

The role of demographic policies in the internationalization of Romanian higher education

Law 247/2018 and its impact on internationalization efforts in Romanian universities.

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*My milkshake brings all the
boys to the yard
And they're like, it's better
than yours*

Kelis, 2004

Key points

1. National and European background.
2. Content of Law 247/2018 and differences to prior legislation.
3. Current admission and visa issuing practices.
4. Reflection in practices by universities and immigration authorities.

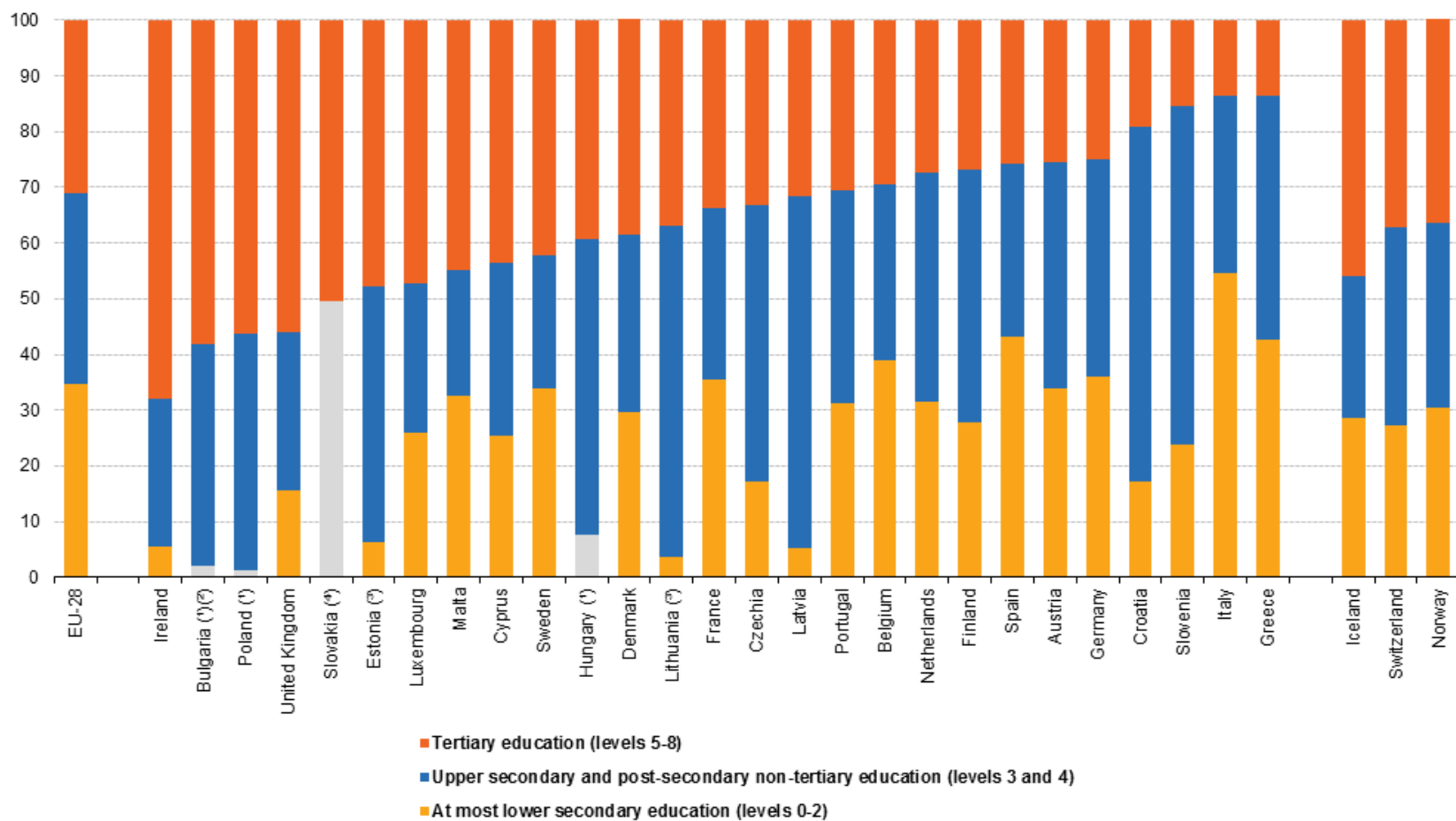
Background

- Amid deepening demographic problems, most European countries struggle to attract highly skilled/educated immigrants.
- Gaps between non-EU migrants and non-migrant populations persist in employment, initial educational attainment and learning outcomes. PISA for example show large gaps.
- Internationalization as `low hanging fruit` in immigration recruitment drives.
- Numerous advantages include initial integration, contact with employers, high levels of education, etc.
- Job-seeking visa extensions increasingly common, often with a duration of 1 year or longer.

