including high-skilled migrants into the public sphere can pave the way for the exchange of ideas, the creation of a multicultural environment with increased tolerance while promoting social integration. The migrant, independent of the level of skills acquired, in the quality of being a new member of the host society, he or she must be seen, realised and heard, as well as he or she must be prepared to also see, realise and hear the locals. The interaction must be mutually beneficial.

On the other hand, Honneth's Theory of Recognition focuses on the importance of mutual recognition for individual identity formation and social integration. Honneth identifies three forms of recognition that we can link to the struggles migrants may face while adjusting to the host society: love (emotional support), rights (legal recognition) and solidarity (social esteem).

Honneth states that "love relationships provide the basic medium for the experience of self-confidence" (Honneth, 1995: 95). The need for emotional support high-skilled migrants may often face is connected to the challenges such as cultural adaptation and especially separation from their families. Policymakers must provide tools of emotional support through community networks and/or social services, which can be configured as something crucial for migrants' well-being and increasing their level of retention.

The legal recognition may ensure that high-skilled migrants have access to legal rights and protection is essential for their sense of security

and belonging. Honneth explains that "legal recognition is about the respect for the autonomy and equality of individuals" (Honneth, 1995, p. 110), which includes fair employment practices, residency rights, and protection against discrimination being inserted also in the dedicated public policies. Honneth's idea of recognition surpasses the notion of the necessity of turning communities demands into a normative body, in the extent that in order to be effectively heard the communities might seek legal validation of their demands and through it, a culture of change could be in place.

Regarding social esteem, the idea is to recognise and value the contributions of high-skilled migrants to the host society as a form of enhancing their sense of self-worth, while motivating them to integrate and contribute further to the society that now they are part of. Honneth (1995: 129), argues that social esteem may allow individuals to participate in the cooperative division of labour with a sense of their own worth. Through public acknowledgment of their achievements and talents it may also foster a sense of solidarity.

The combination of Habermas' and Honneth's aforementioned theories provides a more holistic framework for understanding the dynamics of high-skilled migration in what concerns especially the insertion of newcomers at the host society. According to Habermas (1984: 86), it is only through communicative action, oriented toward mutual understanding that can secure the normative foundations of a pluralistic society.

Rather, by importing new forms of life, immigrants can expand or multiply the perspectives from which the shared political constitution must be interpreted: 'People live in communities with bonds and bounds, but these may be of different kinds. In a liberal society, the bonds and bounds should be compatible with liberal principles. Open immigration would change the character of the community, but it would not leave the community without any character.'

(...) the European states should agree on a liberal immigration policy. They must not circle their wagons and use a chauvinism of affluence as cover against the onrush of immigrants and asylum seekers. Certainly the democratic right to self-determination includes the right to preserve one's own political culture, which forms a concrete context for rights of

citizenship, but it does not include the right to self assertion of a privileged cultural form of life. Within the constitutional framework of the democratic rule of law, diverse forms of life can coexist equally. These must, however, overlap in a common political culture that in turn is open to impulses from new forms of Life. (Habermas, 1996: 514)

A more inclusive communication can be achieved through the creation of platforms for dialogue between high-skilled migrants and native citizens, which can facilitate mutual understanding and reduce social tensions, because if the initiative could be well shaped, it could encompass not only formal settings like town hall meetings but also informal gatherings and cultural exchanges. However, the sensitive issue may be represented by the search for appropriated cultural mediators.

The needs and challenges of not just the high-skilled migrants, but migrants in general, must be addressed and taken into consideration by public authorities. This involves engaging migrants in the policymaking process and recognizing their input in shaping policies that affect them, because inclusion of the public in the deliberative processes may strengthen the legitimacy of the democratic order (Habermas, 1996: 170). Immigration is, according to Habermas (1996: 125), the expansion of the legal community through the inclusion of aliens who seek rights of membership, which of course will require a regulation in the equal interest of members and applicants.

The public sphere as functional element in the political realm was given the normative status of an organ for the self-articulation of civil society with a state authority corresponding to its needs. The social precondition for this 'developed' bourgeois public sphere was a market that, tending to be liberalized, made affairs in the sphere of social reproduction as much as possible a matter of private people left to themselves and so finally completed the privatization of civil society. (Habermas, 1962 [1991]: 74)

To be recognised by the host society is indeed important, but also to achieve self-recognition as part of the new reality. Mentorship programs,

recognition awards and inclusive workplace cultures that celebrate diversity may represent good practices towards welcoming migrants into the host society, because recognition practices must be institutionalised to ensure that individuals will be able to receive proper recognition in various social contexts (Honneth, 1995: 154).

By contrast, the concept of normatively regulated action presupposes relations between an actor and exactly two worlds. Besides the objective world of existing states of affairs there is the social world to which the actor belongs as a role-playing subject, as do additional actors who can take up normatively regulated interactions among themselves. A social world consists of a normative context that lays down which interactions belong to the totality of legitimate interpersonal relations. And all actors for whom the corresponding norms have force (by whom they are accepted as valid) belong to the same social world. (Habermas, 1984: 88)

The principle of alterity, which emphasises acknowledging and valuing the Other in their unique difference, also seeks to value diverse perspectives and experiences, especially those marginalised or oppressed within societal structures. Indeed the principle of alterity is present in the Critical Theory, particularly in its emphasis on the recognition of the Other and the importance of addressing social injustices and inequalities. Moreover, it is possible to identify an embedded sense of alterity in the intersection between the concepts of Communicative Action and Recognition, while analysing the attraction and retaining of high-skilled migrant workers within the EU. Habermas' theory is able to identify diverse perspectives of migrants that are not only heard but deeply respected, fostering an inclusive and democratic dialogue essential for their integration and perhaps leading to more effective policies that could address their actual needs and aspirations. Similarly, Honneth's theory can highlight the necessity of acknowledging the unique identities and contributions of high-skilled migrants, being this recognition one of the main factors that can enhance their sense of belonging and self-worth, crucial for their retention and integration in the host society.

Integrating Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action with Honneth's Theory of Recognition provides a robust framework for analysing and improving the attraction and retention of high-skilled migrants. By fostering inclusive communication and ensuring mutual recognition, host societies can create environments where high-skilled migrants feel valued, respected, and motivated to contribute to their new communities. This approach not only benefits the migrants themselves but also enhances the social and economic fabric of the host countries. In the end of the day, the model adopted to attract and retain high-skilled workers must be based in inclusion and not in surveillance, as well as the interactions dynamics between newcomers and host societies must be taken into consideration.

2. METHODOLOGY

This is a mixed research study that aims to intersect different methodologies and to provide links between their findings. With the objective of pursuing a better understanding of what may function or not, when it comes to the issue of attracting and retaining high-skilled workers from third-countries to Europe, it was used the following intersected approaches: quantitative, qualitative and philosophical.

The study's first step was presented at the chapter State of the Art, in which the literature review encompassed not just the notion of the problem regarding the global fight for high-skilled workers, but also proposed an interdisciplinary analysis of the issue, through the lenses of Migration Theory, Decolonial Studies and Constructivism, then connecting the three theories to a philosophical critical analysis in Habermas.

2.1. From determining targets to analysing social indicators

The research went further into the quantitative approach and collected data from the Global Talent Competitiveness Index edited during the period from 2015 to 2020, a period that receives the direct impact of the 2015 European Migration Crisis, but it is mostly pre-pandemic related. The Global

Talent Competitiveness Index report is an annual publication by INSEAD, the Business School for the World, and it is developed in collaboration with Portulans Institute (an independent non-profit, non-partisan research and educational institute based in the United States, more precisely in Washington, DC) and with the Human Capital Leadership Institute (HCLI, a centre of excellence that facilitates the acceleration of leadership development and strategic human capital management capabilities in Asia), being the report a comprehensive annual benchmarking that measures how countries and cities grow, attract and retain talent, and it provides a unique resource for decision makers to understand the global talent competitiveness picture and develop strategies to boost their economies (INSEAD, 2023).

The data collected from the GTCI provided the identification of the top five European countries best ranked by it from 2015 to 2020 and also the worst five ranked European countries in the same period. The United Kingdom was not taken into consideration during this research, because even if it may appear well positioned in the ranking during the analysed period, the latter clashes with the Brexit situation (from the decision to have a referendum on EU membership to the effective separation from the EU). Consequently, as the UK is not a Member State of the European Union anymore, it was decided to concentrate on the countries that remain under the direct implication of the European policies and its normative structures, as an attempt to provide data and reflections concerning the existing structure and its future.

After identifying the countries as explained above, a spreadsheet was created with Google Sheets in which it established a score from 1 to 5 points to the countries in each GTCI publication, as follows:

It was attributed 1 point to:

- The worst position among the higher ranked 5 countries;
- The best position among the lower ranked 5 countries.

It was attributed 5 points to:

- The better position among the higher ranked 5 countries;
- The worst position among the higher ranked 5 countries.

Also, a general index was calculated by dividing the total score in the whole period by the total of the times the country appears among the best or the worst 5 GTCI positions in the whole period. Through the general index established, it was possible to verify an average rank position in the period, which made it possible to identify the 5 best and worst positioned countries considering the 2015-2020 period as a whole.

Once the countries were identified as previously mentioned, they were used as a sample for the analyses of the Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021 (CPDS), which is a collection of political and institutional country-level data provided by Klaus Armingeon, Sarah Engler, Lucas Leemann and David Weisstanner in collaboration between the University of Zurich (Switzerland), the Leuphana University Lüneburg (Germany) and the University of Lucerne (Switzerland), consisting of annual data for 36 democratic countries for the period of 1960 to 2021 or since their transition to democracy (Armingeon et al. 2023). This research investigated the thirteen following dependant variables from CPDS' Public Social Expenditure and Revenue Data section:

- 1) *ssstran*: Social security transfers as a percentage of GDP. Social assistance grants and welfare benefits paid by general government (benefits for sickness, old-age, family allowances, etc.) (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 29).
- 2) *socexp_t_pmp*: Total public and mandatory private social expenditure as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 30).
- 3) *socexp_c_pmp*: Public and mandatory private social expenditure in cash as a percentage of GDP.
- 4) *socexp_k_pmp*: Public and mandatory private social expenditure in kind as a percentage of GDP.
- 5) *oldage_pmp*: Total public and mandatory private expenditure on old age as a percentage of GDP.
- 6) *survivor_pmp*: Total public and mandatory private survivor benefits as a percentage of GDP.

- 7) incapben_pmp: Total incapacity-related benefits (public and mandatory private) as a percentage of GDP
- 8) health_pmp: Total public and mandatory private expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP.
- 9) family_pmp: Total public and mandatory private expenditure for families as a percentage of GDP.
- 10) almp_pmp: Total public and mandatory private expenditure on active labour market programmes as a percentage of GDP.
- 11) unemp_pmp: Cash expenditure for unemployment benefits as a percentage of GDP (public and mandatory private).
- 12) housing_pmp: Total public and mandatory private expenditure on housing as a percentage of GDP.
- 13) othsocx_pmp: public and mandatory private expenditure on other social policy areas as a percentage of GDP.

The aforementioned variables are dependent on the independent variables of “year” and “country”. The data analysis was conducted through Stata software, by generating twoway graphs created by basic plots with connected design, which gives an easier identification to the reader about the changings across the setted time period from 2015 to 2020 in the plot of dependent variables for each selected country from the GTCI. The purpose was to verify the proposed hypothesis number 1 and 2 connecting the findings to the ranking of the GTCI.

After running the tests through the elaboration of the aforementioned graphs, it was analysed also some data from the Manifesto Project Dataset (MPDataset) basically with the same design conducted in the previous dataset, but this time analysing the party policy positioning on four sub-categories connected to selected variables from the domain Fabric of Society, regarding the issue of immigration and multiculturalism, as follows:

- 1) per601_2: National Way of Life: Immigration: Negative. Statement advocating the restriction of the process of immigration, i.e. accepting new immigrants. Might include statements regarding: immigration being a threat to the national character of the manifesto country; and ‘the boat is full’

argument. The introduction of migration quotas, including restricting immigration from specific countries or regions etc. (Lehmann et al., 2024).

2) per602_2: National Way of Life: Immigration: Positive. Statements favouring new immigrants; against restrictions and quotas; and rejection of the 'boat is full' argument. Includes allowing new immigrants for the benefit of the manifesto country's economy. (Lehmann et al., 2024).

3) per607_2: Multiculturalism: Immigrants Diversity. Statements favouring the idea that immigrants keep their cultural traits; voluntary integration; and state providing opportunities to integrate. (Lehmann et al., 2024).

4) per608_2: Multiculturalism: Immigrants Assimilation. Calls for immigrants that are in the country to adopt the manifesto country's culture and fully assimilate. Reinforce integration. (Lehmann et al., 2024).

The quantitative data analysis was conducted through Stata software as already mentioned and its major objective was to provide some evidence towards the pre-assumption that the local society plays an important role in migrants' decision to arrive, stay and leave. This study considered to explore data concerning the whole society without establishing divisions about what is exclusively dedicated to local citizens and what is exclusively dedicated to migrants.

2.2. Identifying public policies

Following the quantitative data analysis, this study connected it to a qualitative approach, that worked in two different fronts: supranational and national features. At the European level it was analysed the recast of the EU Blue Card Directive, followed by the identification of active migration policies concerning attracting and retaining high-skilled workers/migrants from third-countries at the national level in both the European countries best and worst average positioned in the 2015-2020 GTCI. The objective here was to

identify common and divergent points among migration policies and to verify also the influence or not of the old or new Blue Card Directive at the national level for the selected countries.

3. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, based on the GTCI from 2015 to 2020 it was selected 5 best ranked European countries and 5 worst ranked European countries. After using a points-based system, an index was created, which established the average ranked countries in the whole period as described at Table 3.1. and Table 3.2.:

Table 3.1.		Table 3.2.	
GTCI BEST POSITIONED COUNTRIES 2015-2020	AVERAGE RANK	GTCI WORST POSITIONED COUNTRIES 2015-2020	AVERAGE RANK
Sweden	1	Romenia	1
Denmark	2	Croatia	2
Finland	3	Bulgaria	3
Luxembourg	4	Hungary	4
Netherlands	5	Greece	5

Source: Lanvin et al., 2015; Lanvin et al., 2016; Lanvin et al., 2018; Lanvin et al., 2019; Lanvin et al., 2020. Own work: average rankings generated by Google Sheets command.

Further details on the index and data related to it are available at Annex I (see Annexes section). In the next subchapters it will be possible to verify the data analysis into detail concerning the quantitative and qualitative findings.

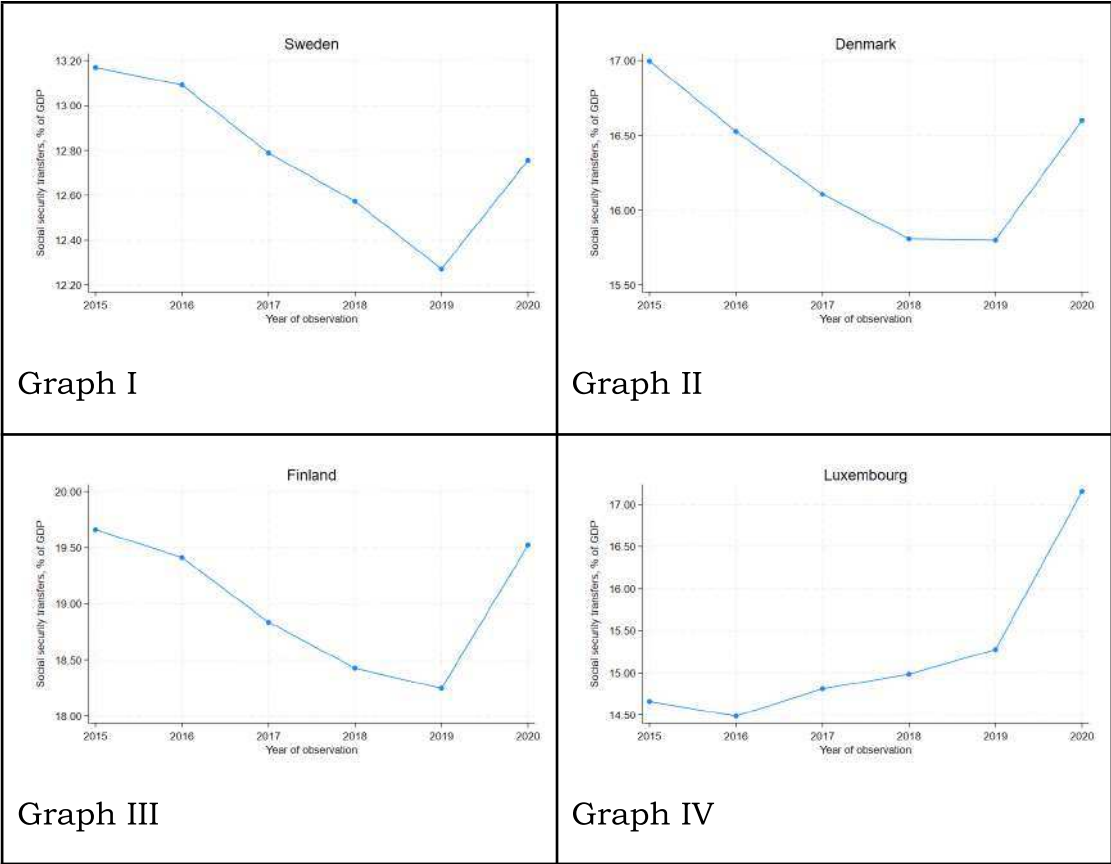
Even if the Stata software was calibrated to delve into the data concerning the full period between 2015 and 2020, it was verified that in some cases the data concerning the last years were not present for some countries, but as the analysis takes into consideration 10 countries and a total of 17 variables, this study proposes to focus in the big picture between

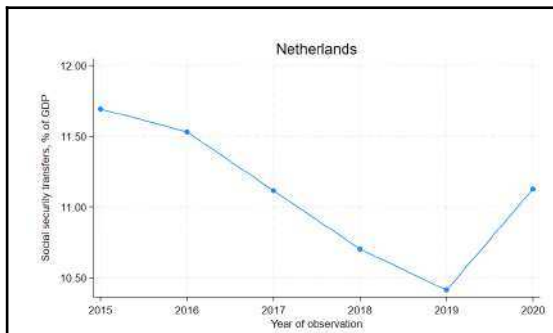
the best and the worst average ranked countries and tries to understand if there might be any relations and/or implications regarding the lack of some data.

3.1. Linking Public and Mandatory expenditure on social policies

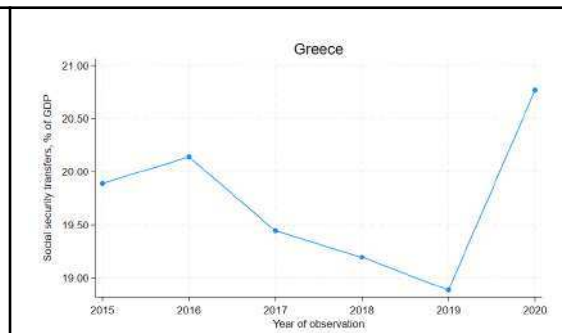
After generating 130 twoway graphs concerning the 5 best and the 5 worst average ranked European countries at GTCI 2015-2020, by analysing 13 different variables from the Comparative Political Dataset, the following findings were verified:

- 1) sstran: Social security transfers as a percentage of GDP. Social assistance grants and welfare benefits paid by general government (benefits for sickness, old-age, family allowances, etc.) (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 29).

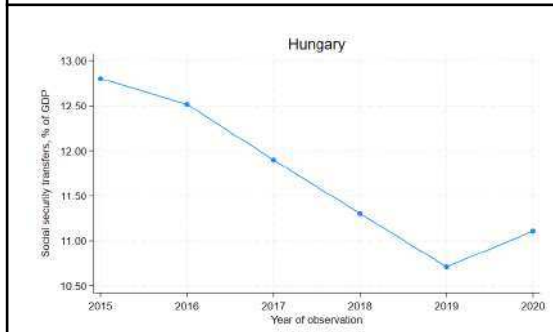




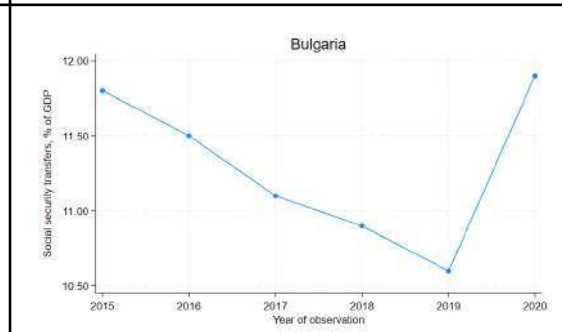
Graph V



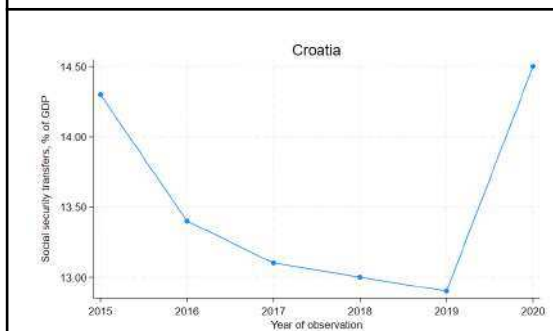
Graph VI



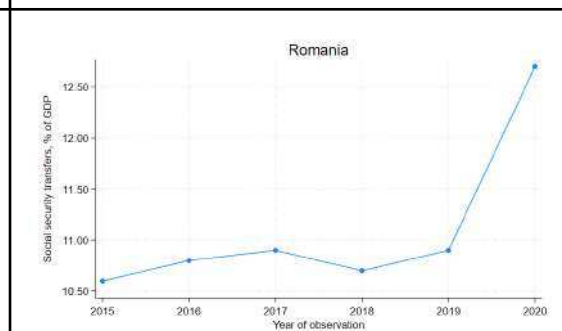
Graph VII



Graph VIII



Graph IX



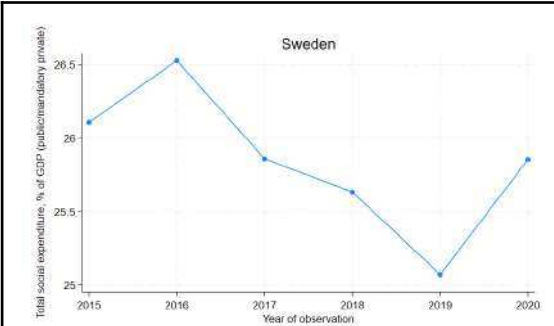
Graph X

Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

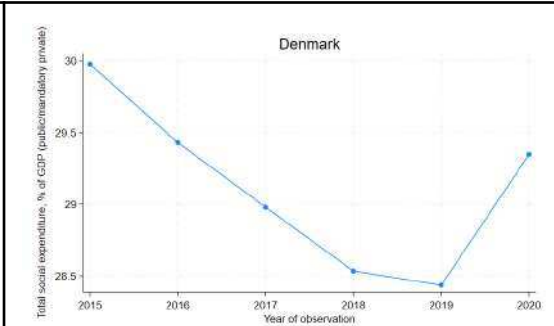
There was a major decrease in the level of investments in social security transfers as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 29) in the period of 2015 to 2019 with the exception of Luxembourg, which registered a decrease only between 2015 and 2016. Romania registered a lower level of variation from 2015 to 2019 and all the countries registered an increase in the level of investments from 2019 to 2020. Luxembourg is presented in the verified data as the one increasing its investments sooner from 2016 to 2020.

The best ranked countries registered a higher level of investments when compared to the worst ranked countries. The exception was Greece, because its level of investments exceeds all of the best ranked countries in the whole period.

