

Challenges of Social Integration of Immigrants in Romanian Society:  
Access to Health Care, Labour Market, and Financial Services

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For immigrants and Third Country Nationals (TCNs), one of the main challenges when arriving in a foreign society is gaining access to healthcare services. This is of paramount importance due to several important reasons: first of all, health constitutes a value in itself, and people, regardless of their social position, economic situation, and juridical status, should have the fundamental right to health care. Moreover, having access to the health care system in the foreign country in which they live constitutes for immigrants and TCNs the first step towards obtaining their residence permit. In accordance with the regulations and procedures established in Romania, in order to obtain the residence permit, an applicant has to present to public authorities a certificate issued by a family physician (*medic de familie*) that the person in case is healthy. However, the family physician will not release an immigrant and/or a TCN a medical certificate if the latter does not hold a residence permit. What we have here is, therefore, a vicious identified circle within which most immigrants are trapped. This vicious circle can be broken only through informal acts of generosity or social intervention. Therefore, one of the main challenges of immigrants and TCNs regarding their access to the health care system is to enroll in a family physician, which opens the gate for other public benefits.

Another major issue is related to medical insurance. According to Romanian law, until the age of 26, every person is entitled to a basic package of health services, including immigrants. However, after the age of 26 years, an individual must be employed in order to benefit from medical insurance and have access to the public health care system. For immigrants and TNCs, this legal provision is highly problematic for several reasons: first, there are cases of immigrants arriving in Romania aged over 26 years. This means that these individuals will not benefit from medical insurance until they manage to get a job (which poses other, just as difficult, problems). And even after finding a job, an immigrant will have to pay retroactively her/his medical contributions in order to secure access to public health care services. Secondly, immigrants aged under 26, will face the same problem after achieving this age. However, in their situation, because

they have spent more time in this country, their chances of finding a job and thus gaining access to health care services, are slightly improved.

Although the right to health care is a fundamental human right, in practice this is not always the case. This is especially so for immigrants and TCNs, who are living in a foreign country and have to struggle to understand the laws and formal procedures by which they can gain access to healthcare services and job opportunities. In this brief document, I have highlighted two serious challenges and major difficulties encountered by immigrants and TCNs in relation to health care services: (1) gaining access to a medical physician, which is required by law for obtaining a residence permit; (2) obtaining medical insurance after achieving the age of 26, which requires having a job in order to have access to the public health care system.

Regarding obtaining a work permit for foreign workers, when an immigrant changes his/ her job, they need this work permit, which takes a long time to obtain. And during that time, they have no salary or any income. Therefore, this is a serious problem encountered by many immigrants. Another important problem is when immigrants want to open a bank account, which is required when applying for a residence permit and for a range of other practical purposes. Most banks refuse to open a bank account and there are no clear rules why they refuse to provide such a basic service to immigrants. All these issues and obstacles make the life of an immigrant very challenging and tamper with the process of their social, cultural, and economic integration.