Educational attainment among non-EU immigrants (Eurostat, 2019)

Analysis of the population born outside the EU and aged 25-54 years, by educational attainment level, 2018

(%)



Background in Romania

- No recent tradition of immigration, especially for permanent residence.
- Small but increasing number and share of international students. Heavy local particularities (Moldovan, medical students have high shares).
- Labour shortages are difficult to gauge. Discrepancies between statistically measured vacancy rates and reports by employers, as well as wage evolution do not correspond to economic orthodoxy (e.g. existing statistics indicate a mix of both low unemployment and low employment as well as high real wage growth and low vacancy rates).
- Thus far recruitment drives for non-domestic labour target specific occupations with steep staff availability shortages (e.g. construction, tourism).
- Growing worker shortages visible in high skilled fields (IT, medicine).

International student admissions

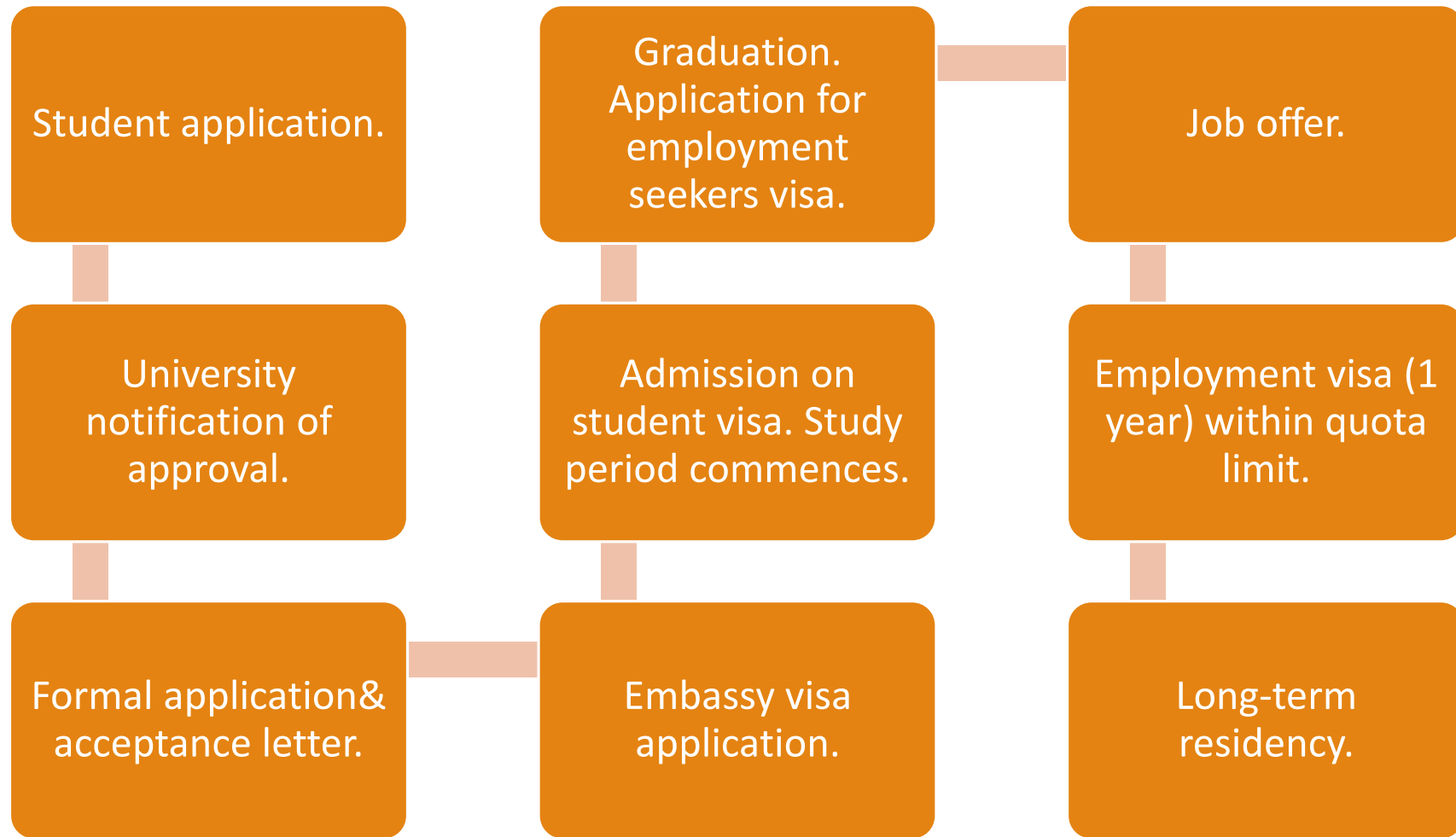
Citizens of	2015	2016	2017	2018	TOTAL
MOLDOVA	1612	1720	1849	2202	7383
ISRAEL	655	692	641	479	2467
TURKEY	443	509	586	591	2129
MOROCCO	255	260	277	256	1048
TUNISIA	355	234	200	173	962
SERBIA	215	256	201	196	868
UKRAINE	115	138	141	183	577
IRAK	226	132	96	107	561
SYRIA	126	96	113	112	447
NIGERIA	246	53	67	75	441
OTHER	1039	1149	1175	1249	4612
TOTAL-MD	3675	3519	3497	3421	14112
TOTAL	5287	5239	5346	5623	21495