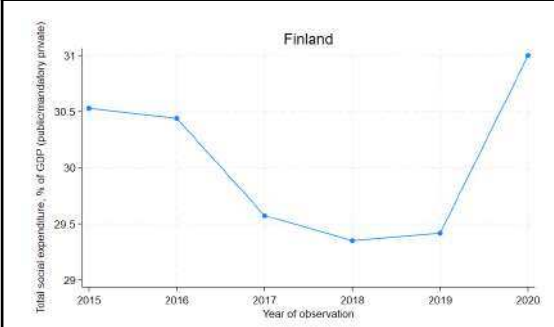
2) socexp_t_pmp: Total public and mandatory private social expenditure as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 30).



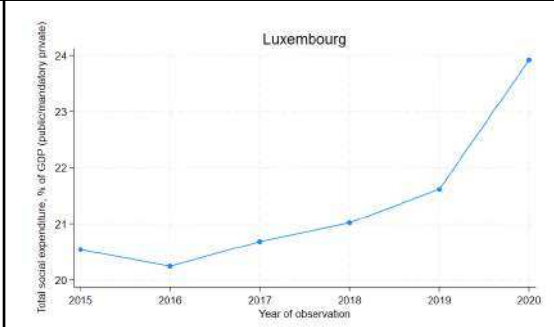
Graph XI



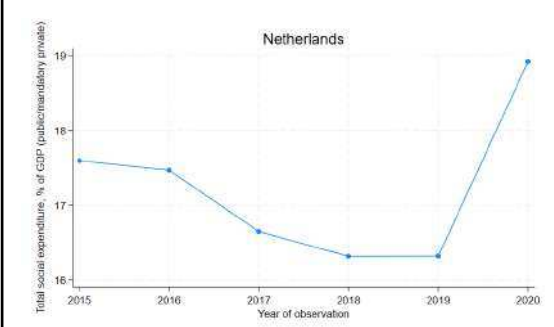
Graph XII



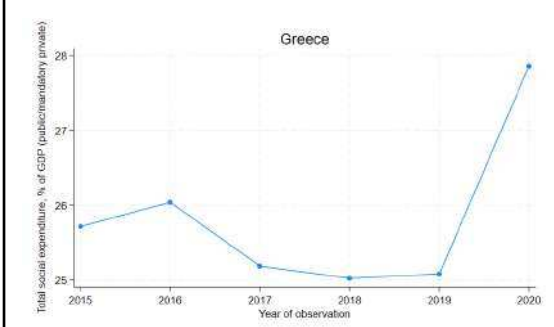
Graph XIII



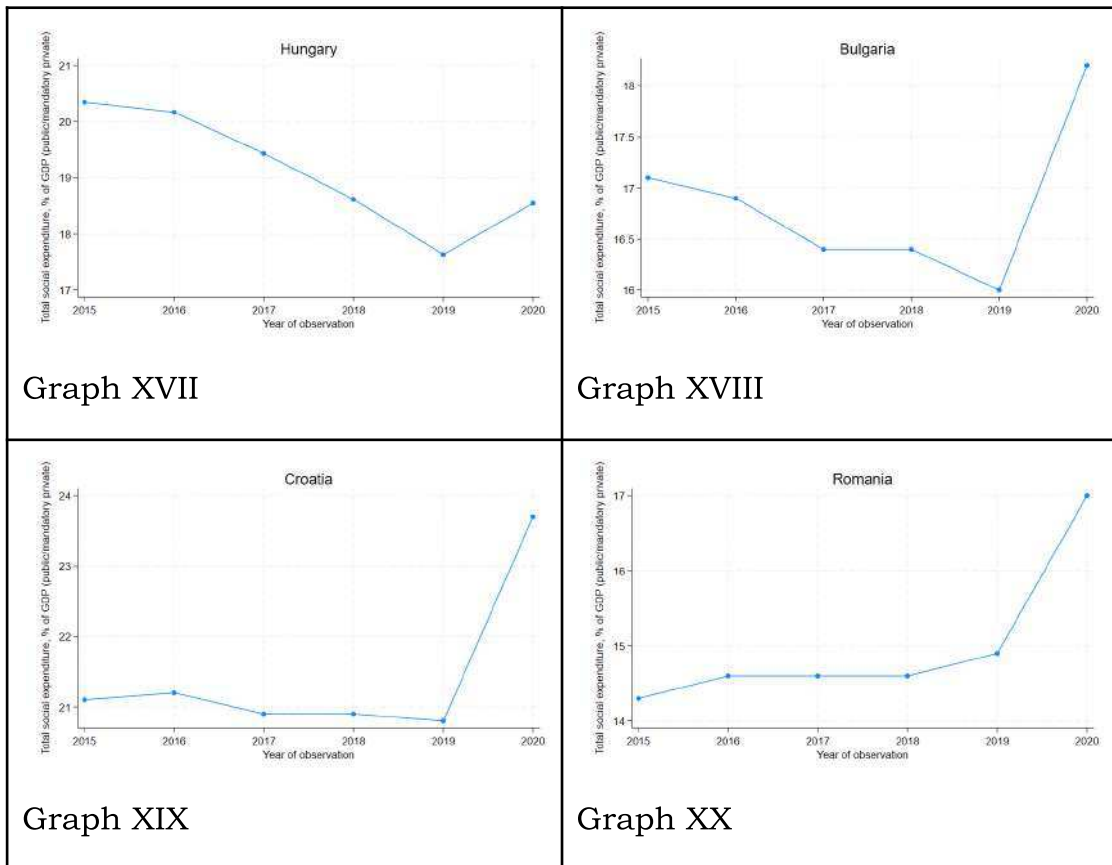
Graph XVI



Graph XV



Graph XVI

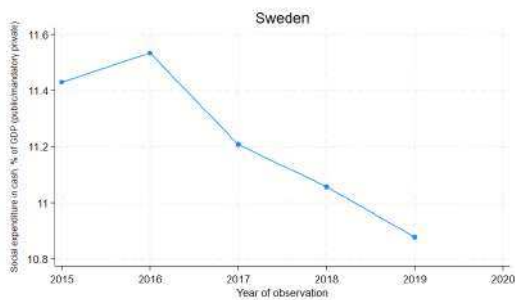


Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

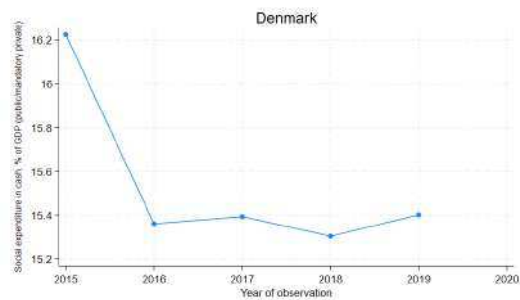
In general there was a decrease in the level of investments in the total of public and mandatory private social expenditure as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 30) in the period from 2015 to 2019 with the exception of Luxembourg again, which registered a decrease only between 2015 and 2016 and Sweden presenting an inexpressive increase from 2015 to 2016. Romania registered a lower level of variation from 2015 to 2019, followed by Croatia that maintained the level of investments in the same period. All the countries registered an increase in the level of investments from 2019 to 2020, with the exception of Luxembourg which was increasing its investments already from 2017 to 2020.

It was verified that the best ranked countries registered a higher level of investments when compared to the worst ranked countries during the whole period.

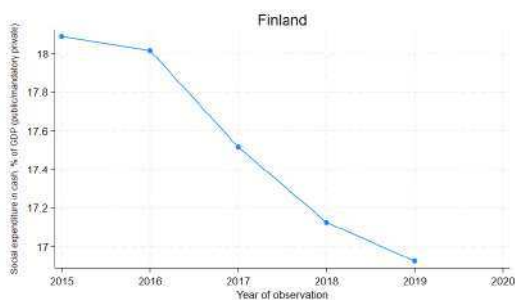
- 3) socexp_c_pmp: Public and mandatory private social expenditure in cash as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 30).



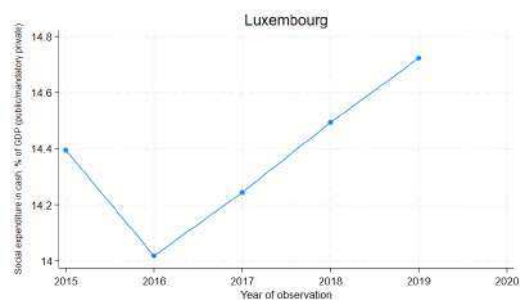
Graph XXI



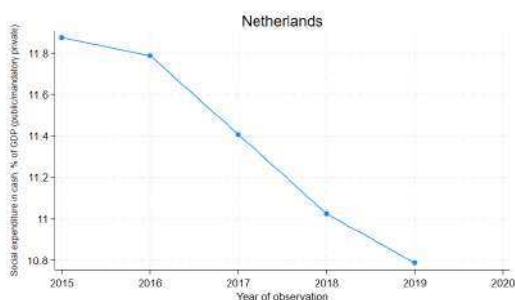
Graph XXII



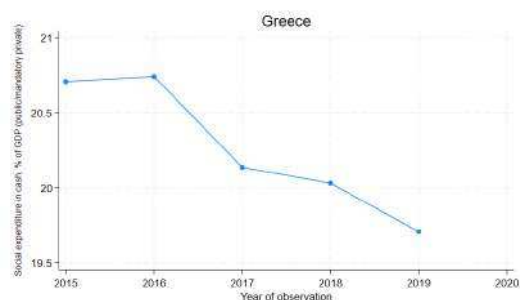
Graph XXIII



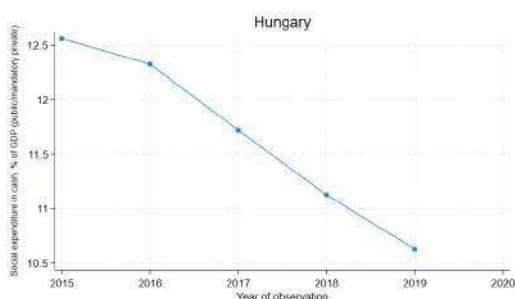
Graph XXIV



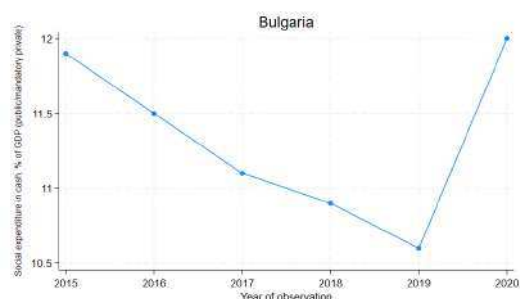
Graph XXV



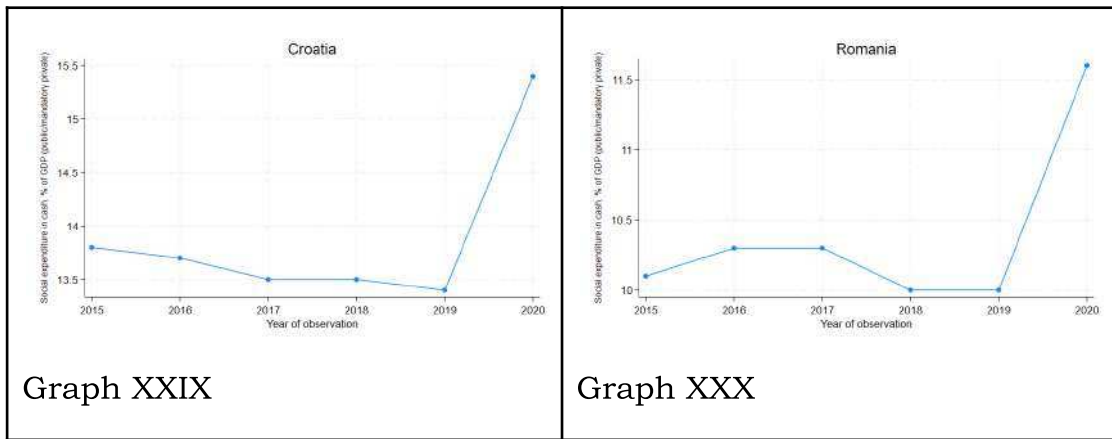
Graph XXVI



Graph XXVII



Graph XXVIII

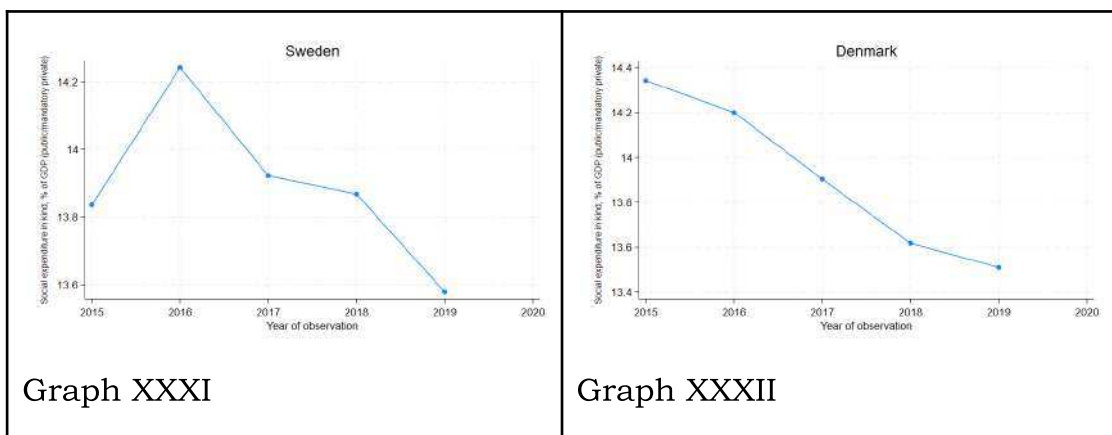


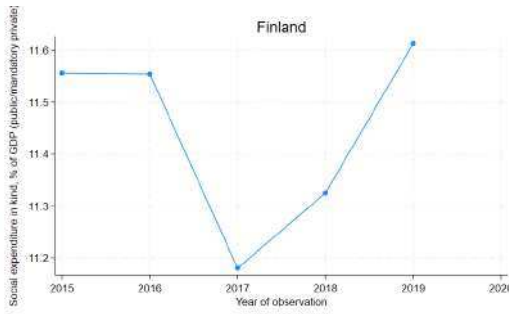
Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

Only Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania had registered data regarding 2020. All the countries present a decrease in the level of public and mandatory private social expenditure in cash as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 30) from 2015 to 2019 with the exception of Luxembourg, which already registered an increase from 2016 to 2019. Romania and Sweden presented a slight increase between 2015 and 2016.

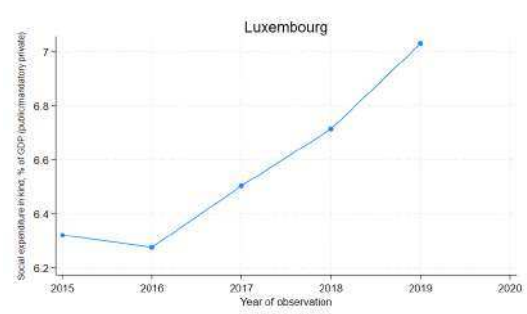
The best ranked countries in general registered a higher level of investments when compared to the worst ranked countries. The exception was Greece again, because its level of investments exceeds all of the best ranked countries in the whole period.

- 4) socexp_k_pmp: Public and mandatory private social expenditure in kind as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 30).

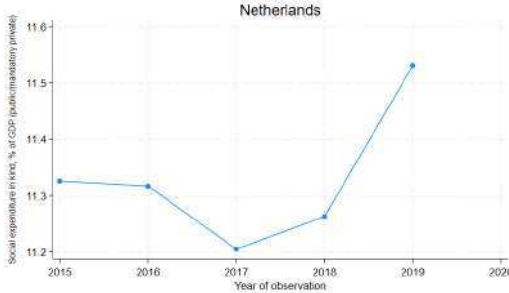




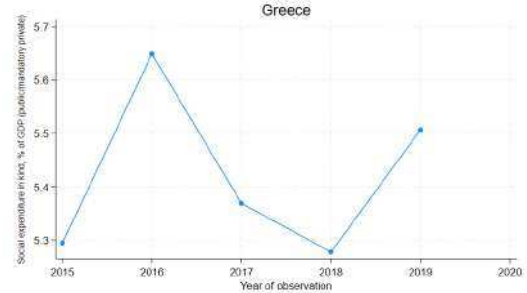
Graph XXXIII



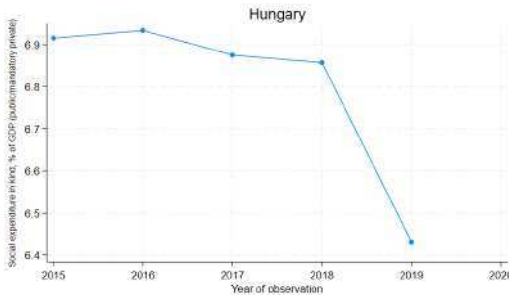
Graph XXXIV



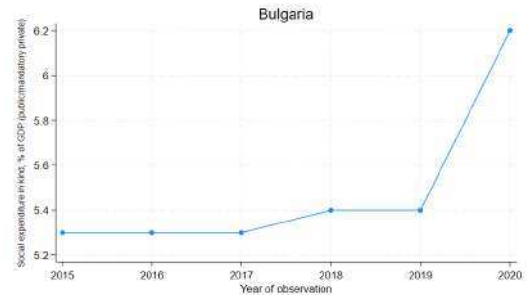
Graph XXXV



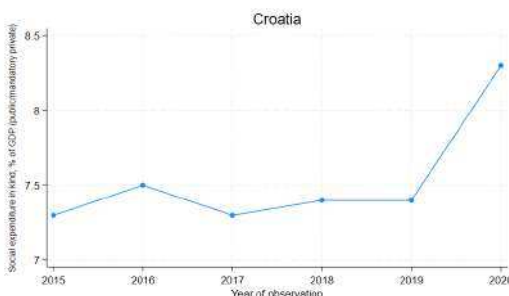
Graph XXXVI



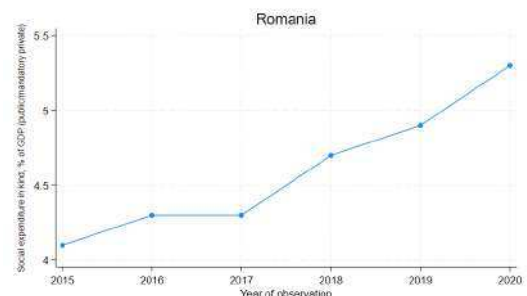
Graph XXXVII



Graph XXXVIII



Graph XXXIX



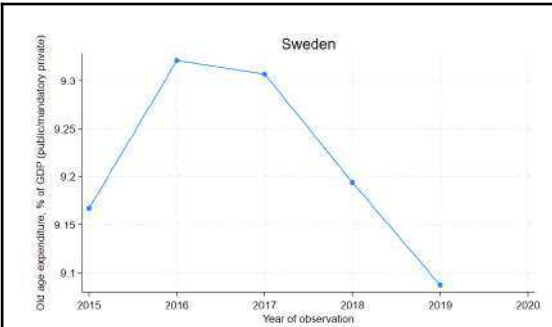
Graph XL

Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

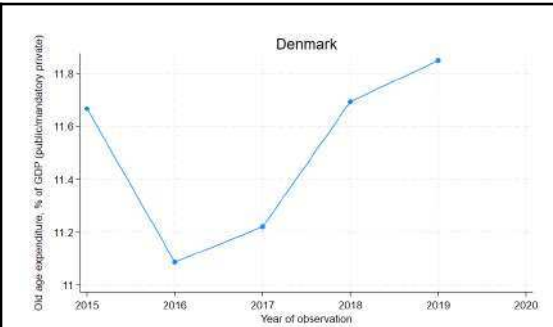
Again only Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania had the data available for 2020. There is a variation among the best ranked countries alternating periods of increase, maintenance and decrease in the level of public and mandatory private social expenditure in the variable “kind as a percentage of GDP” (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 30), but the data does not present itself as a common variation in general. However, it is interesting to observe that there is a considerable difference in the level of investments among the best and worst ranked countries, because the worst ones registered a lower level of investments in general when compared to the best ones in the whole period.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that Luxembourg once more presents data towards an increase in the level of investments already from 2016 on. Also it was observed that the aforementioned countries that have the available data for 2020 registered an increase in the level of investments from 2019 to 2020.

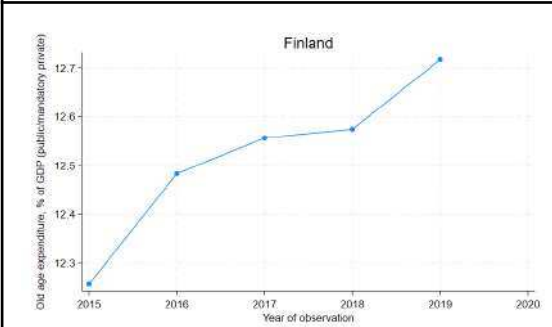
5) oldage_pmp: Total public and mandatory private expenditure on old age as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 30).