Methodology

- Analysis of legal changes brought about by Law 247/2018 and identification of key differences with prior situation.
- Total of 6 interviews (and 11 interviewees) conducted face-to-face or via phone. Interviews semi-structured, anonymous both institutionally (where possible) and individually.
- Selection of universities with significant international student populations (non-Moldovan/non-medical) for main interviews. Included 3 public, 1 private institution. 3 Bucharest-based, 1 regional.
- Interview with the main institution dealing with student and residence visas.
- Interview with HR company representative to gauge the status of the labour market outside of official statistics.

Law 247/2018

- Spearheaded by the need to align Romanian legislation with the provisions of European Directive (EU) 2016/801
- Updates definitions, visa categories and facilitates mobility for both skilled and unskilled migrants
- Introduces a 9 month visa extension for non-EU graduates in Romanian universities, with the explicit purpose of seeking employment
- Does not exclude applicants for employment via this route from the national quota for migrants
- Does not modify visa issuing practices or institutional responsibilities
- Has no impact on admission practices and procedures



Actors on the road to residency

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

- General Inspectorate for Immigration
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs via embassies
- Government of Romania as quota decision-maker
- Other institutions (e.g. security institutions)

AUTONOMOUS ACTORS

- Universities
- Private companies as employers at the moment of graduation

Findings in universities

- Universities were not broadly familiar with recent changes, though some staff working with international students did mention familiarity with opportunities to seek employment.
- There was no differentiation between visa extensions for administrative formalities and seeking employment.
- Communication with immigration authorities as well as security bodies rated highly, but often directed at students themselves.
- Embassies criticized intensely due to visa delays.
- Common `hooks` for international students included costs, access to EU-recognized degrees, local conditions, prestige, etc.
- Familiarity with labour shortages existed among university representatives but not actively linked to internationalization efforts.

Findings among other interviewees

- Immigration authorities acutely aware of importance of labour immigration at various skills levels.
- Implementation of Law 247 started immediately after its publication, with current conversion of administrative visa extensions to job seekers' visa extensions.
- Communication on legal changes facilitated by universities but often targeted students directly.
- Labour immigration was deemed increasingly important by the representative of a leading HR company, who noted a rise in purposely directed head-hunting and recruitment activities.
- The interviewee did however note that low-skilled immigration is currently prioritized, given recent reductions in minimum wage criteria.

General conclusions

- Law 247/2018 was rapidly implemented, with no delay caused by the need to adopt subsidiary legislation/methodologies
- Universities do not seem familiar with new provisions regarding graduate employment nor particularly concerned with the fate of graduates
- Non-integrated communication between international students and Romanian institutions they interact with
- Internationalization efforts used messages that broadly ignored employment opportunities, emphasized value for money and location-associated advantages
- National authorities do maintain a series of practices that discourage internationalization, notably the timeline of admissions and visas

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