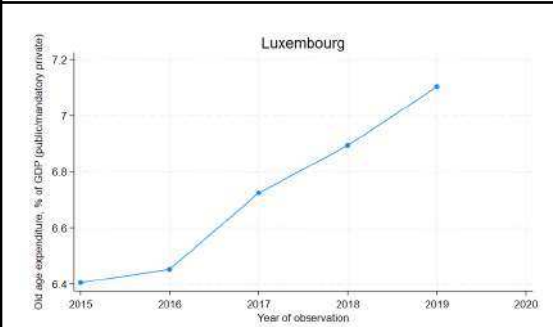
Graph XLI



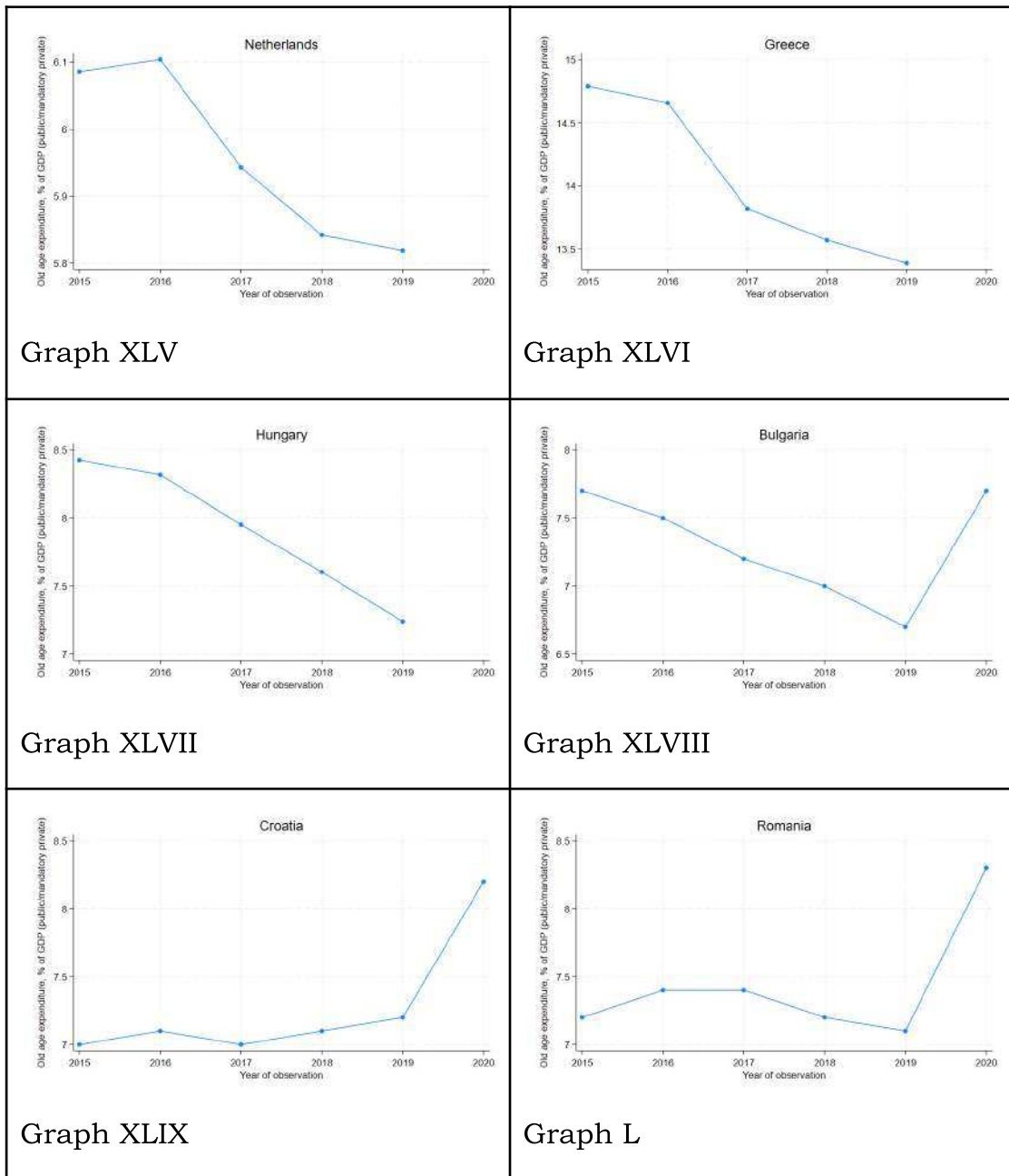
Graph XLII



Graph XLIII



Graph XLIV



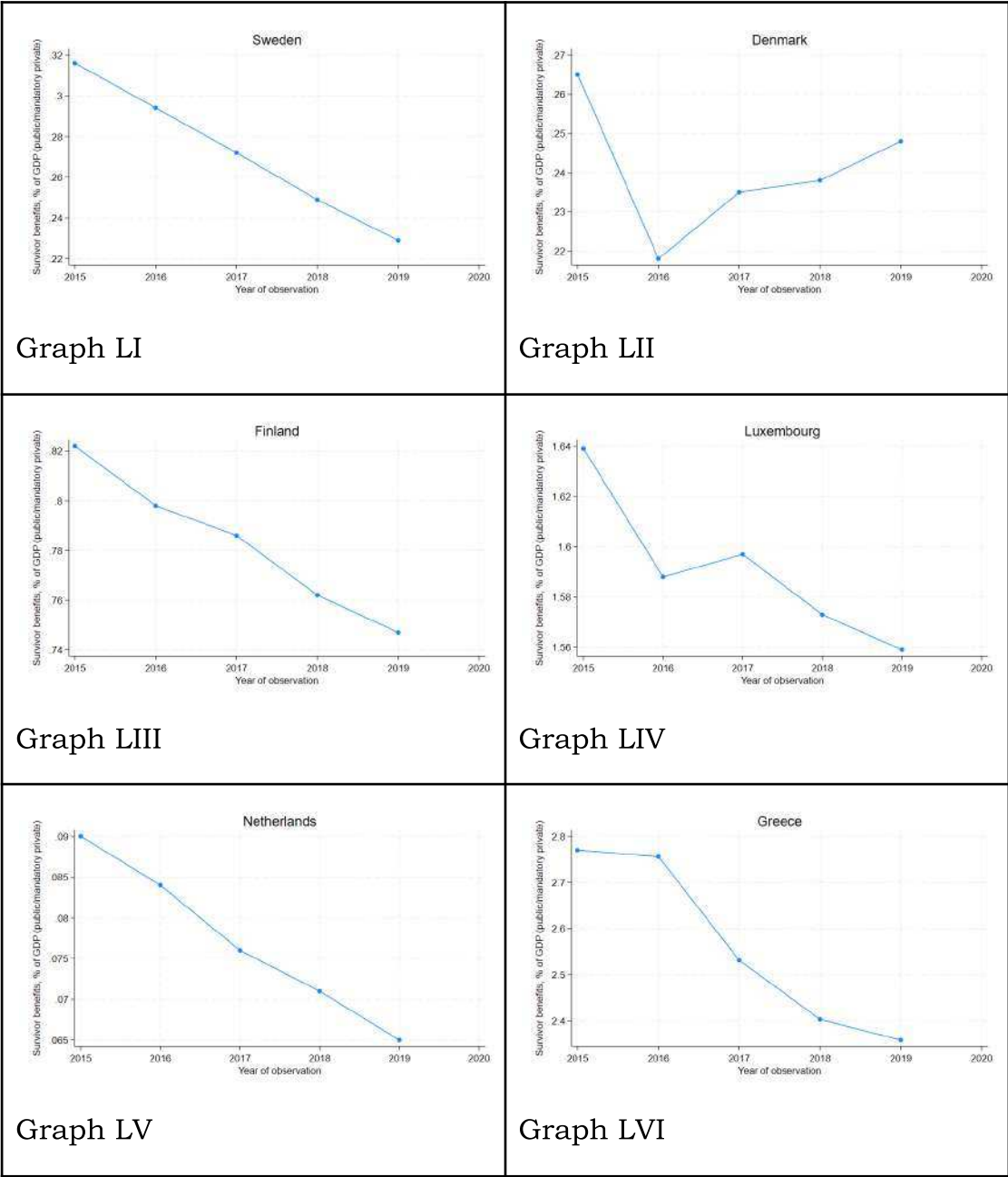
Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

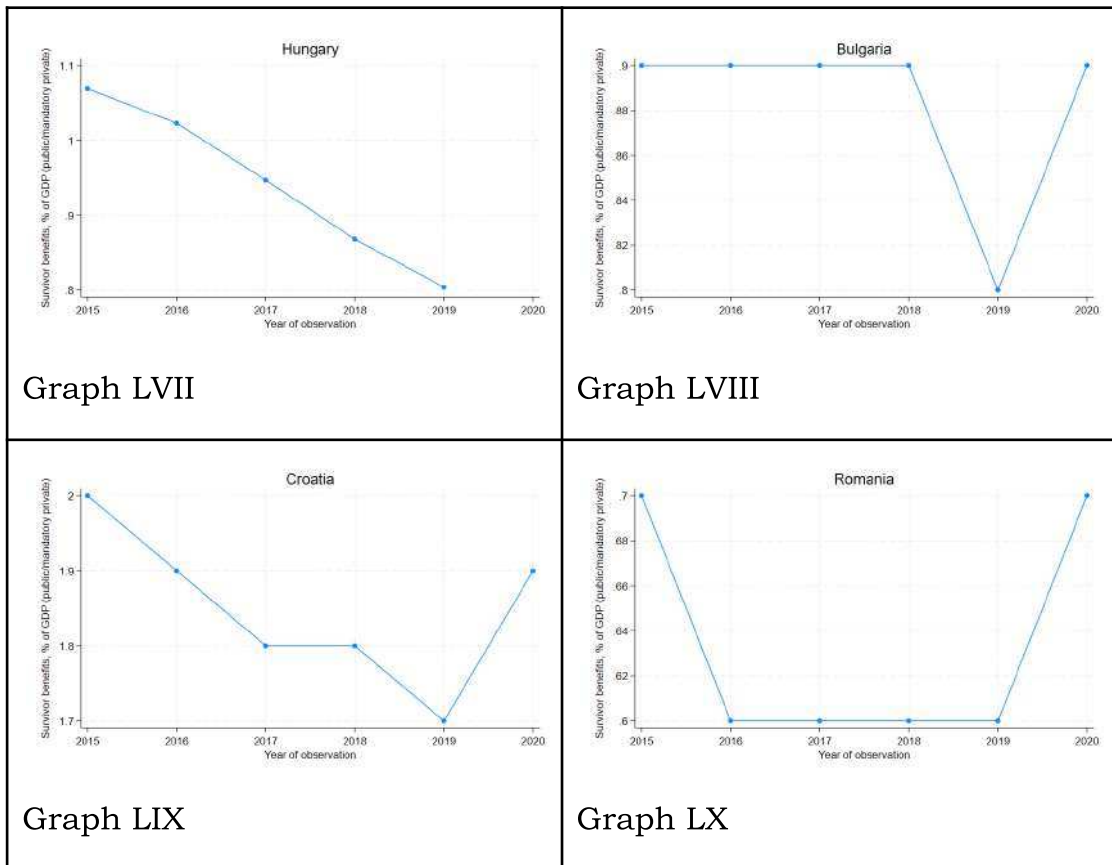
As already observed in previous variables, once more only Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania had the data available for 2020. In general, it was observed a higher increase in the level of investments for the total public and mandatory private expenditure on old age as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 30) among the best ranked countries in the period contrasting with a higher level of decrease in the investments among the worst countries.

Finland and Luxembourg registered an increase in their investment already from 2015 contrasting with Hungary registering the opposite. Greece

presents a decrease of investments between 2015 and 2019, but it might be perceived as an exception among the worst ranked countries due to registering the highest level of investments in comparison with all best ranked countries in the period. Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania registered an increase of their investments from 2019 to 2020.

6) survivor_pmp: Total of public and mandatory private survivor benefits as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 31).



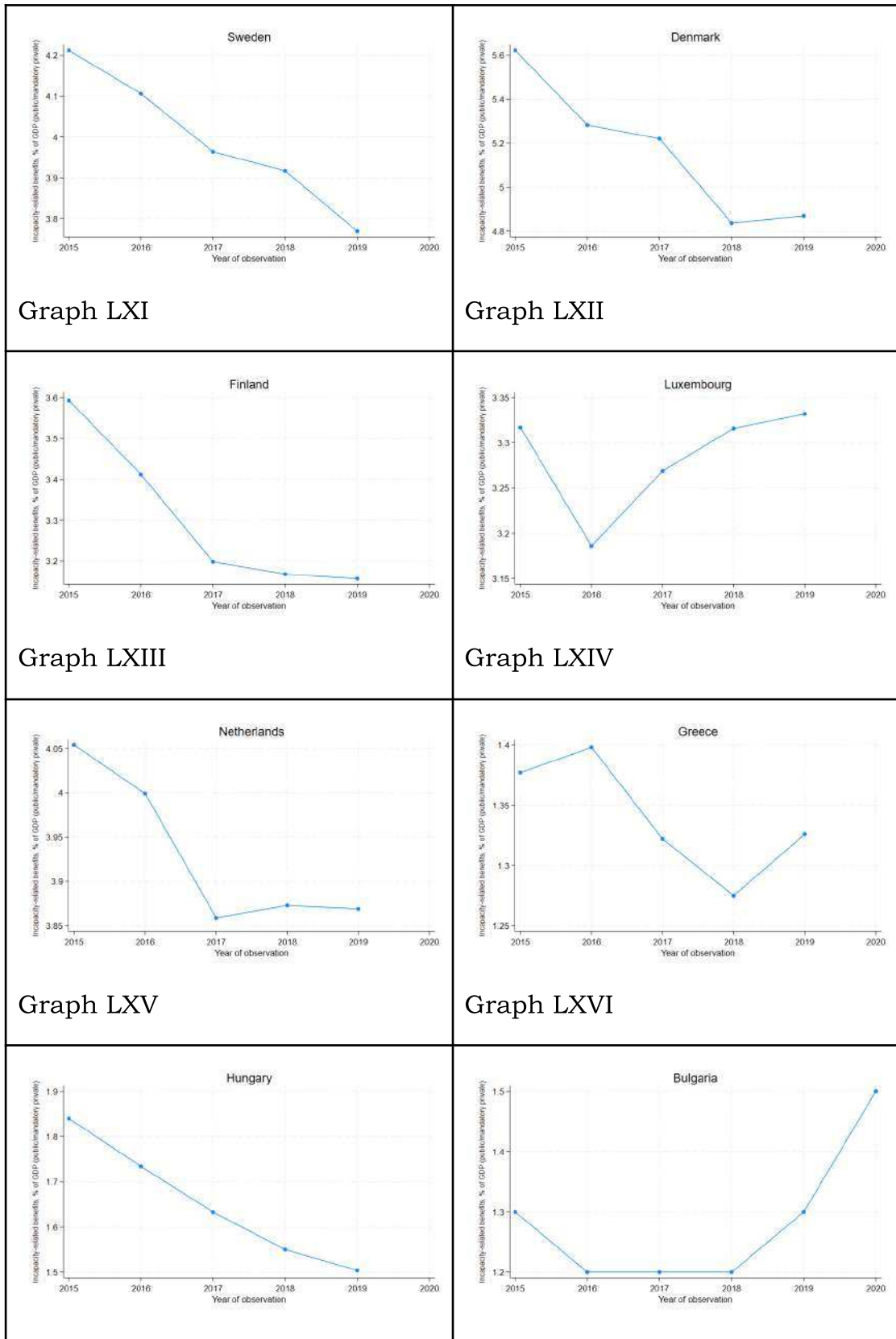


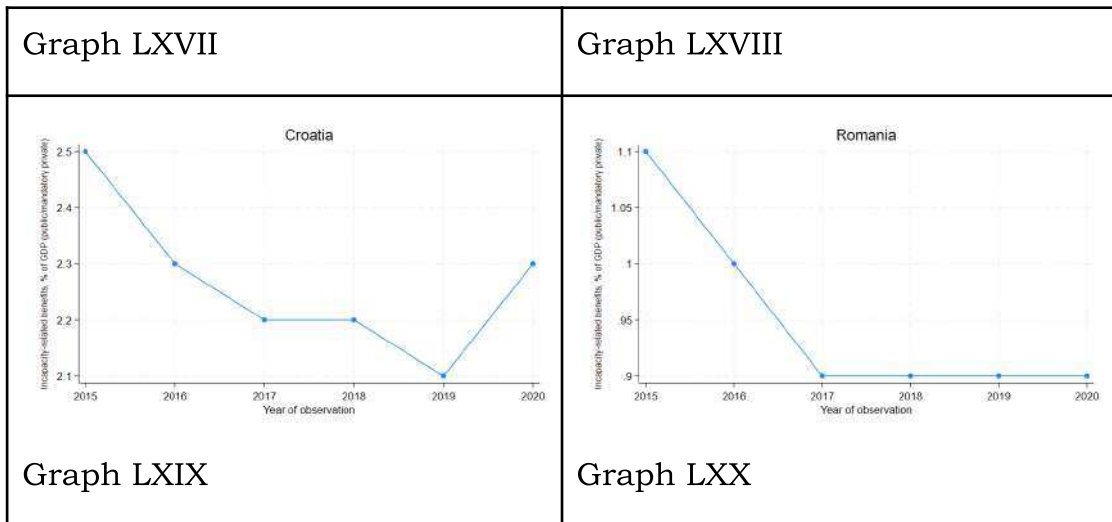
Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania were the only ones with the data available for 2020 and registering an increase in the level of investments for the total public and mandatory private survivor benefits as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 31) from 2019 to 2020.

The level of investments in this variable is low among all the observed countries and all of them registered a decrease in the period of 2015 to 2019. It was interesting to observe that Greece once more presents a superior level of investments in comparison with the best ranked countries in the same period and, on the other hand, the Netherlands registered the lower level of investments even in comparison with the worst ranked countries. In general, the best ranked countries registered a higher level of investments in the same period when compared to the worst ranked countries.

7) incapben_pmp: incapben_pmp: Total incapacity-related benefits (public and mandatory private) as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armington et al., 2023: 31).



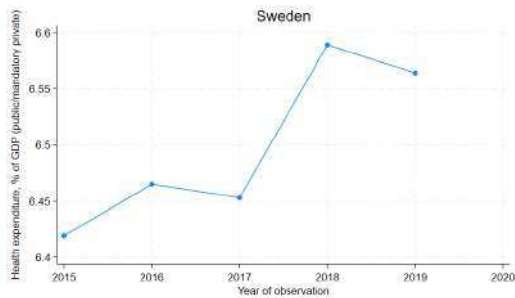


Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

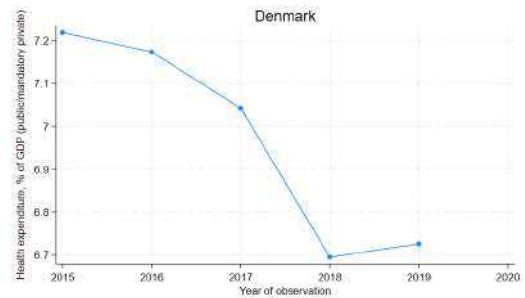
Only Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania had data available concerning the year of 2020, but differently from the previous variables with the same issue, it was not demonstrated a pattern of increased level of investment from these three countries between 2019 and 2020 in the total incapacity-related benefits(public and mandatory private) as a percentage of the GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 31). The difference detected here is that Bulgaria registered an increase already from 2018 on, Romania maintained the same level from 2017 on and Croatia was the only one registering an increase from 2019 to 2020.

In general, it was observed a decrease in the level of investments among both best and worst ranked countries, but once more the best ranked countries presented a higher level of investments when compared to the worst ranked countries. When the countries presented some level of increase in the investments in this variable, they were inexpressive.

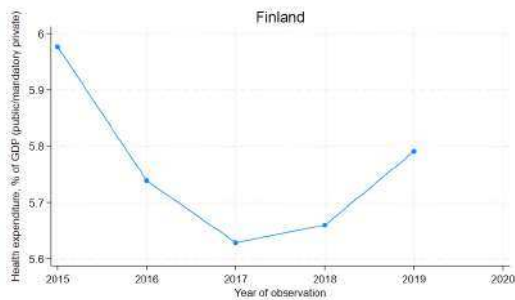
- 8) health_pmp: Total public and mandatory private expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 31).



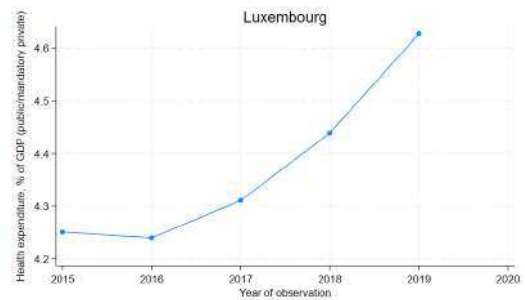
Graph LXXI



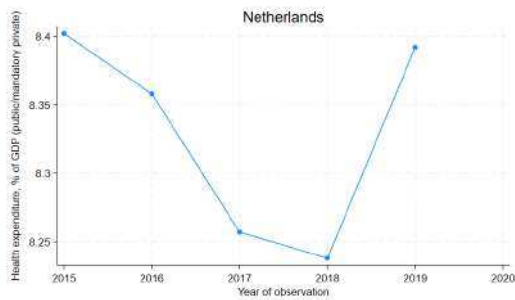
Graph LXXII



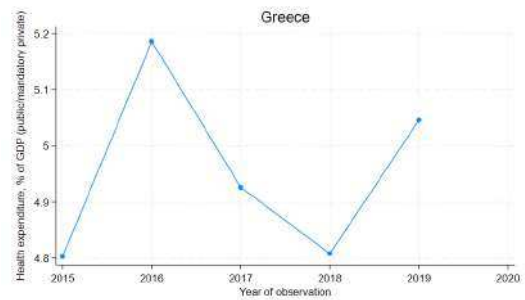
Graph LXXIII



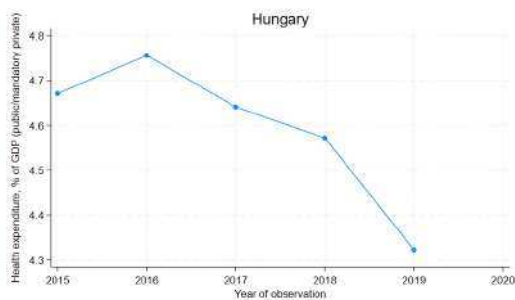
Graph LXXIV



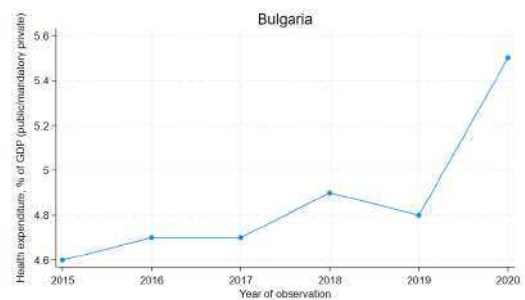
Graph LXXV



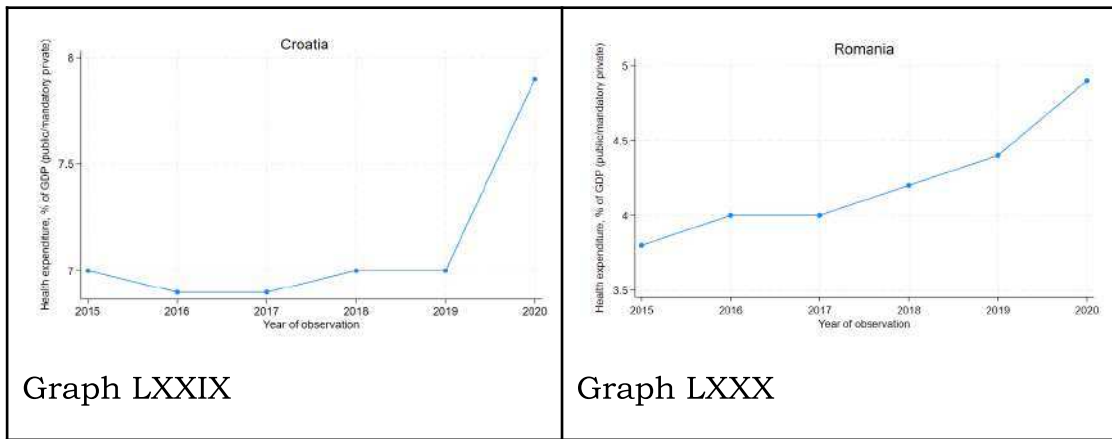
Graph LXXVI



Graph LXXVII



Graph LXXVIII

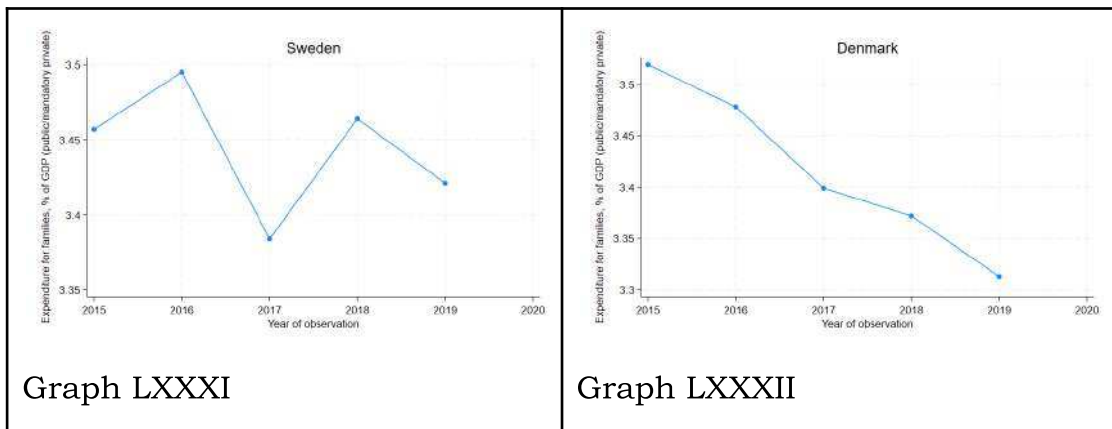


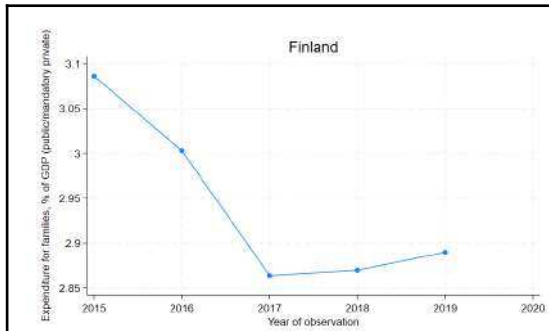
Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania were once more the only ones with the data available for 2020, but this time the three countries registered an increase in the level of investments in the total public and mandatory private expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 31) during the whole period from 2015 to 2020.

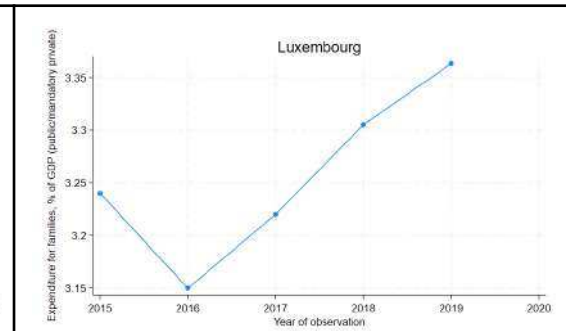
The best ranked countries presented in general a higher level of investments when compared to the worst ranked countries. The exceptions observed were Luxembourg and Croatia, due to the fact that the first one registered a lower level of investments for the period when compared to all worst ranked countries and the latter registered one of the best levels of investments in general during the observed period.

- 9) family_pmp: Total public and mandatory private expenditure for families as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 31).

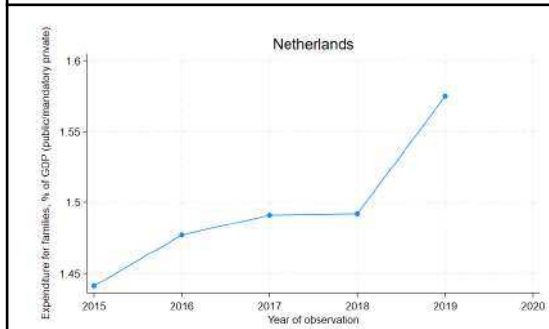




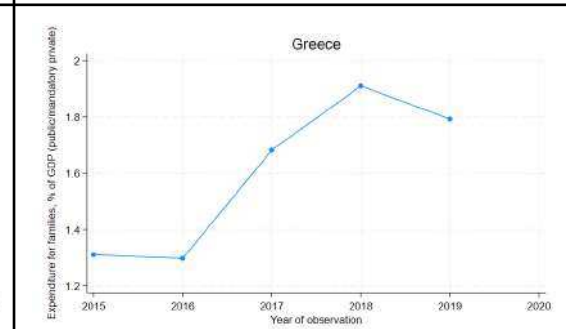
Graph LXXXIII



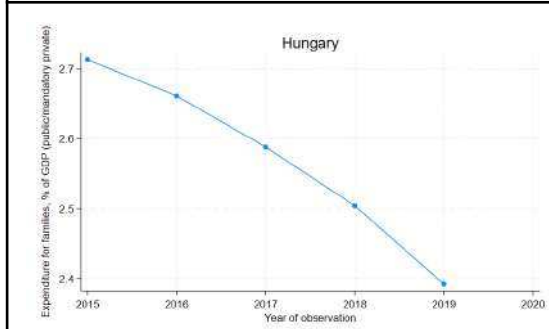
Graph LXXXIV



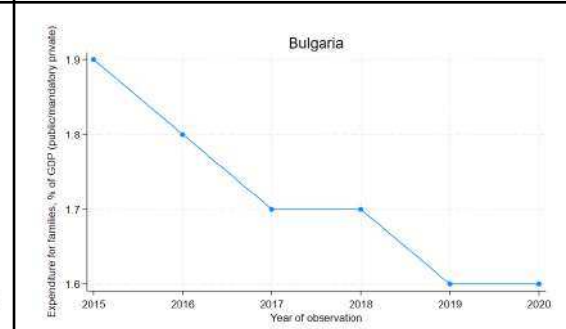
Graph LXXXV



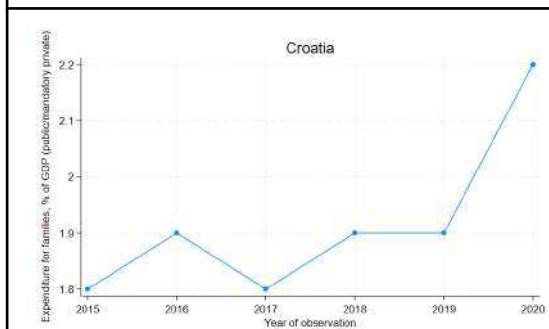
Graph LXXXVI



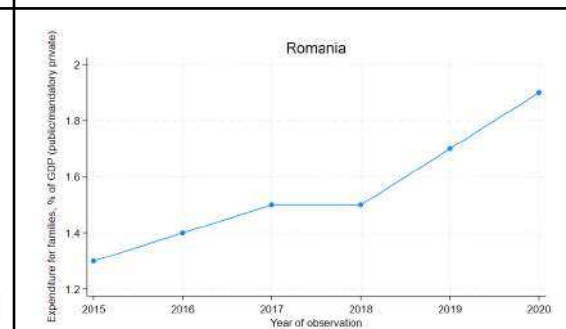
Graph LXXXVII



Graph LXXXVIII



Graph LXXXIX



Graph XC

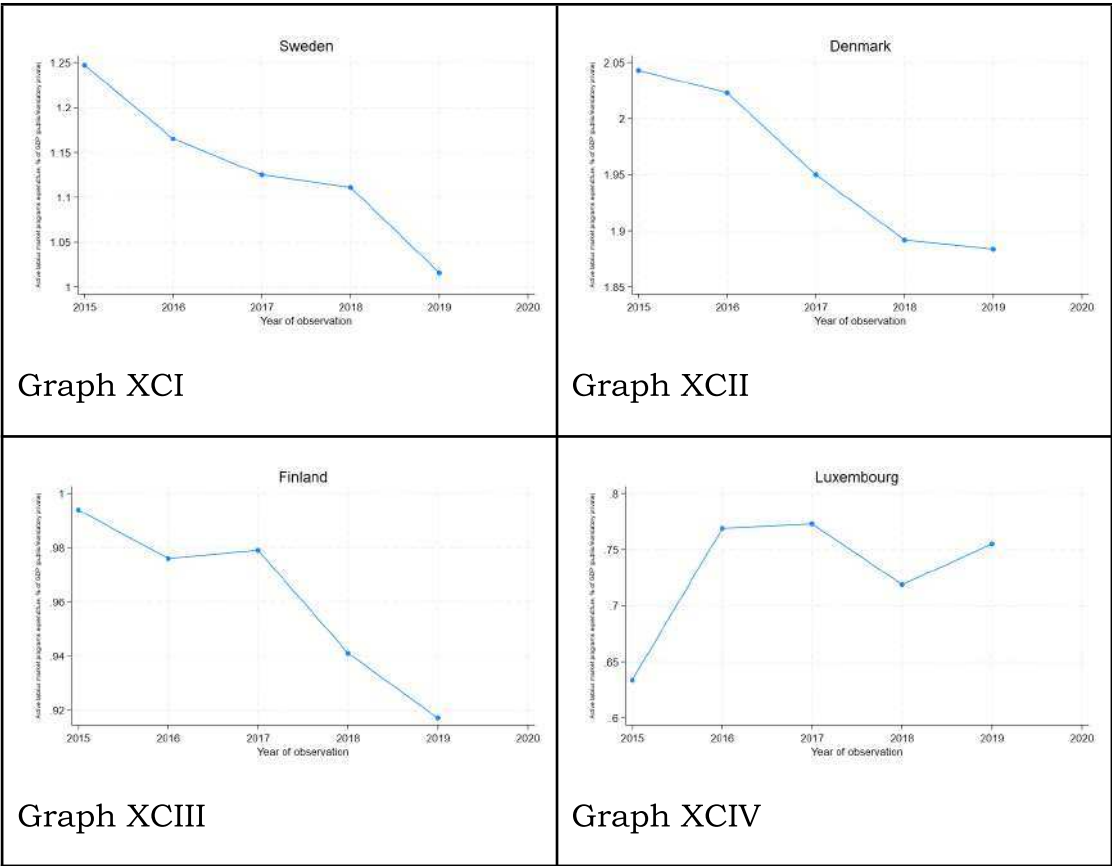
Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

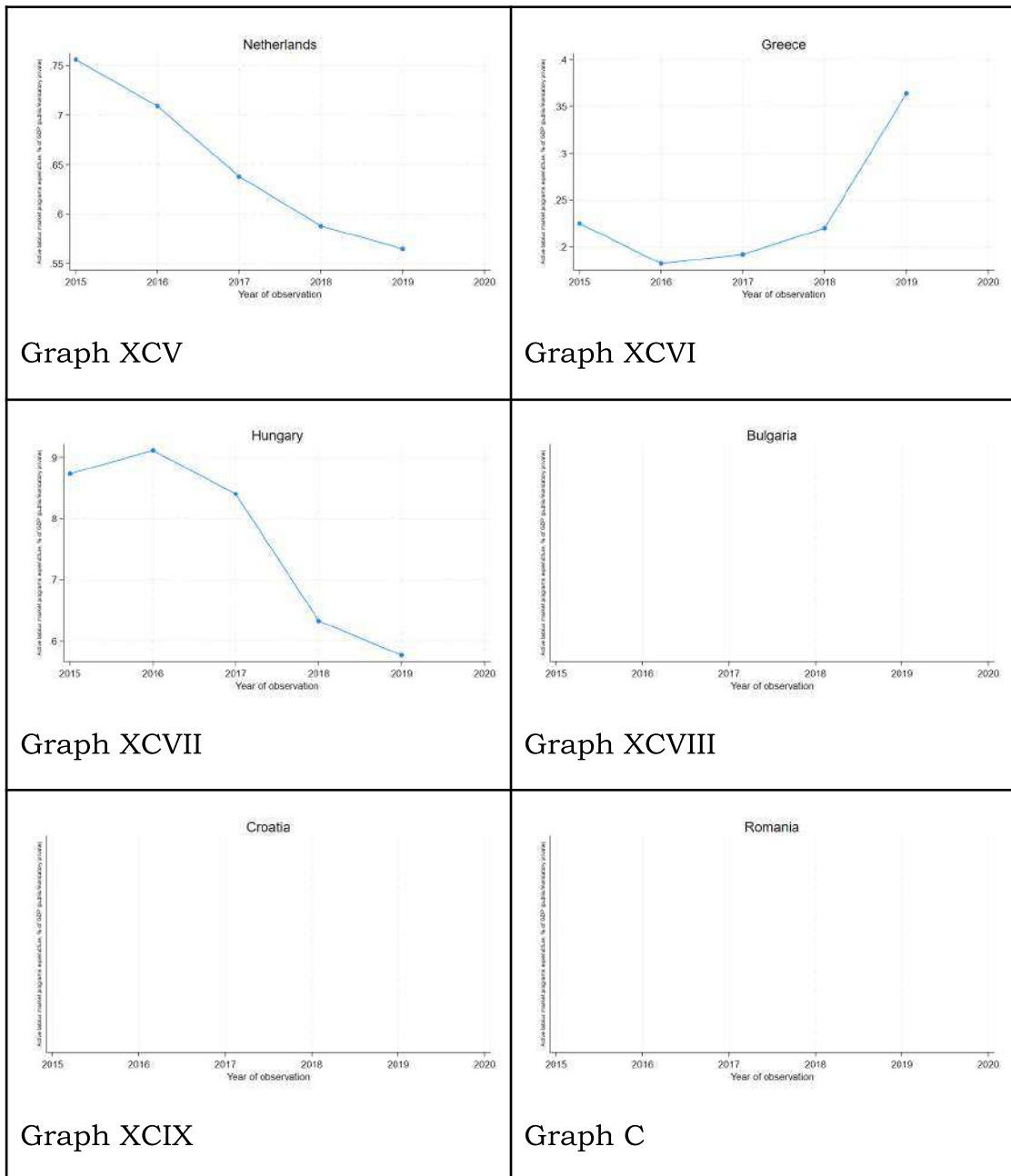
Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania were the only countries that had available data for the year 2020, but it was not observed any pattern among them between 2019 and 2020.

With the exception of the Netherlands, all the other best ranked countries registered a higher level of investments in the total public and mandatory private expenditure for families as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 31) when compared to the worst ranked countries.

It was observed a decrease in the level of investments among most of the best ranked countries in the period, with the exception of the Netherlands and Luxembourg that registered an inexpressive increase from 2015 on and 2016 on respectively.

10) alm_pmp: Total public and mandatory private expenditure on active labour market programmes as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 31).





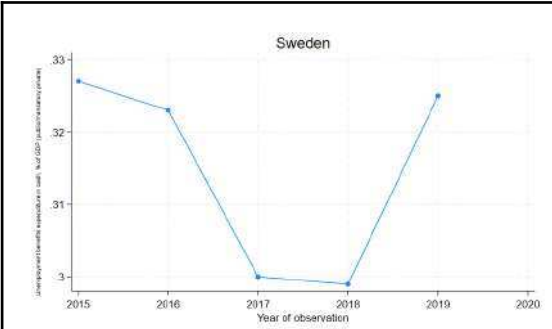
Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

It was observed that Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania do not have available data for the whole period concerning the total public and mandatory private expenditure on active labour market programmes as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 31).

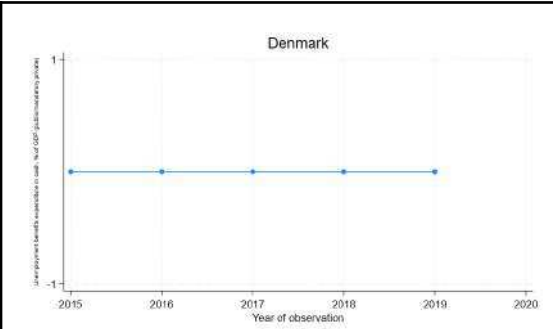
With the exception of Luxembourg, all the other best ranked countries registered a decrease in the level of investments during the observed period. Finland was the only best ranked country that registered a lower level of investments in comparison with Greece and Hungary (the only two worst

ranked countries with available data in the dataset). None of the analysed countries had available data for the year 2020.

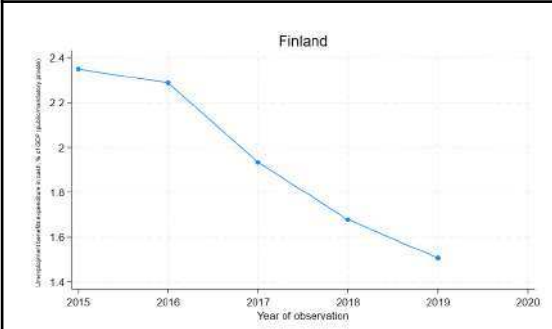
11) unemp_pmp: Cash expenditure for unemployment benefits as a percentage of GDP (public and mandatory private) (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 32).



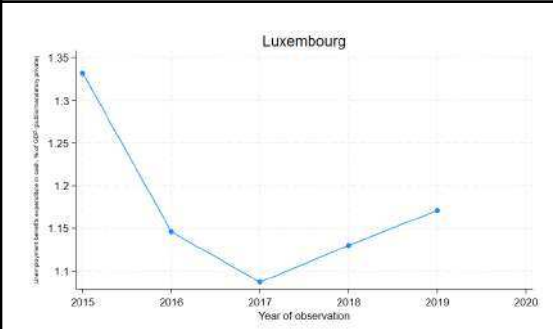
Graph CI



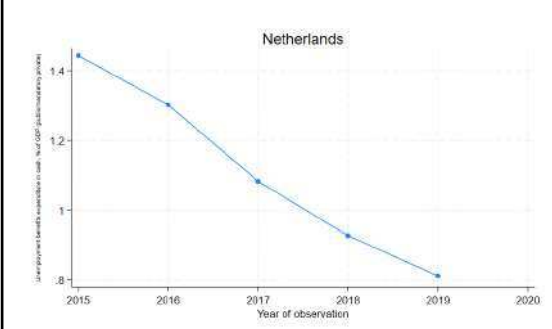
Graph CII



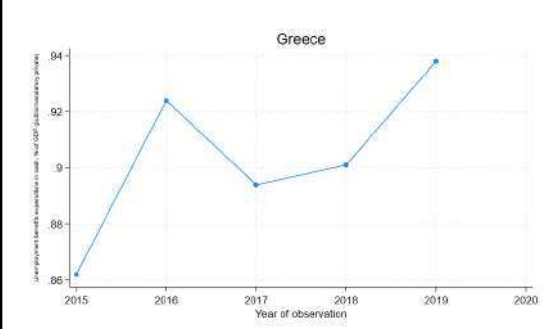
Graph CIII



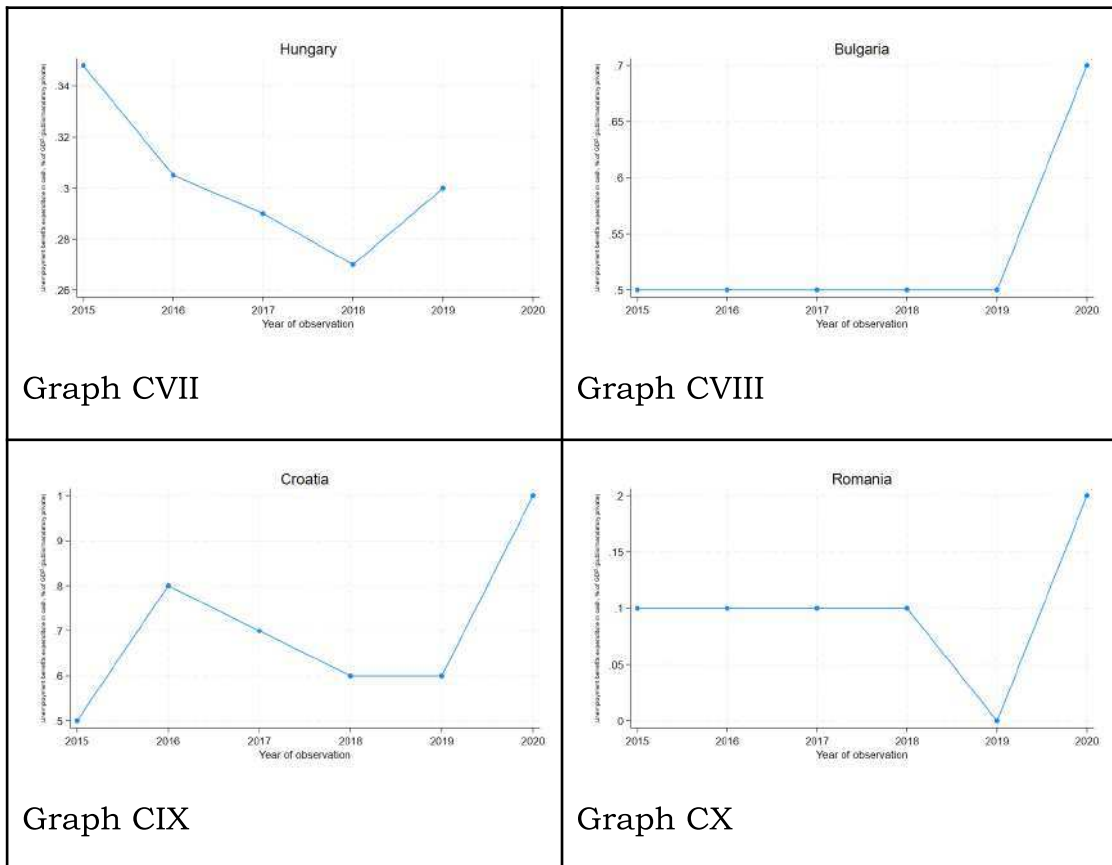
Graph CIV



Graph CV



Graph CVI

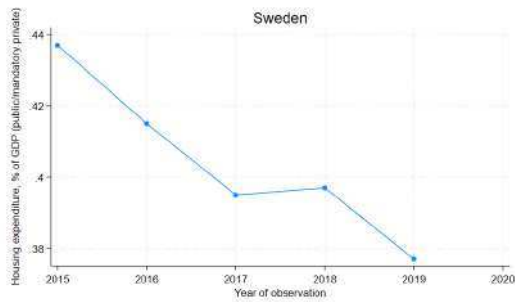


Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

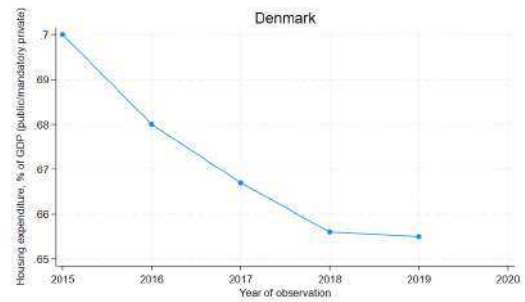
The year of 2020 only has available data for cash expenditure for unemployment benefits as a percentage of GDP (public and mandatory private) (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 32) for Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania and all the three countries registered an increase in the investment between the period from 2019 to 2020.

Among the best ranked countries, Sweden registered an inexpressive variation in the period and Denmark registered no investment in the variable during the whole period. Even among a decrease in the investments for the best ranked countries they registered a higher level of expenditure when compared to the worst ranked countries in the same period.

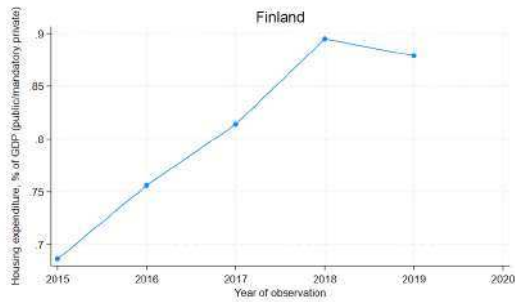
- 12) housing_pmp: Total public and mandatory private expenditure on housing as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 32).



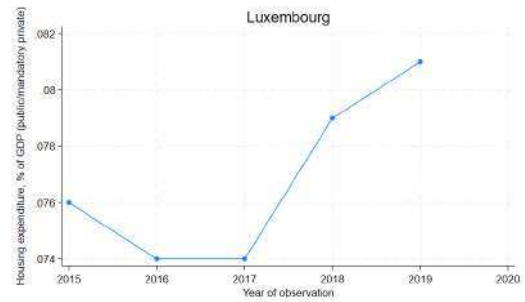
Graph CXI



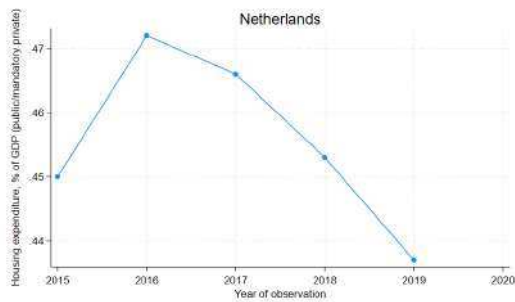
Graph CXII



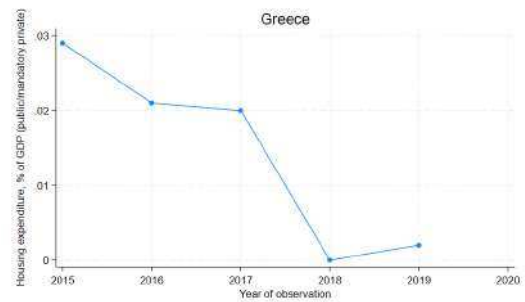
Graph CXIII



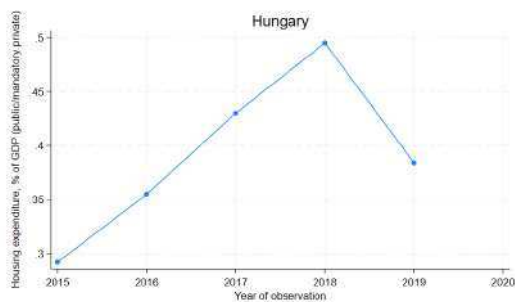
Graph CXIV



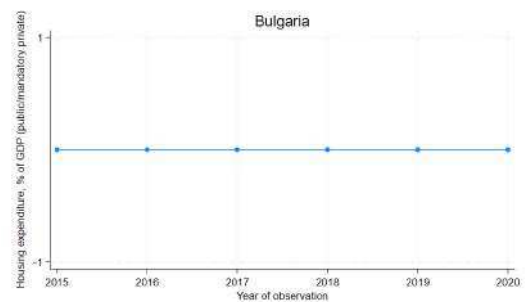
Graph CXV



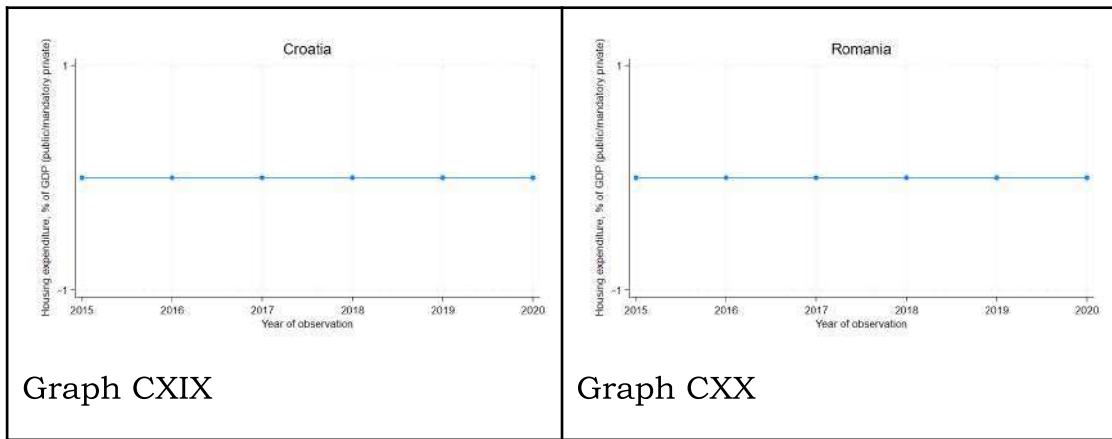
Graph CXI



Graph CXVII



Graph CXVIII

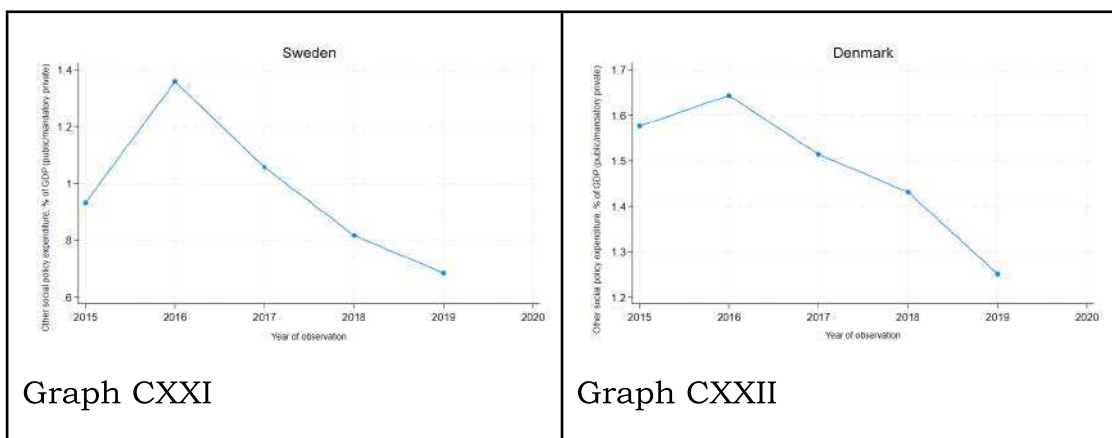


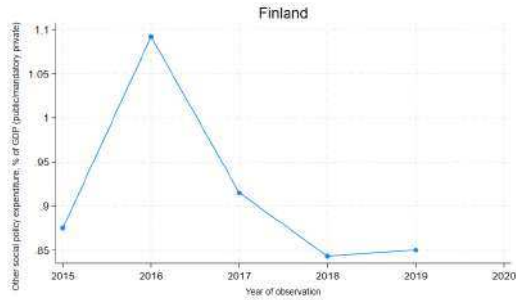
Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

Despite 2020 having available data from Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania, the three countries presented zero investments in total public and mandatory private expenditure on housing as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 32) during the whole period from 2015 to 2020.

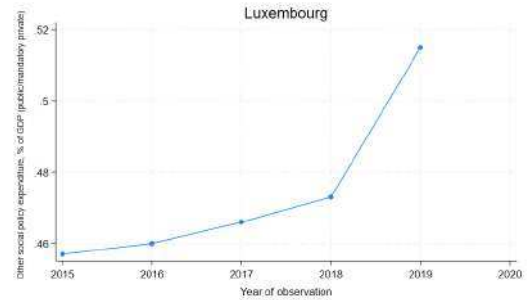
In comparison to the worst ranked countries, it was observed that the best ranked countries registered a higher level of investments in the aforementioned variable in the same period.

- 13) othsocx_pmp: public and mandatory private expenditure on other social policy areas as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 32).

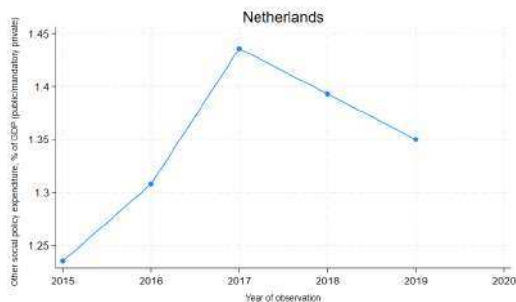




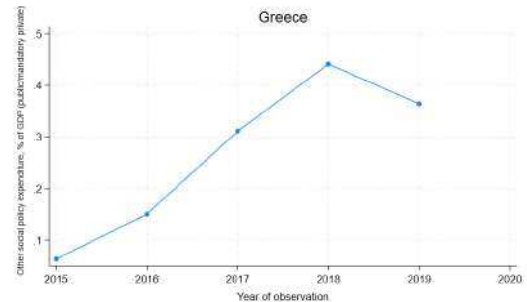
Graph CXXIII



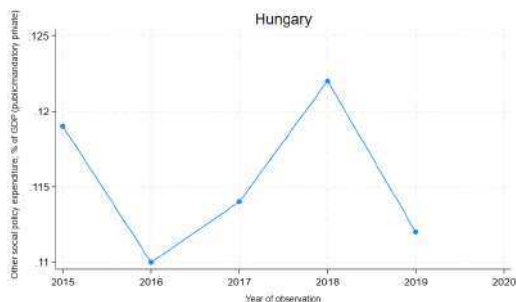
Graph CXXIV



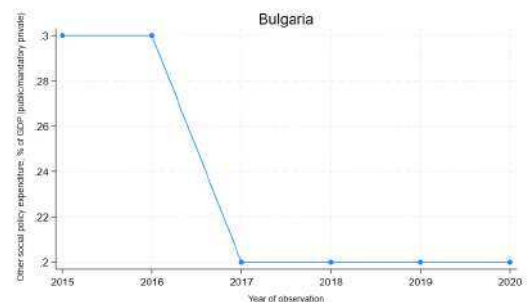
Graph CXXV



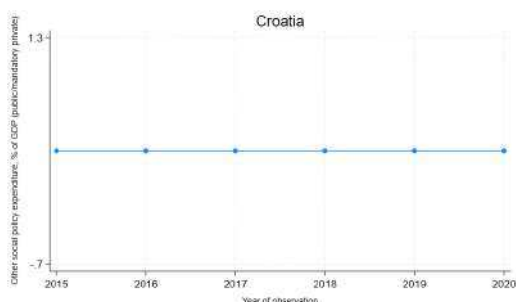
Graph CXXVI



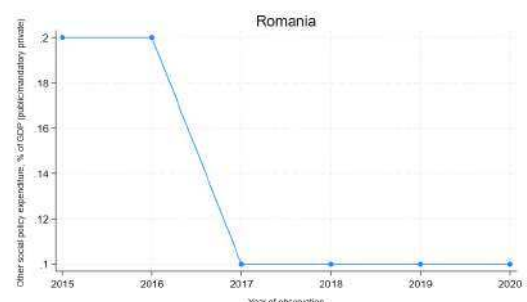
Graph CXXVII



Graph CXXVIII



Graph CXXIX



Graph CXXX

Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

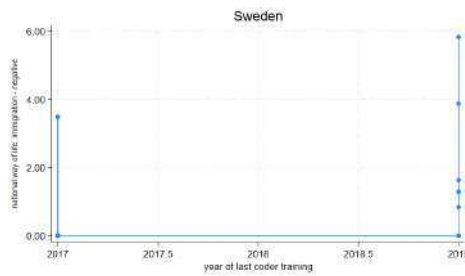
The year of 2020 only has available data for public and mandatory private expenditure on the social policy areas as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 32) regarding Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania and the two latter countries registered a decrease in the investment between 2016 and 2017 followed by a maintenance of their levels until 2020, but on the other hand Croatia maintained its level during the whole period from 2015 to 2020.

It was observed that the best ranked countries registered a higher level of investment in comparison to the worst ranked countries in the same period.

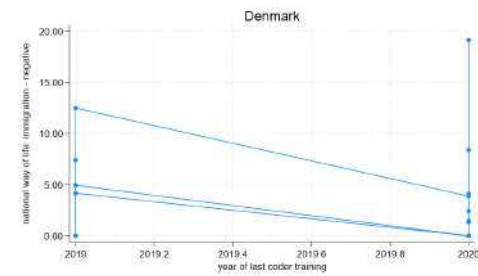
3.2. Linking party policy on Welfare and Immigration sentiments

Aiming to understand the party policy alignment towards welfare and immigration sentiments, 40 twoway graphs were generated concerning the 5 best and the 5 worst average ranked European countries at GTCI 2015-2020 and after analysing 4 different variables from The Manifesto Project Dataset, the following findings were verified:

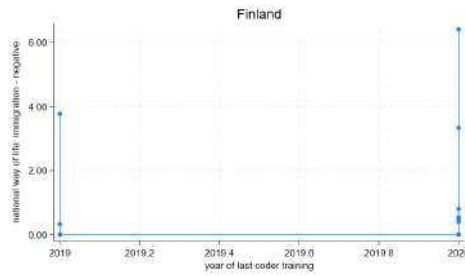
- 1) per601_2: National Way of Life: Immigration: Negative. Statement advocating the restriction of the process of immigration, i.e. accepting new immigrants. Might include statements regarding: immigration being a threat to the national character of the manifesto country; and 'the boat is full' argument. The introduction of migration quotas, including restricting immigration from specific countries or regions etc. (Lehmann et al., 2024).



Graph CXXXI



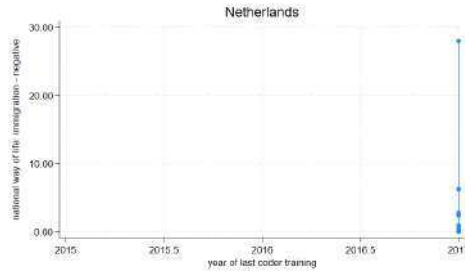
Graph CXXXII



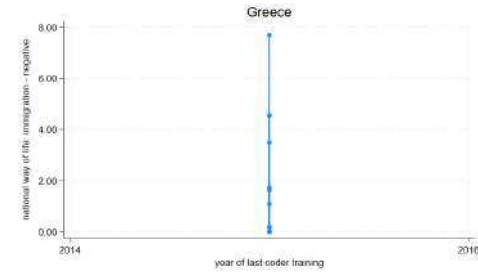
Graph CXXXIII



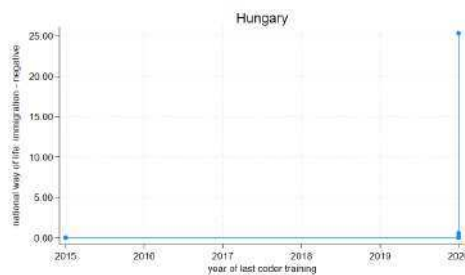
Graph CXXXIV



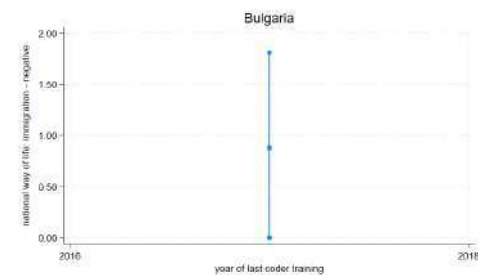
Graph CXXXV



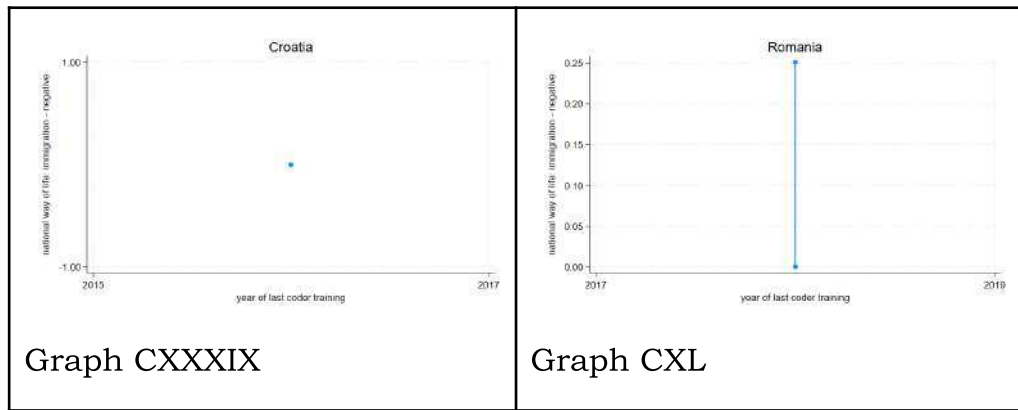
Graph CXXXVI



Graph CXXXVII



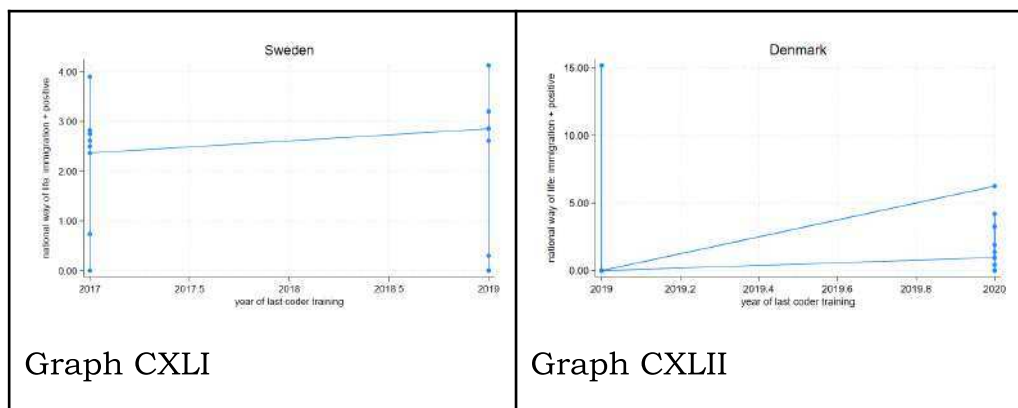
Graph CXXXVIII

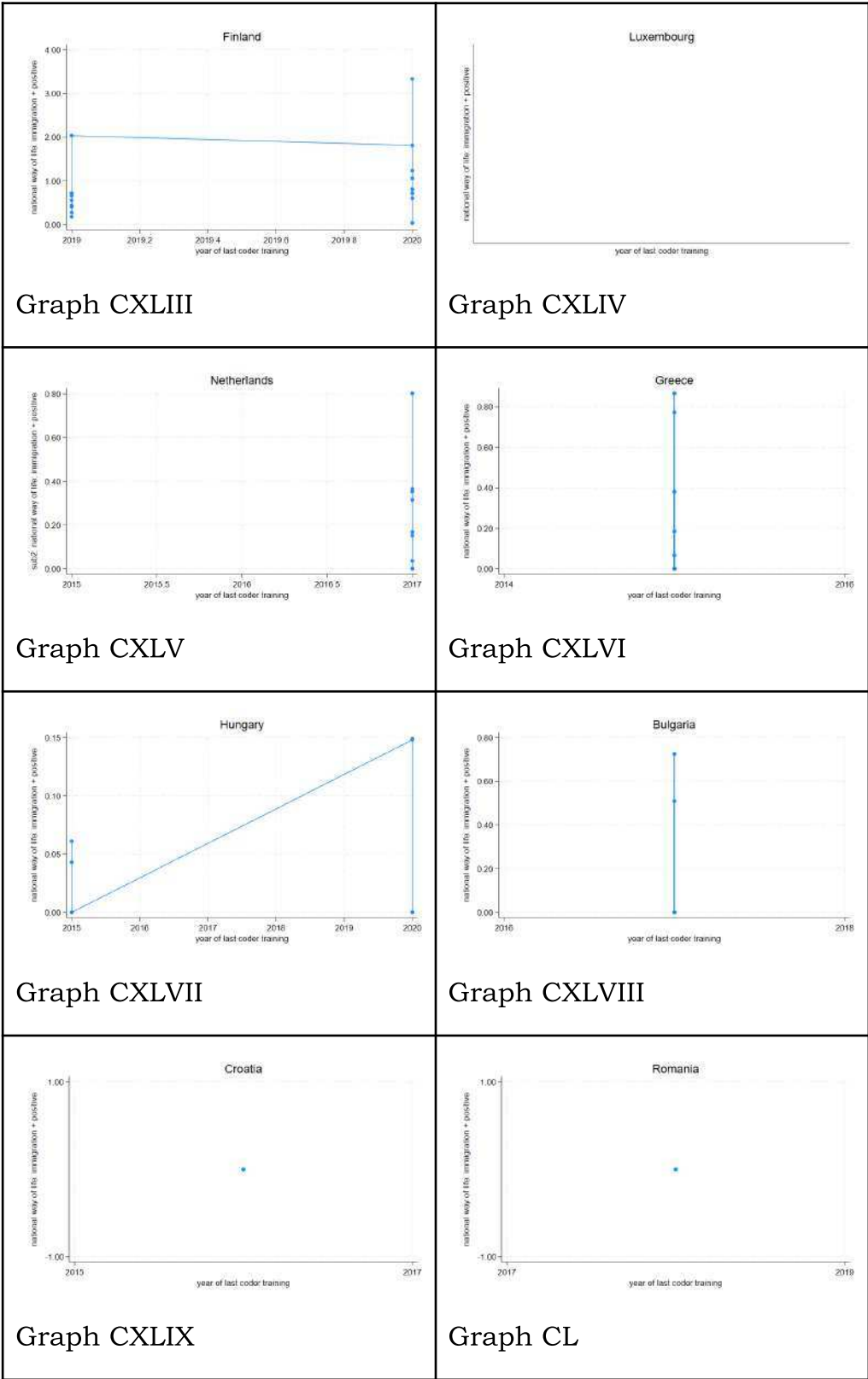


Source: Lehmann et al. (2024). Own work graphs generated by Stata command using The Manifesto Project Dataset.

It was observed that the best ranked countries registered a higher level of discourses in their party manifestos regarding the negative point of view towards immigration under the concept of national way of life when compared to the worst ranked countries in the period from 2015 to 2020. Also it was observed that there was an increase in this type of discourse in the last years in the best ranked countries. The only exception is Luxembourg, which does not have available data for the period in this variable.

- 2) per602_2: National Way of Life: Immigration: Positive. Statements favouring new immigrants; against restrictions and quotas; and rejection of the 'boat is full' argument. Includes allowing new immigrants for the benefit of the manifesto country's economy. (Lehmann et al., 2024).



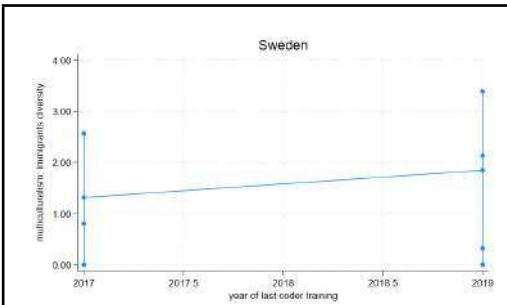


Source: Lehmann et al. (2024). Own work graphs generated by Stata command using The Manifesto Project Dataset.

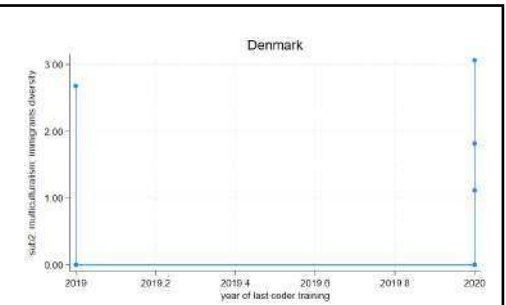
Countradictoriously, the best ranked countries registered also a higher level of discourses in their party manifestos regarding the positive sentiments towards immigration under the concept of national way of life

when compared to the worst ranked countries in the period from 2015 to 2020. The only exception is Luxembourg, which does not have available data for the period in this variable.

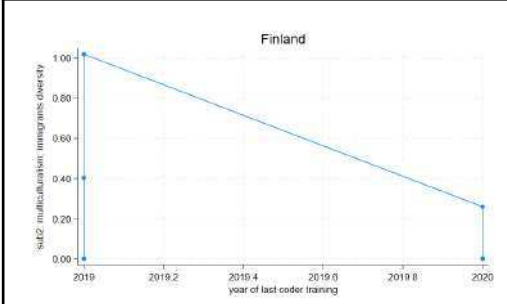
3) per607_2: Multiculturalism: Immigrants Diversity. Statements favouring the idea that immigrants keep their cultural traits; voluntary integration; and state providing opportunities to integrate. (Lehmann et al., 2024).



Graph CLI



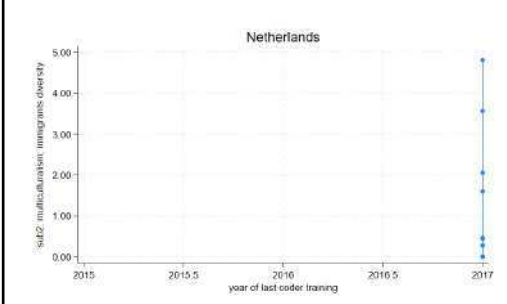
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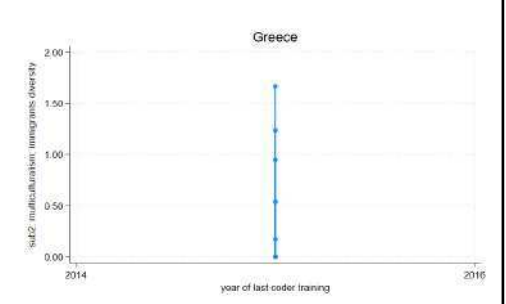
Graph CLIII



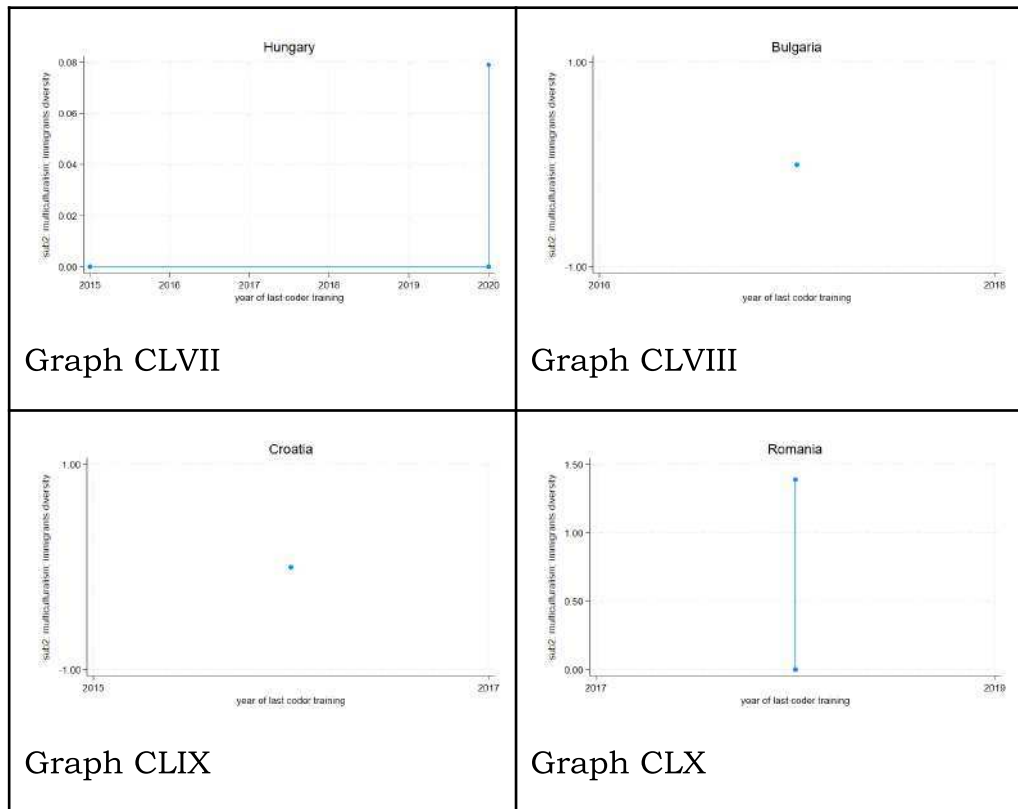
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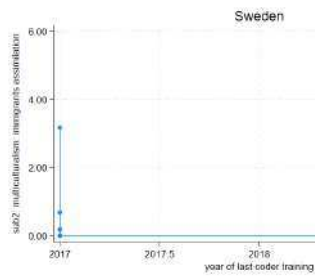
Graph CLVI



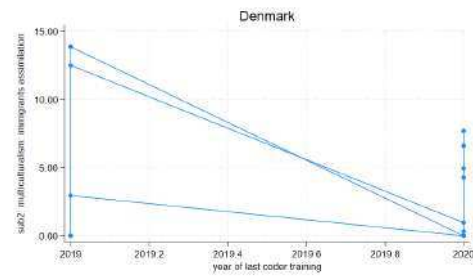
Source: Lehmann et al. (2024). Own work graphs generated by Stata command using The Manifesto Project Dataset.

When compared to the worst ranked countries, the best ranked countries registered a higher level of discourses in their party manifestos favouring the idea of celebrating the diversity of immigrants and promoting the acceptance of the differences present in the concept of multiculturalism. Once again the only exception is Luxembourg, which does not have available data for the period in this variable.

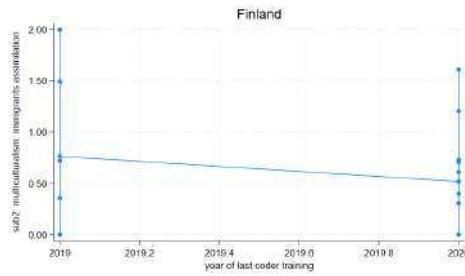
- 4) per608_2: Multiculturalism: Immigrants Assimilation. Calls for immigrants that are in the country to adopt the manifesto country's culture and fully assimilate. Reinforce integration. (Lehmann et al., 2024).



Graph CLXI



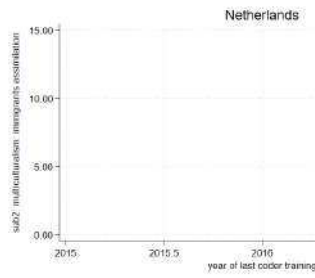
Graph CLXII



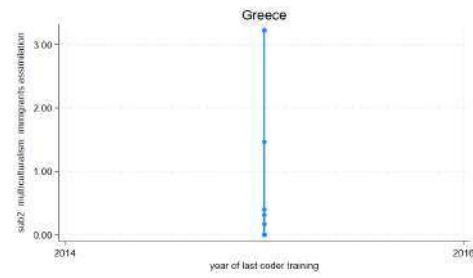
Graph CLXIII



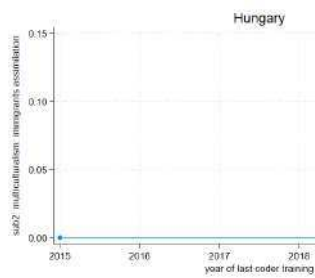
Graph CLXIV



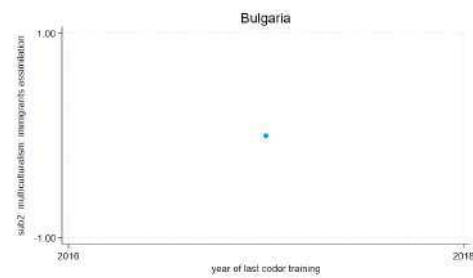
Graph CLXV



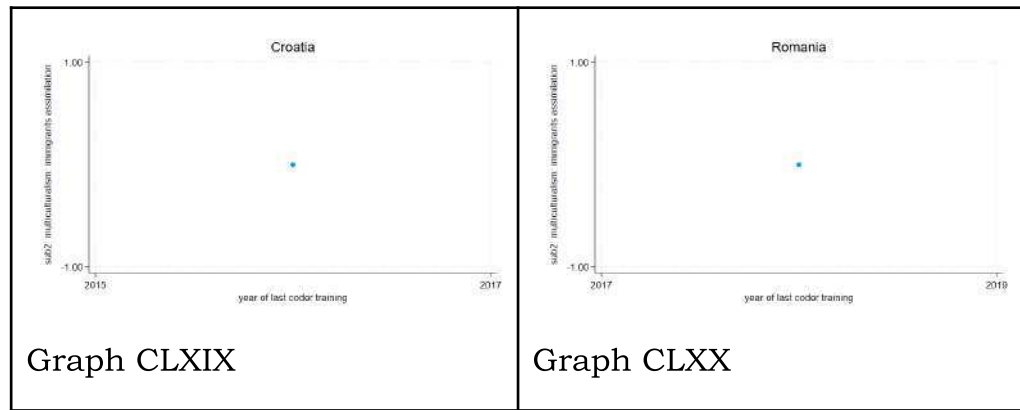
Graph CLXVI



Graph CLXVII



Graph CLXVIII



Source: Lehmann et al. (2024). Own work graphs generated by Stata command using The Manifesto Project Dataset.

Once more, when compared to the worst ranked countries, the best ranked countries registered a higher level of discourses in their party manifestos nurturing the idea of promoting the assimilation of immigrants and the necessity of their adjustment to the local compendium of norms, rejecting this way the concept of multiculturalism. Only Luxembourg presented an exception, because it does not have available data for the period in this variable.

3.3. Supranational and National features

When it comes to analysing the European Union related topics, the whole multi-level system must be taken into consideration. It is under this scope that this study aims to understand better the implications of attracting and retaining high-skilled workers in the European Union. In the next subchapters, this study delves first into the most important piece of public policy done at the European level towards the issue of attracting and retaining high-skilled workers from third-countries and secondly it delves into the same kind of policy efforts done at the national level. The objective is to verify also how these elements interact among them and influence each other.

The subchapter 3.3.1. will analyse the supranational features towards the recast of the Blue Card Directive, which was adopted in 2009 and it was a big failure to the Union. Due to the Migration Crisis of 2015 the EU faced a

necessity to review the aforementioned directive and after concluding the negotiations, a new Blue Card Directive is now in place but not yet well implemented to the fullest by all the Member States involved with it. In order to simplify for the reader, this study will refer to 2009 Blue Card Directive as BCD-1 and to 2021 Blue Card Directive as BCD-2.

In order to promote a better understanding of the national implications of BCD-1 and 2 and/or parallel local competing programs, this study proposes to take a closer look into the best practices promoted by the GTCI 2015-2020 best European average positioned country at subchapter 3.3.2. and also tries to identify the challenges faced by the GTCI 2015-2020 worst European average positioned country at subchapter 3.3.3.

3.3.1. European Union and the recast of the Blue Card Directive

Migration in many forms has been an important issue for years to be discussed by the European institutions with the aim to find solutions that encompass the protection of borders, the work conditions, the competitiveness of the European economy and the cultural, social and political tensions. The European Union migration flows encapsulates the third-country migrants, the internal migration across the Union and the emigration of its citizens to outside the Union.

The issue starts at the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, in its article 79, paragraph 1 when it establishes:

The Union shall develop a common immigration policy aimed at ensuring, at all stages, the efficient management of migration flows, fair treatment of third-country nationals residing legally in Member States, and the prevention of, and enhanced measures to combat, illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings. (EUR-Lex, 2016)

The 2015 European Migrant Crisis (also sometimes called Refugee Crisis or even Syrian Crisis) brought the issue of migration to the table of the leaders and the necessity of shaping new solutions to restrain its

developments. That was the changing point in order to start new debates on the matter of migration in Europe. Refugees and asylum seekers were arriving by the routes of the Mediterranean and the Balkans, each of them being used by different nationalities. The Mediterranean route was the one being used by a composition of different nationalities, mostly provenient from the African continent, while the Balkans route was being used the most by Syrians and Afghans. The reaction of Europe was first and foremost in discord, with heated debates and an East-West divide over the reception of refugees and their distribution within the continent (Wagner, 2015:2).

The European Agenda on Migration 2015-2020 established that a new policy on legal migration must be competing with other economies to attract workers with the skills needed by the Union and also that changes in the skills required by the EU between 2012 and 2025 were expected to increase the numbers in the share of jobs employing higher-educated labour. Nonetheless, the Union should keep an eye on addressing sensitive sectors facing shortages, the need to build up its own skills base, equip people for inclusion in today's labour market and also in addressing the long-term economic and demographic challenges based in the binomial interaction between the concepts of ageing population and the economy increasingly dependent on highly-skilled jobs. The European Agenda on Migration 2015-2020 was the changing point in order to put in practice a new policy.

Migration will increasingly be an important way to enhance the sustainability of our welfare system and to ensure sustainable growth of the EU economy. This is why, even if the case for legal migration will always be difficult at a time of high unemployment and social change, it is important to have in place a clear and rigorous common system, which reflects the EU interest, including by maintaining Europe as an attractive destination for migrants. (European Commission, 2015)

In January 2016, the organisation Médecins Sans Frontières released a report denouncing the European response to the so-called 2015 Refugee Crisis and saying that the policies of deterrence and chaotic response to the humanitarian needs of those who fled actively dramatically worsened the

conditions of refugees and migrants and created a “policy-made humanitarian crisis” (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016).

It may be a new year but we know that people will continue to risk their lives and no restrictive policy will stop them from seeking a better future for themselves and their families. We continue to call for a safe passage and urge Europe to stop playing with people’s lives and dignity (...).

This crisis is far from over and assistance remains completely insufficient in Italy, Greece and the Balkans (...). During 2015, European states tried to find policies to protect their borders from vulnerable people. We hope that in 2016 there will be no more need to protect these people from European policies. (Ponthieu apud Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016)

It was under this context that the European Parliament called for an ambitious and targeted revision of the Blue Card Directive in its Resolution on the situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration from 12 April 2016. The European Parliament recalled that in the Agenda on Migration from May 2015, the European Commission announced its intention to revise the Blue Card Directive on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of highly qualified employment, looking especially at the issues of scope (possibly covering entrepreneurs willing to invest in Europe) and improving the rules on intra-EU mobility (European Parliament, 2016).

On 7 June 2016, the European Commission addressed its proposal for a new directive to be discussed and negotiated by the European Parliament and the Council on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of highly skilled employment. In the extent that the Blue Card Directive from 2009 proved itself insufficient and ineffective, the proposal aimed to revise and reform it by revamping the existing rules and improving the ability of the Union to attract and retain highly skilled third-country nationals, since demographic patterns suggested that even with the more skilled European Union’s workforce the New Skills Agenda

aimed to develop, there will still be a need to attract additional talent in the future (European Commission, 2016).

A first trilogue took place on 11 February 2021 and the Parliament and the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union reached a provisional agreement on 17 May 2021 over a revision to the Blue Card Directive, with the objective to attract and retain highly qualified workers, especially in sectors that face skills shortages and established new rules for a more inclusive criteria, simplification of procedures, facilitation of intra-EU mobility, facilitation of family reunification and granting higher level of access to the labour market for legal migration. The provisional agreement was followed by the adoption by the Council of the new rules on 7 October 2021, generating the recast Blue Card Directive, which established the deadline for its implementation by 18 November 2023. Unfortunately, the announced deadline did not prevent some countries (e.g. Sweden and the Netherlands) from delaying the transposition and implementation of BCD-2, as well as the full recast efforts did not convince Denmark and Ireland to join the BCD-2 scheme.

Migration numbers in 2022 suggested that without migration flows, the European population would have shrunk by half a million in 2019, because 4.2 million children were born and 4.7 million people have died in the EU (European Commission, 2022). In 2020, the EU population shrunk by about 100 thousand people (from 447.3 million on 1 January 2020 to 447.2 million on 1 January 2021), due to a combination of less births, more deaths and less net migration (European Commission, 2022), but it is important to consider in the numbers, regarding especially 2020, the side effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

It is well known that the globalisation of the world economy linked to the growing boundaryless nature of the workforce and the reduction in immigration and emigration barriers to the movement of people have helped fuel a “war for talent” worldwide (Chambers et al. apud Chand & Tung, 2019). The European Union represents a big portion of the largest economies on the planet and while its population rates have been showing alarming data about its shortening in recent years, it is somehow even natural that its leaders consider a solution regarding how to attract and maintain migrants

with the right and needed competencies to keep the economy's engine running.

The aim of the European Union is to enhance productivity, keeping itself competitive in the global market and at this sake it is important to be aware about how skilled workers play an important role in what regards an industrialised economy and the developing of new technologies and knowledge in general. Many host countries have higher concentrations of skilled immigrants in particular occupations, as for example, immigrants account for some 57% of scientists in Switzerland, 45% in Australia, and 38% in the US, being also in the US 27% of all physicians/surgeons and over 35% of medical residents in 2010 (Kerr et al. apud Chand & Tung, 2019).

Moreover, the European Union has at its disposal the institutions that are the key players when it comes to developing and negotiating new policies that could generate benefits across the block, measuring the opportunities and challenges. It is in the scope of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission that relies on the discussions that lead to the decision making process and adoption. But, on the other hand, the transposition of European directives, as well as their success or failure relies massively on the national level and how national actors will decide to proceed to implement and to comply with it or if they will decide to put their efforts on already existing policies regarding the same issues on the national level.

Unfortunately, today Europe is not exactly one of the top destinations for high-skilled and talented workers and the new design for the Blue Card Directive is struggling to change the game, in the extent that the leaders are finally understanding that it is important also to create mechanisms to improve the tolerance towards newcomers, because in doing so more talent and skills will be attracted combined to other factors. To this extent, it is important to say that the notion of integration and inclusion needs to be improved and expanded, in the sense that the issue of integration is a shared responsibility and effort involving not just the migrants themselves, but also the Member States and their host societies.

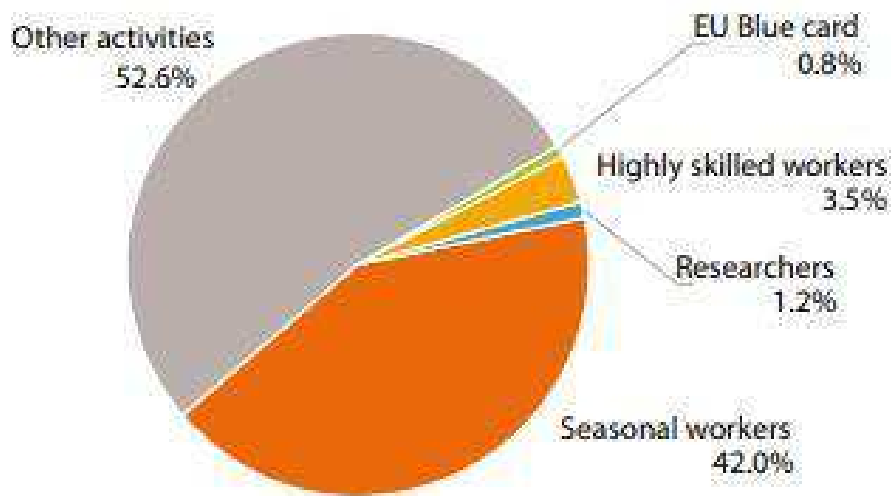
In recent years, Europe faced an increase in the far-right wing and consequently in the anti-immigration feelings, which is not just something being held by this ideological side of the political game, but according to Alonso and da Fonseca (2011) impacts also in the rising of the same political discourse being strategically positioned also by the left wing, in the extent that the Left, in order to become increasingly critical towards immigration as its mainstream and/or extreme right competitors, intensifies its populist rhetoric and being somehow perceived as tough on immigration is thus not a prerogative of just the Right. However, it is not possible to deny the need for migrants in order to maintain the development of the local and supranational economy, due to the shrinking of the European population in the last decades, as well as the need for a specialised workforce with the adequate human capital to keep the engine of the economy running and growing in consonance with its *Zeitgeist*.

Due to the shortening of the European population, which as stated before encompasses the lower levels of births and the ageing of the population, to attract migrants is an important issue as not just a demographic problem, but also an economic, social and political one into the European multilevel system.

Through Chart 3.1 it is possible to identify, based on Eurostat data, how ineffective the BCD-1 was, to the extent that the EU Blue Card represented just 0.8% of first residence permits issued for work reasons in the European Union and Norway in the year of 2020, while highly skilled workers represented just 3.5% apart from the EU Blue Card. The numbers speak for themselves, showing the inefficiency of a dedicated Directive that strived to achieve results on the ground, but did not represent a significant culture of change on European migration policies nor the increase in the preference of high-skilled workers in considering the EU as a whole over certain hotspot destinations. The changings proposed by BCD-2 are ambitious in the sense of trying to increase these numbers and transform the European Union into an attractive destination for high-skilled workers, by offering them simplified conditions to arrive and appealing advantages to stay.

Chart 3.1

First residence permits issued for work reasons, EU and Norway, 2020 (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2022.

Several changes in the recast contribute to making the EU more attractive as a destination of choice for migrant workers. They benefit the migrant interest and as such also serve employers' demand for talent. We highlight three specific measures: i) family reunification ii) intra-EU mobility and iii) access to long-term residence and circular migration. (de Lange & Vankova, 2022)

While the BCD-1 aimed to set out the entry and residence conditions, the BCD-2 expand its efforts by not just establishing the residence conditions, but also the rights of highly qualified third-country nationals and their families, determining for that a period of stay superior than three months in an European Union Member State and/or working in a Member State other than the one that first granted the EU Blue Card. Adding rights and encompassing families is a huge step and such a big improvement, in the measure that these are one of the strongest topics to be taken into consideration for high-skilled migrants while choosing destination and/or permanency.

Moreover, the BCD-2 is innovative by allowing the so-called high-skilled workers to be accompanied by their family members, who are

also entitled to the right to work in the Union, making it an interesting advantage in the extent that the family reunion will be immediate and it offers the possibility to increase the family income.

Undoubtedly, when the Commission proposed the review of BCD-1, it was due to the fact that it was concluded that BCD-1 had many intrinsic weaknesses and also due to the fact that it was not being applied consistently across the EU and one of the reasons is that many Member States have parallel rules and procedures competing for the same category of high-skilled workers, showing a considerable level of inefficiency through its fragmentation, while making it more difficult for the Union to attract and retain the talents and skills it may need. The Commission's proposal aimed to replace the Member States' parallel systems by unifying them under the scope of the reviewed version of BCD-1 with the objective of classifying the same groups as entitled for having a Blue Card issued.

One of the outcomes of the 2015 Migration Crisis that impacted directly on BCD-2 negotiations is the fact that beneficiaries of international protection will be now considered as a possibility to increase the numbers of high-skilled workers, as they are already present in the European territory, but were not entitled to have a Blue Card under BCD-1 rules, because their status was considered exclusionary.

BCD-2 is

(...) the first to bridge the divide between labour migration and asylum law in the EU context. It levels the legal position of highly qualified people arriving in Europe through regular migration and for the purpose of international protection. Even though this bridging is a positive step forward, the complexities of the legislative patchwork remain unresolved, as demonstrated by the Ukrainian refugee arrival and the triggering of the TPD. (de Lange & Vankova, 2022)

Moreover, BCD-2 demonstrates fairness and respect in regards to the lack of qualified workers in the profession concerned at the applicant's home country, converting this topic into a rejection rule for getting a Blue Card. But, on the other hand this topic might perhaps be perceived under an ambiguous scope of intentions, because it can be considered as both an

attempt to help lower economies to stay competitive, but also as an attempt to refrain migrants coming from certain regions.

While not even the approval of the BCD-2 stopped the necessity for improvements regarding attracting and retaining high-skilled and talented workers, the institutions kept on searching for solutions that continually lead to fragmented policies. The issue mentioned in the previous paragraph, was already present in the debates ran by the Parliament on the Commission's proposal for Attracting skills and talent to the EU, particularly the Talent Partnerships with North African countries held in June 2022 and which surprisingly placed together on the same side Identity and Democracy (ID) - a far-right political group composed by nationalists, populists and eurosceptics - and Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) - a centre-left party group of the Party of the European Socialists, composed by mostly social-democrats. It was a debate that had antagonic political forces inside the Parliament converging among themselves in such a sensitive matter.

Alfred Sant (S&D) defended the idea that the regulation must be grounded as well in human and social values, related to the recipient economies but equally to the situation of individual migrants and the societies they are leaving and he addressed the Parliament on risking promoting a model of development by which less advanced economies pump resources into educating doctors and nurses who after graduation leave their country to work in advanced economies, raising also the question if European migration policy should be promoting such a perverse cross-subsidisation (European Parliament, 2022). On the other hand, Philippe Olivier (ID), in his aim to refrain immigration from third-country nationals, kept sticking to the idea that the question of skills could be resolved through inter-European cooperation or through training, while raising the question about what are the ethics of taking away from emerging countries their lifeblood and their trained elites (European Parliament, 2022). One enlightens the social question, but the other one apparently could be perceived as hiding behind ethical questions to masquerade some level of anti-immigration sentiments.

The decision makers finally understood the importance of flexibilizing the admission conditions, like for example a lower salary threshold, a minimum duration for the initial contract which can be less than 6 months, simplifying the rules for recent graduates and workers in shortage occupations, equivalence between professional experience and formal qualifications, as well as broadening the rights also for self-employed activities. Intra-EU mobility is the ‘magical tool’ that the EU has to offer compared to national schemes, justifying harmonisation of the measures to attract and retain highly qualified migrants (de Lange & Vankova, 2022), but it is also something to keep an eye on monitoring it, because it can deepen the level of economic discrepancy and lack of cohesion between European Regions.

Even if BCD-2 makes a huge effort in the sense of trying to modernise the legislation, this rebranded version is not immune to convert itself in an example of what political scientists call ‘failing forward’, a next step in a continuous process failing to achieve the Commissions’ ambitions of harmonising EU migration law (de Lange & Vankova, 2022), but it is too soon to analyse the extension of its outcomes and will take some years until the researchers will be able to study its implementation impacts and economic policy dimension.

A certain dose of eurocentrism perhaps impedes some Europeans to perceive themselves at a vulnerable position and to this extent, migration is actually the Achilles’ heel of the European Union. Shrinking and ageing population, lower rates of births and the necessity of boosting the economy with high-skilled and talented workers coming from third-country nations are a real deal in today’s Europe. It is pointless to design the best policies in content, if they do not find support to be well implemented on the ground.

To achieve good level of support, the BCD-2 must work on a good marketing plan with the aim of showing its benefits not just to the migrants it wants to attract, but also to educate the employers and the civil society about issues like the vulnerability of European economy in face of the need for high-skilled workers on demand and also the issues towards the integration and inclusion processes of newcomers. It is important to raise awareness about the advantages of the BCD-2 for multiple actors involved,

like employers, civil society and in the target countries, because without knowledge about the topic it will be destined to fail again like BCD-1.

To this extent, it is also important to raise awareness about European own History regarding the fact that Europeans were massive migrants not too long ago and the growing economy did not end the process, just changed the numbers and the flows. European society needs to understand the prejudice that their own people suffered as migrants in other contexts and learn about how to not repeat the cycle of microaggressions against third-country migrants. Europe also faces its own brain drain process and by understanding itself as an emigrant continent, it can offer a different perspective towards the perception of its today's and tomorrow's immigrants.

European Union should pay attention to the distribution of migrants towards its regions, by developing a system of immigrant annual quotas organised by region, with the aim of helping increase the population of the shortened places that need the most and avoid the super concentration of immigrants in just a few big city centres, which leads to housing problems for them and for the local population, regarding availability of houses and raising of prices.

Bringing Trade Unions for the implementation process of BCD-2 will be crucial and can help directly in educating migrants about their rights and increase the control of labour conditions offered on the ground for them. Many times, migrants are easy targets for predator employers that take advantage of their vulnerability towards the understanding of the local system and its rules.

The need for talent across the Union is real and the recast BCD-2 demonstrates a huge step forward to tackle the shrinking population while boosting opportunities for both locals and newcomers. Its success will depend on the regional collaboration in order to promote cohesion at the local level, as well as to publicise the program abroad (at university fairs, for example) perhaps can represent a good strategy in order to sustain the basis for a so-called European melting pot that goes beyond the notion of "united in diversity" among its citizens, but also invites the newcomers to sit at the same table while their epistemologies are also respected and taken into consideration in this plural supranational context.

3.3.2. Sweden's good practices

As explained in the chapter concerning the methodology applied in this study, after analysing the GTCI from 2015 to 2020, Sweden emerged as the best average positioned European country in the period, configuring itself into the most attractive destination for high-skilled migrants within the EU. In order to better understand the Swedish good practices that might be in place and which made and/or make possible the good level of attractiveness in the country, it is important to take a closer look also into its immigration policies evolution across time.

Sweden has an immigration policy that changes from one period to another and which adjusts itself to the challenges present in specific periods. The adjustments are reflected the most in the level of liberalisation or restrictiveness towards welcoming newcomers to the country. In this sense, Sweden had adopted different measures to facilitate or to contain the entrance of immigrants.

According to Lemaître apud Awori (2019: 9), Sweden had a minimal number of foreigners not until the outbreak of the Second World War and because Sweden did not take part in the conflict, its economy stabilised progressively, its native citizens stopped emigrating from the country while Sweden turn itself into a destination point for immigrants, becoming a country suitable for global attraction of immigrants.

Awori (2019: 11-12) took account for at least five shifts in the Swedish immigration policy: 1890's (liberalised), 1914 (restrictive), 1954 (less restrictive), 1972 (restrictive) and 2008 (new liberalised). Sweden had no restrictions regarding visas, passports or the imposition of work permits until before World War I and it is probably as a matter of national security that the first shift occurred.

After 1914, reflecting the concerns towards the war, the country transformed its immigration policy into a very restrictive one and in order to get to work in Sweden a foreigner should get a work permit that was not easy to obtain. However, after a period, this policy again changed to a less

restrictive direction and with a collective effort together with other Nordic countries, it was established a common Nordic labour market in 1954, which turned Sweden into a more attractive destination (Awori, 2019: 11).

The easy access was again restricted in 1972 (Emilsson, Magnusson, Osanami Törngren & Bevelander apud Awori, 2019: 11) and then Sweden passed through a series of changes and adaptations at the institutional level, in order to comply with its membership at European Economic Area (EEA) in 1994 and European Union in 1995 (Awori, 2019:11) and it was in the spirit of a changing scenario that also new challenges at the Swedish labour market started to be addressed and required the design of a new policy.

It was just at the end of 2008 that Sweden came up with a brand new liberalised immigration law, after two years of internal negotiations. The country spent decades under a higher level of restrictiveness and before 2008, its labour market was only open to specific occupations linked to the fact of comproved labour shortages in the countries of origin. The 2008 shift elevated the level of the Swedish immigration policy towards the labour market to a more liberalised one, which also reflected the adjustments the country needed to comply with at the open market it was inserted. After several decades with a restrictive system in place, Sweden now has one of the most open labour migration systems in the world (Emilsson apud Awori, 2019: 11), which in parallel had a side-effect attracting more labour immigrants from non-EU countries.

The innovation of the new system consisted in the shift from being State-driven to become employer-driven, as Sweden gave employers the mandate to hire skilled workers from any country to fill up the vacant positions (Awori, 2019: 12). In this sense, it is not the State that decides the target concerning type of jobs or preferred nationalities, but the power of decision is ceded on the ground to those who deal directly with the labour migrants.

The 2008 law was a clear breach of an almost 40-year long period of state controlled labour migration. The biggest change was that the so-called labour market test was abolished. Now it is the employers, not state agencies and unions, who decide the need for labour and from which part of

the world they wish to recruit. There are no restrictions with regard to skills, occupational categories or sectors and there are no quantitative restrictions in the form of quotas.

(...)

A labour migrant basically enjoys the same rights as other residents when working and living in Sweden. Family members are entitled to accompany the employee from day one and they get a work permit regardless of whether they have a job offer when leaving their country of origin.

(...)

While the number of high-skilled workers have increased during the entire period, from 5,300 in 2009 to 7,600 in 2012, the low-skilled workers increased from 1,900 in 2009 to 4,900 in 2011, and then fell to about 3,300 in 2012. (Emilsson, 2014:135-136)

Demographic challenges of Swedish population and the differential employment trends between immigrants and native population has culminated in integration issues to be considered top priority on the Swedish political agenda (Dahlstedt & Bevelander apud Awori, 2019:12). In Sweden, the promotion of integration efforts is also something that changed across time just like the immigration policy itself. Nowadays, the Swedish cluster of integration policies is also considered as one of the most generous in place at the European level.

When it comes to integration policy, Sweden makes a collaborative effort between several ministries, giving specific functions to them while cooperating with each other in order to promote a more inclusive host society. Also, the municipalities take bigger responsibilities regarding integration, while the government is represented by the county administration who coordinates all integration works of the central government, agencies, municipalities and county councils (Lemaître; Ministry of Integration & Gender Equality apud Awori, 2019:13).

At the European level, Sweden is part of the EU Blue Card Network, but after the recast of BCD-2, Sweden has delayed its implementation. The procedures when applying for a work permit under the BCD rules are yet attached to the BCD-1 and waiting for updates. The applicant must prove that the salary, the working conditions and all other terms of his/her

employment are at least equal to persons already residing in the country (EU Blue Card Network [Sweden], 2024).

In order to issue an EU Blue Card, Sweden also sets employer obligations, that start with the work permit application linked to the creation of a formal offer of employment and just after the employer has completed the aforementioned offer, is that the third-country national is informed by email on how to proceed to submit an application for work permit. Also, the employer must advertise the position in Sweden and within EU/EEA and Switzerland for at least 10 working days (EU Blue Card Network [Sweden], 2024). Normally it has to be advertised at the European Job Mobility Portal (EURES), but there are no serious checks if an employer has made the job offer public within the European Union/European Economic Area and the announcement becomes just a formality this way, and an employer can choose to recruit from outside EU even if there are available unemployed workers within Sweden and EU (Quirico apud Emilsson, 2014: 135-136).

In order to comply with the rules for an EU Blue Card to be issued, the employer must offer equal or better terms of the contract than the ones provided under a Swedish collective agreement or that which is customary for the occupation or industry, taking probably into consideration the lack of networks migrants might have, Sweden also establishes that a relevant trade union must have been given the opportunity to express an opinion on the terms and conditions of the employment (EU Blue Card Network [Sweden], 2024), but it does not have the right of a veto.

Sweden has in place efforts towards the integration process of migrants being connected to learning the language and local civic traits, as for example the two-year introduction program that aims to facilitate the transition to the Swedish labour market, as well as vocational trainings and upgrading programs that are organised by public institutions and universities in order to guarantee that immigrants have the possibility to supplement the trainings and experiences acquired abroad, culminating to the match potential employers in the end of the trainings.

Another example of Swedish good practice regarding the integration process of migrants is the program that helps immigrants to convert their foreign credentials into Swedish equivalent ones, which can be considered a

measure of paving the way to integration through job market insertion. Also, it is important to highlight the Swedish efforts in putting in place anti-discrimination initiatives and its mentoring schemes as a measure of facilitating the networking for newcomers.

Keeping an eye in the needs emerging from the technological and innovation global trend, Sweden also established a good practice in what concerns to facilitate the requirements for occupations in the IT industry, because the overwhelming majority of the high-skilled migrants in the country are IT professionals who are recruited by large multinational companies in sectors that deal with great demand for skilled workers. In order to facilitate and speed the process for these professionals, Sweden abolished professional accreditation requirements for the occupations in the IT industry.

Sweden also took into consideration the intra-corporate transfers, by facilitating the process in large corporations that have been certified by the Migration Board and can go through the work permit application process faster, giving also the possibility to large companies to take advantage directly from the shift between State-driven and employer-driven immigration policy, because through their well established international reputation, they are able to use their own websites to advertise work opportunities and employees might get in touch with them directly or through their large network as pointed out by Emilsson (2014:139).

The web portal workinginsweden.se, which is considered as good practice by the OECD (2012), has been set up to advertise the possibilities for work and communicate the rules to potential labour migrants. It contains information in seven languages about the regulations and procedures of obtaining a work permit together with facts about living conditions in Sweden. The portal has a link to EURES, which is automatically updated with job ads from the Employment Service. The problem is that those job advertisements are not aimed at third country nationals. Most advertisements are published in Swedish with a Swedish audience in mind (interview with PES 1). Even if an employer finds a potential employee, there is still an issue of asymmetric information (Katz & Stark 1987). (Emilsson, 2014:138)

The Swedish latest discussion regarding the attraction of high-skilled migrants proposed by its Ministry of Justice (2024) is that highly skilled labour immigration must be promoted and an exemption from the wage requirement for recent graduates must be taken into consideration.

And last but not least, the civil society must also be taken into consideration when it comes to the Swedish good practices towards migration in general, because there are several integration projects in the country financed by the EU, but designed and implemented by civil society agents.

3.3.3. Romania's challenges

Romania joined the European Union not a long time ago and since 2007 the country continues trying to deepen its integration process into the European Union standards, while trying to overcome the implications that comes from its totalitarian past. In order to understand the struggles Romania may face regarding the attraction and retaining of high-skilled migrants under its condition as an EU Member State, it is important also to revisit the immigration policies that were in place before its democratisation.

Right after Romania ending its totalitarian regime, the country faced massive emigration flows and even nowadays, the emigration levels are still to be taken into consideration in the domestic policies, because the country is still orbiting more towards the emigration sphere than towards the immigration one. Apparently, from time to time, to attract their national citizens back reveals to be a more significant issue than operating in what concerns the immigration themes.

Matei et al. (2020: 433-434) in their comparative study from international migration policies in post-communist countries, verified that before 1990's Romania's national policies were focused in a rigorous control of emigration of its citizens and enforced severe repressive measures for those who violated the restrictions, being such policies in place with the aim

to avoid mass emigration of citizens while pursuing at the same time to ensure a strict control of those entering the country.

Although freedom of movement was strictly limited, economic shortages and oppressive political regimes in Eastern European countries led to the development of illegal emigration networks. Unlike Western European states, Romania and Poland had insignificant inflows of foreigners before 1990, covered mainly by ethnic migrants (Anghel et al., 2016). A new migration phase began with the European Agreements, establishing an association between the European Communities and their Member States. Their main objective was to provide a framework for gradual integration into the European Community of the two acceding countries. (Matei et al., 2020: 433-434)

After becoming an EU Member State in 2007, in a first moment Romania had to concentrate its efforts regarding the migration policy on fighting irregular immigration, better external border management, a standard European asylum policy, and the development of channels for regular migration (Matei et al., 2020: 437-438). It was a natural process of adapting and adjusting its local rules and body of Laws to the EU legislation standards.

The immigration profile of Romania remained unchanged in the EU post-accession period, being characterised mainly by low-skilled foreign workers, whose number was slowly increasing year by year (Matei et al., 2020: 438). Unfortunately, right after its accession to EU, Romania had to face situations in which the History of mankind itself deepens its difficulties towards tackling the issue of balancing emigration and immigration, as well as attracting talent to the country. The 2008 economic crisis followed the Romanian accession to EU, which also contributed to the emigration flows continuing to be high and after trying to set new strategies for immigration in 2011, 2015 and 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic struck the world leading to a period of more or less two years of parallel implications in the sector.

The Romanian Government adopted several National and Strategies for Immigration in 2011, 2015 and 2019. The

main objective of the Romanian authorities was to maximise the positive effects and limit the adverse effects of immigration. Romania's efforts in the field of immigration were concentrated on four policy pillars: control of immigration policy, policy on preventing and fighting irregular immigration, the asylum policy and the policy on social integration of foreigners. The Romanian legislative measures included no derogation from the general regime by country of origin or category of migrants. (Matei et al., 2020: 438-439)

Return migration is from time to time an object of interest of Romanian authorities. The level of interest in designing policies dedicated to incentivising their citizens to return to the country tend to follow the variation on the economic sphere.

The recruitment of foreign workers has been regulated according to the EU provisions which requests a labour market test before the employment of foreign workers. In addition to this test, Romania introduced a quotas system. In a different approach, Poland has implemented a simplified procedure for workers in such sectors as agriculture, construction, industrial processing and transport. No such program has been implemented in Romania. The more liberal migration policy and the increased labour market shortages led to an increased number of foreigners in Poland, while Romania's attractiveness remained relatively low. (Matei et al., 2020: 443)

Regarding the recast of EU Blue Card Directive, Romania has already implemented laws with the ambition to flexibilize the EU Blue Card, even though the country did not respect the deadline for this implementation, stretching it for about almost four months. The Romanian revision of its EU Blue Card perpass three important factors: validity for up to three years; eligibility based on professional experience alone; and relaxed family reunification eligibility, business activity rules, and employment contract duration requirements (Fragomen, 2024). The proposed changes configure an attempt to increase the attractiveness of Romania for high-skilled workers from third countries and reduce talent management challenges for employers (Fragomen, 2024).

Nonetheless, the EU Blue Card acquisition in Romania still faces some considerable level of bureaucracy, while to live and work in Romania as a highly-skilled migrant, first it is the employer that must obtain a work authorisation specifically for highly-qualified workers on the behalf of the applicant, who must hold an university or college diploma from an educational programme that lasted three years or more or alternatively, the applicant must be able to prove his/her qualifications by showing relevant professional experience (EU Blue Card Network [Romania], 2024).

Romania is still in the process of Europeanization and to change its status from an emigrant country to a more attractive destination for high-qualified migrants will naturally take time. The efforts are in place and they need to be assessed from time to time and maybe adjusted. The process of change is not an automatic one. The change in the Romanian case does not concern just the shift from the culture of emigration to the culture of immigration, but the shift of the whole country to be more cohesive within the Union.

4. TESTING HYPOTHESIS IN TWO LEVELS

This study worked towards a mixed approach that encapsulated both the quantitative and the qualitative approach in order to seek answers to its hypothesis and achieve an expanded understanding of what may work better or not when it comes to the issue of attracting and retaining high-skilled migrant workers.

In the following sections, the results presented in the previous chapter are going to be analysed first under their own approaches. Because of that, this study refers to the analysis as hypothesis test in two levels (eg. quantitative and qualitative). After analysing both levels, this study will finally promote an intersection between the quantitative and qualitative results, aiming for a more holistic configuration of this research.

4.1. Quantitative findings

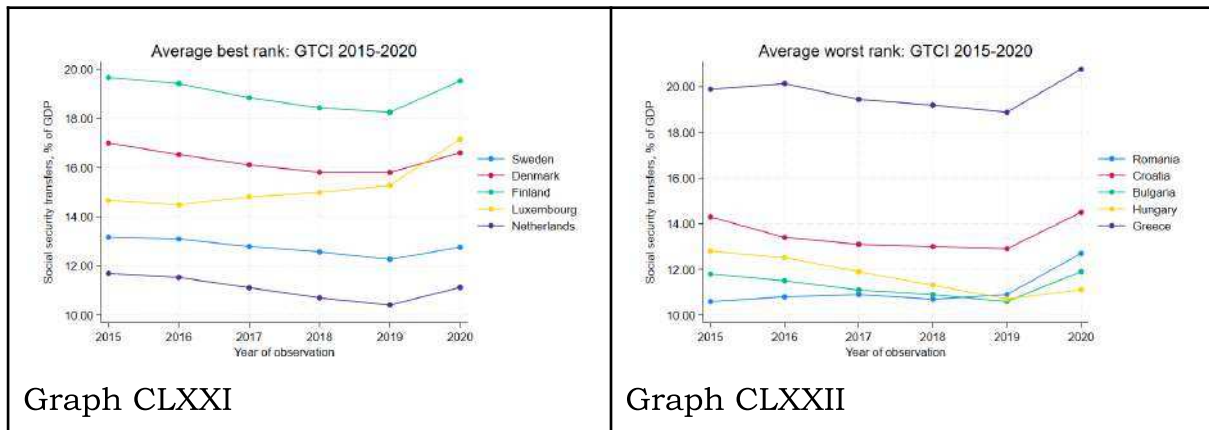
After going through the analysis of 17 quantitative variables and 170 graphs concerning 10 different countries in the chapter “Empirical Analysis”, in order to offer the reader a better visualisation on the results, new graphs will be explored in this section that will be presented in pairs concerning the aforementioned variables. The paired graphs present themselves as a summary of the 2015-2020 GTCI best and worst average countries.

Taking into consideration that among the 13 variables presented in the subchapter “Linking Public and mandatory expenditure on social policies”, 11 of them were connected to the variable number 2 (socexp_t_pmp), being all of them part of that variable, it was then decided to present in this section just the total results, in other words, instead of going into the results of variables 3 to 13, we are going to focus on the results of variables number 1 and 2, because variable number 2 contains the variables 3 to 13 in its results.

It is important to elucidate that by presenting just the variable socexp_t_pmp instead of the other 11 related variables, the research does not lose its core, just proposes a visual simplification and tries to not repeat itself exhaustively.

At the first level, the four hypothesis were tested according to the quantitative findings as follows:

- 1) sstran: Social security transfers as a percentage of GDP. Social assistance grants and welfare benefits paid by general government (benefits for sickness, old-age, family allowances, etc.) (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 29).



Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

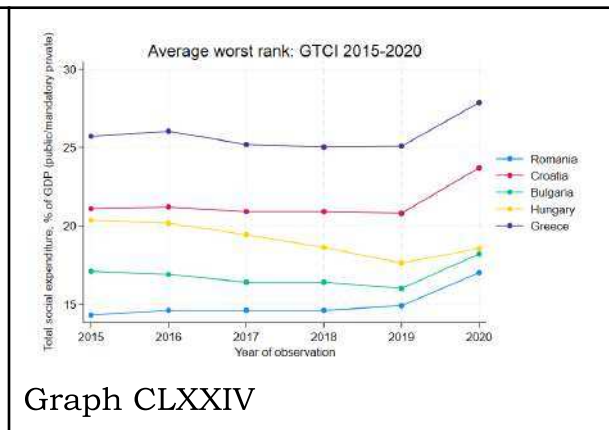
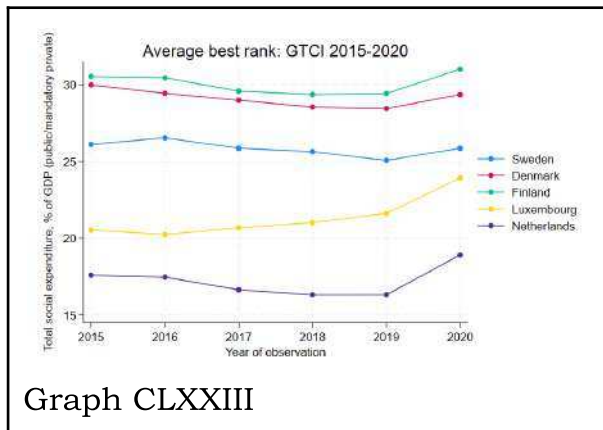
The data related to the best and worst 2015-2020 GTCI average countries shows that the best countries presented a similar behaviour in the period, by decreasing the level of investments and then increasing it from 2019 on (as well as the worst countries), being the only exception Luxembourg that presented an increasing in its investments from 2016 on.

There was a difference identified between the best and worst countries, because through the data it is possible to observe that the best countries presented a higher level of investments when compared to the worst countries, with Greece being an interesting exception.

It is worth mentioning that the sudden increase in the level of investments in the social security transfer as a percentage of the GDP coincides with the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis.

The collected and analysed data in the variable *sstran* sustains H1 and rejects H2.

- 2) *socexp_t_pmp*: Total public and mandatory private social expenditure as a percentage of GDP (OECD apud Armingeon et al., 2023: 30).



Source: Armingeon et al., 2023. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2021.

The data related to the best and worst 2015-2020 GTCI average countries shows that the best countries presented a similar behaviour in the period, by decreasing the level of investments and then increasing it from 2019 on (as well as the worst countries), being the only exception Luxembourg that presented an increasing in its investments from 2016 on.

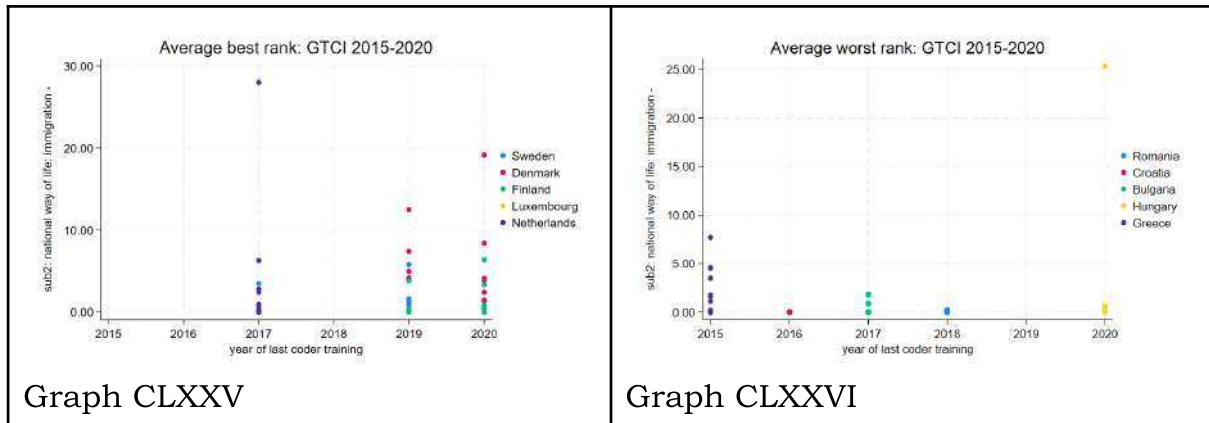
There was a difference identified between the best and worst countries, because through the data it is possible to observe that the best countries presented a higher level of investments when compared to the worst countries. Four out of five best countries present more than 20% of GDP invested in total public and mandatory private social expenditure.

It is worth mentioning that the sudden increase in the total level of investments in the public and mandatory private social expenditure as a percentage of the GDP coincides with the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis.

The collected and analysed data in the variable socexp_t_pmp sustains H1 and rejects H2, but it is important to mention that while delving into the related variables, some of them did not present data registered during some periods, allegedly from 2019 to 2020.

- 3) per601_2: National Way of Life: Immigration: Negative. Statement advocating the restriction of the process of immigration, i.e. accepting new immigrants. Might include statements regarding: immigration being a threat to the national character of the manifesto country; and ‘the boat is full’ argument. The introduction of migration quotas,

including restricting immigration from specific countries or regions etc. (Lehmann et al., 2024).

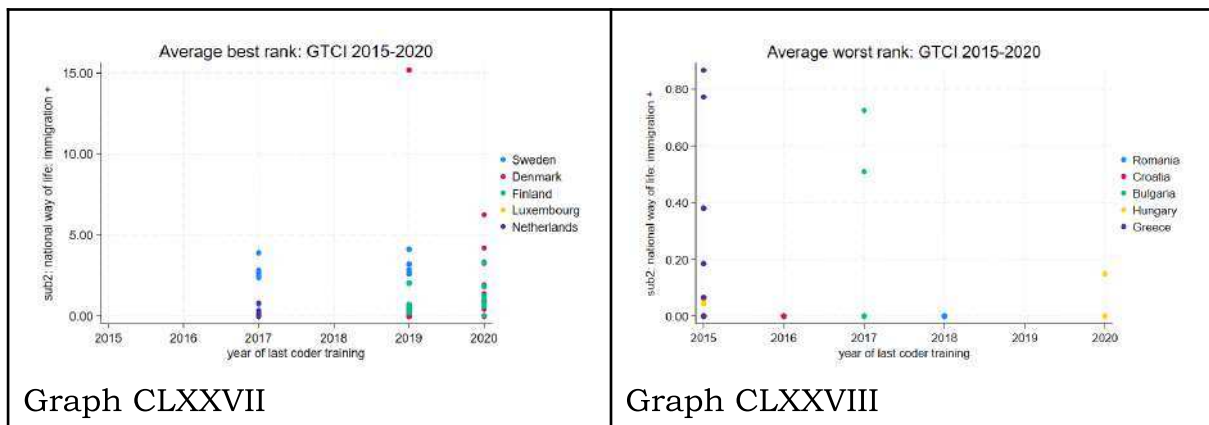


Source: Lehmann et al., 2024. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using The Manifesto Project Dataset.

It became evident that there is a difference between the best and worst average countries in what concerns the presence of a negative discourse towards immigration in their party manifestos, but surprisingly the higher concentration of negative discourses was identified among the best countries.

The findings regarding the variable per601_2 rejects H4.

- 4) per602_2: National Way of Life: Immigration: Positive. Statements favouring new immigrants; against restrictions and quotas; and rejection of the 'boat is full' argument. Includes allowing new immigrants for the benefit of the manifesto country's economy. (Lehmann et al., 2024).

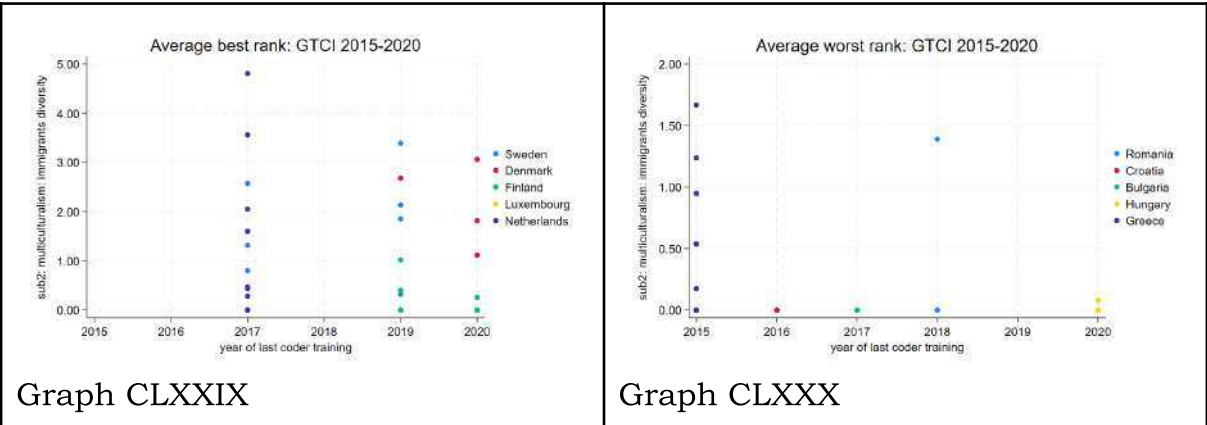


Source: Lehmann et al., 2024. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using The Manifesto Project Dataset.

The analysis identified a difference between the best and worst average countries in what concerns the presence of a positive discourse towards immigration in their party manifestos, being the higher concentration of positive discourses identified also among the best countries.

The findings regarding the variable per602_2 confirms H3.

5) per607_2: Multiculturalism: Immigrants Diversity. Statements favouring the idea that immigrants keep their cultural traits; voluntary integration; and state providing opportunities to integrate. (Lehmann et al., 2024).

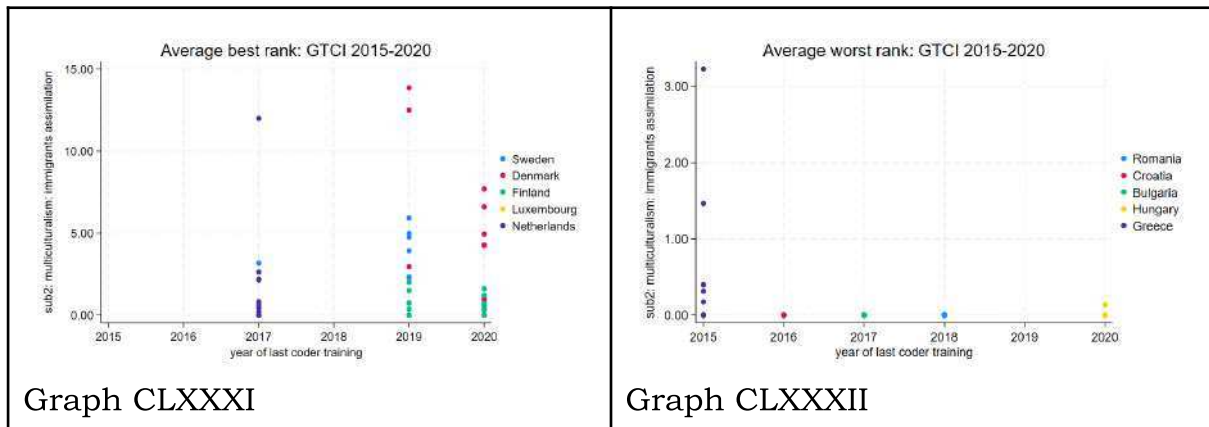


Source: Lehmann et al., 2024. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using The Manifesto Project Dataset.

The higher concentration of a positive discourse concerning the favouring of immigrant diversity was identified among the best countries, which demonstrates once more a difference when compared to the worst countries.

The findings regarding the variable per607_2 confirms H3.

6) Per608_2: Multiculturalism: Immigrants Assimilation. Calls for immigrants that are in the country to adopt the manifesto country’s culture and fully assimilate. Reinforce integration. (Lehmann et al., 2024).



Source: Lehmann et al., 2024. Own work graphs generated by Stata command using The Manifesto Project Dataset.

The higher concentration of a negative discourse concerning the calls for immigrant assimilations was identified among also the best countries, which demonstrates once more a difference when compared to the worst countries.

The findings regarding the variable `per607_2` reject H4.

4.2. Qualitative findings

Following the testing of the four hypotheses in the first level, this study aims to broaden the discussion by analysing the migration policies in place at the European and national level in regards the attraction and retaining of high-skilled migrants. Even if at the first level of testing the hypothesis it already provided very concrete results, it is at the second level of analysis that we will be able to identify the tools that are in place when it comes to high-skilled migrants policy design. The second level of analysis will pave the way to the intersection of the results in the next section.

At the European level, it was identified the existence of a dedicated policy that aims to specifically attract and retain high-skilled migrants by flexibilizing the rules for entrance, the mobility and permanency in the Union for high-skilled third-country nationals. The policy in place is the EU Blue Card Directive, which was released in 2009 and recast in 2022 due to its failing in transposition and implementation at the national level.

Despite these good intentions, however, delayed or inconsistent national implementation that risks fragmenting the regulatory landscape could undermine the original vision of a Europe that offers unified and EU-wide skilled labour immigration options. This could ultimately harm the continent's status as a preferred destination for highly skilled labour. (Antoons et al., 2024)

The EU Blue Card scheme brings several key principles at the disposal of the Member States that were designed to amplify and consolidate the status of Europe as a top destination for high-skilled labour. The BCD-2 facilitates the mobility within the EU and tries to make possible that over time, EU Blue Card holders can acquire certain rights to move to, and work in other EU countries, which means that migrants eventually could have access to the entire EU labour market and they are not restrained to working in only the Member State that issued is EU Blue Card (Antoons et al., 2024).

The recast BCD-2 tried to offer a more holistic view of the migrants' issues in order to design a more suitable solution that makes possible to the cardholders to enjoy equivalent rights to the citizens regarding working conditions, education, qualification recognition, social security (including unemployment benefits) and freedom of association in the host Member State, while also favouring the conditions for family reunification, as well as long-term residency rights in the EU (Antoons et al., 2024). Another important fact is the effort at the European level to flexibilize the conditions to those high-skilled migrants who do not have a diploma, but instead of that present a relevant professional experience.

Taking a closer look at the national level, this study proposed to analyse the 2015-2020 GTCI best and worst average positioned countries in what concerns the attraction and retaining of high-skilled migrants. It was possible to observe profound differences between the way that these policies were shaped across time in Sweden and Romania.

Both countries presented variation in their immigration policies concerning the level of how liberal or restrictive they were according to certain periods and reflecting the direct influence of historical phenomena in

their policy design. Despite the differences, Sweden and Romania presented a higher level of liberalisation towards their immigration policies after joining the EU.

While Sweden has several good practices to offer, Romania keeps struggling orbiting its challenges. There is a huge economic gap between the two countries and Romania is not completely Europeanised yet and presents the need to be more cohesive in the next few years. Also, while Sweden attracts and retains global talent, Romania keeps losing its own citizens for emigration.

What might be clear in this study is that Romania eventually will improve its indicators, but it came to the spotlight that in Sweden apparently the changing point to increase the number of high-skilled migrants was the decision of the Government to promote a shift from a State-driven migration policy to an employer-driven one. When comparing the Swedish model to the Romanian one, the collected data suggests that, despite all other prerogatives faced by Romania that may not contribute to increasing its level of attractiveness of high-qualified workers from non-EU countries, the country went in the opposite direction of what the Swedish good practices suggested. While Sweden achieved a considerable improvement in its level of attractiveness by decentralising the recruitment of migrant workers and giving the possibility to the employers to proceed directly according to their needs in an easier and faster way, on the other hand Romania implemented a quota system that does not contribute to simplify the procedures.

Also, it is important to elucidate that Sweden possesses a better level of expertise in what regards the implementation of integration policies and initiatives when compared to Romania and it is natural that the data suggests that, because Sweden has a major immigrant population in comparison to Romania, that configures itself yet as an emigrant country.

In what concerns complementing the testing of the four hypotheses at the second level, the data suggests that as in the previous section, H1 and H3 are confirmed, while H2 is rejected. Nonetheless, the data suggests another complementary tendency to H4 that will be explored better in the next section.

4.3. Intersection of results

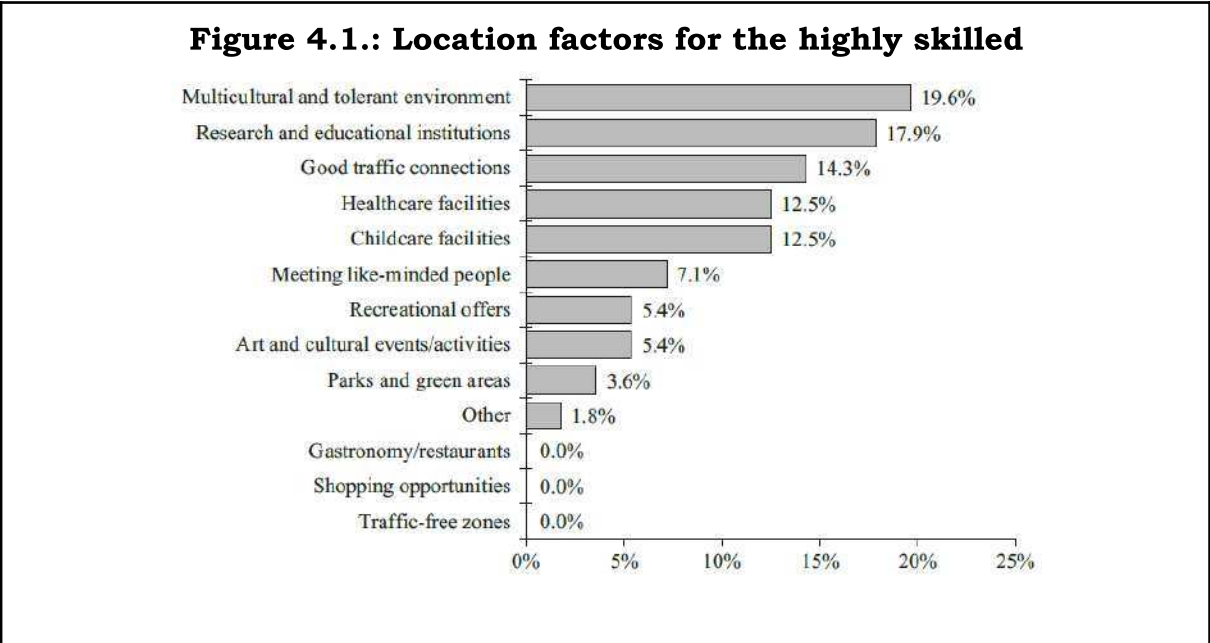
The quantitative and qualitative findings converge to each other and complement one another, as demonstrated in the previous sections. The quantitative data is assertive in confirming H1 and H3 while rejecting H2 and H4. On the other hand the qualitative findings offer a more tangible resource connected to the quantitative one.

The H1 concerns the good level of public and mandatory expenditure in social areas as a determinant factor to attract high-skilled migrants, while H3 regards the presence of a more positive discourse towards immigration and welfare in party manifestos showing a tendency to attract a better level of high-skilled migrants. The confirmation of both hypotheses in the first level can also be sustained as a complementation at the second level if all the EU efforts to recast the Blue Card Directive and promote a more welcoming Union to non-EU nationals are taken into consideration; and Sweden implementing a more welcoming policy already during the BCD-1 period and promoting the integration of migrants while achieving the better level of attractiveness in Union. Those efforts are intrinsically correlated with the premises of H1 and H3.

On the other hand, H2 and H4 being rejected in the first level can also rely on a complementation at the second level if we think about the struggles faced by Romania to implement the policy to the fullest and to promote integration towards its migrants. Then, H2 once more will show that in fact the good level of public and mandatory expenditure in social areas will matter as confirmed by H1. The H4 claimed assimilation and a negative discourse towards immigrants as a factor linked to the lower level of attractiveness of high-skilled migrants, which can be linked indirectly to the lower level of integration policies and/or initiatives in place in Romania and their efforts from time to time in concentrating their efforts in attracting their own citizens back to the country. This way, the complement the second level offers to H4 is contradictory, because it goes in the opposite direction, as Romania shows the outputs and outcomes of a negative approach towards migration, which if it was directly linked to a party manifesto could

confirm H4. However, as it is not, it will be considered just a complementary information, but that does not offer a robust reference to be taken into consideration as a factor of rejection or confirmation to the aforementioned hypothesis.

What emerges from this study is the notion that when the high-skilled migrant chooses the host location, it is not just the economic factor that will be taken into consideration, but also the subjective factors also, as demonstrated in Figure 4.1.:



Source: Kofler et al, 2020: 65

Notably, the strengths identified during this research concern the possibility of offering new and/or complementing insights for policy makers, which may represent an opportunity to guarantee the highest level of success in the implementation of the BCD-2. On the other hand, the lack of data for some countries in the analysed variables represented a weak point in this research, limiting the findings. Nevertheless, even after identifying the weakness in this study, it is important to clarify that this work achieved significant results that may contribute to the current discussion of the topic by offering a point of view that puts the migrant and the native in the same level in order to build bridges between them and respect their individualities.

The respect for multicultural diversity matters and the access to the welfare system also matters (even if at the first moment they are not entitled

to it). The efforts done at the European level in order to promote the attraction and retaining of the high-skilled migrants will work better this time if the stakeholders on the ground also engage themselves in shaping better practices to transposition, implementation and continuous assessment of the recast BCD-2, while promoting intersections between the host society and the newcomers for a better understanding between them at the societal level.

Conclusion

The changing point in order to have the debate that culminated in the review of the Blue Card Directive was the 2015 Migration Crisis, as well as the European Agenda on Migration 2015-2020 was the changing point in order to put in practice this new policy. The recast of the Blue Card Directive shows a huge step to promote multiculturalism across Europe and to maintain its economic development and respective indicators rising in a sustainable manner. The adopted changings can be implemented with success, but achieving good results from the outcomes will be a big challenge, because it will depend also on the transposition at national level in the Member States.

Through paying attention to speed both bureaucratic procedures and family reunion is a positive change in the game and it has the potential to increase the attractiveness of Europe as a destination for high-skilled and talented migrants. Nonetheless, if the European Union does not put forward an effective action plan on how to educate its population towards multiculturalism and how to educate migrants about the cultural context they are being inserted in, this policy is doomed to repeat its failure. But again, the European Union depends on the Member States to implement innovative policies on the ground and from one country to another, the level of cohesion is not good enough.

It is important to keep the dialogue open with employers, civil society and migrants, because they all represent sides of the same coin. The way the BCD-2 was shaped can lead to advantages like increasing the number of

attractions of skills and talent, but also it can lead to disadvantages like rising social tensions on the ground if it does not promote the feeling of EU belonging for both its citizens and its immigrants. Cultural features must be taken into consideration.

High-skilled migrants can create optimal connections in their countries of origin to global sources of knowledge, capital, and goods and this is further enhanced by the reality that a growing number of emigrants now return home with higher social and human capital levels and/or create dual beachheads of business in both their countries of origin and countries of residency (Chand & Tung, 2019), presenting a new perspective where well-integrated immigrants can play important roles in boundary spanning across borders and connecting disparate elements of the global value chain (Schotter et al.; Mudambi apud Chand & Tung, 2019).

In order to achieve a good level of success after its full implementation, the BCD-2 must increase the European economy, while also promoting innovation. The Directive primarily focuses on attracting and retaining talented professionals to contribute to the European labour market and it may have its economic policy dimensions associated also with the contribution to economic growth and higher level of competitiveness. By flourishing an economic scenario that includes fostering innovation by bringing in professionals with specialised skills and expertise it can enhance the overall economic environment.

Simplified and efficient processes for entry and residence can encourage professionals to choose the EU as their destination, contributing to a more dynamic and responsive labour market and retaining skilled workers is a key in the economic policy dimension. Future economic policies derived from BCD-2 may include measures to promote social integration, as a well-integrated workforce can contribute more effectively to the economy in general and the BCD-2 may be part of broader economic policies aimed at addressing demographic imbalances by bringing in a skilled workforce to support economic growth and maintain social welfare systems.

The success of BCD-2 can be paradoxically related to the creation of a new phenomenon related to revisited concepts of colonialism and imperialism in the XXI century, but at the moment this represents more of a

speculation than a fact and it needs to be observed closely in the next decades, in order to prevent Eurocentric dynamics that perpetrate prejudice and exploitation. In this sense, observers will be keen to see if and how the new Blue Card affects migration patterns both into and across the EU (Antoons et al., 2024).

After running quantitative tests regarding the four proposed hypothesis, the data suggested a confirmation of the hypothesis number 1 and 3, which means that the level of high-skilled migrants' attractiveness is related to a good level of public and mandatory expenditure in social areas (even if these investments are not being directed specifically at them), as well as, the presence of a more positive discourse towards immigration and welfare in the countries' party manifestos.

On the other hand, data suggested the rejection of hypothesis number 2 and 4, which means that the good level of public and mandatory expenditure in social areas (even if these investments are not being directed specifically at them) impact directly in the level of attractiveness, as well as, the presence of a more negative discourse towards immigration and welfare in the countries' party manifestos does not decrease the level of attractiveness. However, it is important to observe that regarding the positive and/or negative discourses concerning immigration, the bigger factor on the matter is just the presence of a discourse encompassing the theme of immigration, because as explained along the research, adopting a more severe discourse about immigration is a populist tool from both the Right and the Left.

The answer for the proposed research question about what European countries can do to improve their level of attracting and retaining high-skilled migrants from third-countries is designing decolonised and liberalised immigration policies, increasing the investments in social areas, promoting tolerance for both newcomers and host society and learning from the good practices already in place. It is important also to provide continuous assessments on the ground.

The outcome of this holistic study suggests that the more liberalised an immigration policy is from the State, the more effective it is. The comparative cases of Sweden and Romania, offers an outline that indicates a

tendency of Romania to keep left behind once more. Apparently, the more bureaucratic and State-driven an immigration policy is, the chances for failure will be drastically increased and this is the kind of relevant and practical result that emerges from this research and may also add a holistic and critical perspective to the already existing researches in the field.

The limitation of this study resides on the fact that being the recast EU Blue Card Directive not even implemented yet by all countries, as it is something brand new, it does not offer the possibility of collecting robust data to be analysed. Also, as the system is splitted into several national policies, it creates difficulties in analysing the Directive on the ground as a whole.

Further research must explore the outcomes of BCD-2 full implementation in the years to come, paying attention to the social aspects of integration on both sides (newcomers and host society), as well as gender-based and race-biassed dynamics and perhaps a comparative study between BCD-2 and second level migration return in Italy, Luxembourg and Germany. The concept of second level migration return is introduced in the conclusion of this research and is defined by the situation in which a person has the citizenship of a second country recognised by the principle of *jus sanguinis* and decides to migrate and establish his/her residency in the country in which he/she has his/her ancestry recognised in the form of citizenship. Also, further research must investigate the implications of Covid-19 pandemic crisis related to the attraction of high-skilled migrants under the BCD scheme.

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Charts

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List of Tables and Figures

- Figure 4.1.: page 110

- Table 3.1.: page 49

- Table 3.2.: page 49

Annexes

Annex I

GLOBAL TALENT COMPETITIVENESS INDEX ANALYSIS: 2015-2020														
2015-2016			2017			2018			2019			2020		
COUNTRY	GTCI RANK	POINTS	COUNTRY	GTCI RANK	POINTS	COUNTRY	GTCI RANK	POINTS	COUNTRY	GTCI RANK	POINTS	COUNTRY	GTCI RANK	POINTS
Luxembourg	3	5	Sweden	5	5	Denmark	5	5	Sweden	4	5	Sweden	4	5
Denmark	5	4	Luxembourg	7	4	Finland	8	4	Finland	6	4	Denmark	5	4
Sweden	6	3	Denmark	8	3	Denmark	7	3	Sweden	7	3	Netherlands	6	3
Finland	10	2	Finland	9	2	Netherlands	9	2	Netherlands	8	2	Finland	7	2
Netherlands	12	1	Netherlands	11	1	Luxembourg	10	1	Luxembourg	10	1	Luxembourg	8	1
Ibly	41	1	Hungary	41	1	Greece	42	1	Greece	44	1	Greece	47	1
Croatia	43	2	Greece	43	2	Bulgaria	47	2	Hungary	53	2	Hungary	52	2
Bulgaria	44	3	Croatia	45	3	Croatia	48	3	Bulgaria	54	3	Bulgaria	55	3
Greece	49	4	Bulgaria	49	4	Hungary	52	4	Croatia	55	4	Croatia	59	4
Romania	52	5	Romania	55	5	Romania	64	5	Romania	69	5	Romania	64	5
ALL COUNTRIES	TOTAL POINTS	AMONG THE 5 GTCI BEST OR WORST POSITIONED, 2015-2020	GENERAL INDEX	AVERAGE RANK		GTCI BEST POSITIONED COUNTRIES 2015-2020	AVERAGE RANK		GTCI WORST POSITIONED COUNTRIES 2015-2020	AVERAGE RANK				
Luxembourg	12	5	2.4	4		Sweden	1		Romania	1				
Denmark	19	5	3.0	2		Denmark	2		Croatia	2				
Sweden	21	5	4.2	1		Finland	3		Bulgaria	3				
Finland	14	5	2.8	3		Luxembourg	4		Hungary	4				
Netherlands	9	5	1.8	5		Netherlands	5		Greece	5				
Ibly	1	1	1	6					Hungary	6				
Croatia	18	5	3.2	2										
Bulgaria	15	5	3	3										
Greece	9	5	1.8	5										
Romania	25	5	5	1										
Hungary	9	4	2.25	4										