

# The “Badanti” Social Phenomenon in Lazio and Molise Regions and the Implication of Romanian Women

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## Abstract

The social phenomenon of “BADANTI” is referring to a parallel social work system developed in Italy by a large number of Romanian emigrants, especially women, through their day to day jobs, mostly unqualified and often illegally. The present paper focuses on the research of the “Badanti” phenomenon especially in Lazio and Molise regions where the largest number of Romanian emigrants can be found. For example, in Lazio region the Romanian nationals represent the largest number of emigrants, approximately 40% of the total emigrants while in Molise region the Romanian emigrants represent approximately 38% of the total emigrant population.

The Romanian women are part of the parallel social work system as unqualified workers by taking care of children and the elderly mostly in private homes. Although well appreciated for a job well done by their employers, who are mostly private persons, the state social work system will soon enter into a crisis because of the “Badanti”. Actions should be taken in order to preserve the welfare state and avoid the collapse of a national social work system which could lead to grater implications in a society that can’t afford to relay on emigrants to constitute an illegal and parallel social work system.

The sociological research regarding the “Badanti” phenomenon took place in the two Italian regions between April and November 2016 using questionnaires and interviews as methods of research.

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**Keywords:** “Badanti”, social work system, Romanian women, Lazio, Molise

## Introduction

Starting 2007-2008 a new social phenomenon was brought into the public attention in Italy. The media and then several research institutes started to look into the implication of the immigrants (Friedman & Randeria,

2004) upon the Italian society, especially on how women immigrants have an impact on their society (Geddes, 2003).

The phenomenon was called “Badanti” and it refers to the persons called badante who are immigrants, mostly from Eastern Europe and mostly women who work in housekeeping and nursing old people or kids (Bommes & Morawska, 2005). Etymologically speaking the word *badanti/badante* (badare=to take care of) would translate from Italian language as caretaker. The Italian dictionaries explain the word badante as “persons who have as profession to survey and take care old and disable people”. Referring to this phenomenon, professor Giovanni B. Sgritta in his book entitled *Badanti e anziani in un welfare senza futuro* concludes “the Badante is all an Italian phenomenon. What made it happen? To whom it may serve? Definitely to the families, but also to the state: in fact raises families from increasingly difficult tasks and allows the state to leave things as they are, that is to put on the shoulders of the women, in the first place, the responsibility to treat and assist children and the elderly. The lengthening of life expectancy and declining birth rate have fueled the aging process of our country. Carers are the spontaneous response, private, these requirements; make up for the failures of politics and the weakening of families and family support networks. Research published here sheds new light on the size and nature of the phenomenon: outstanding solution to the problem of aging freezes a situation where families and women continue to play a leading role. And then?” (Sgritta, 2009).

### **The “Badanti” phenomenon as seen by specialists**

Specialists in social work and sociology from Italy have different judgments regarding the “badanti” phenomenon and what should be done regarding it. There were made many researches and studies regarding this phenomenon including ones by state authorities.

Some specialists consider this phenomenon benefic for the state. “To whom it may serve? Definitely to the families, but also to the state: in fact raises families from increasingly difficult tasks and allows the state to leave things as they are, that is to put on the shoulders of the women, in the first place, the responsibility to treat and assist children and the elderly.”(Sgritta, 2009).

Other specialists see this phenomenon as one that affects not only the social work system but also the life of the badante. Elena de Filippo considers that “The social care has important implications for this women (badante). For most of them it means lack of intimacy, forced domestic partnership and continuing working rhythm” (de Filippo, 2010).

Many of the specialists are concerned by the fact that some of these women (badante) are often victims of abuse. In Bordogna Tognetti’s opinion

the fact the they “work in an isolated environment because often the residencies of the people whom they take care of are situated in peripheries and they can not ever leave the elderly alone” represents the main risk of being victims of abuses, along the fact that “they never have time to meet with compatriots that work in the same field of activity” (Tognetti, 2004).

Martire Zindato considers that an aggravating fact regarding exclusion is represented by single mothers. “In this cases, motherhood represents a major risk towards exclusion” (Zindato, 2005).

Some specialists criticize the welfare system that is not prepared to face today challenges. “the absence of a welfare system capable to face challenges of single mothers immigrants is visible...the paradox is that are the immigrant women, who take care of Italian families, to pay the price of a weak and residual welfare system. They are the first to pay the price of such critical issues”(de Filippo, 2010).

### **Statistical data regarding Romanian immigrants in Italy (Lazio and Molise regions)**

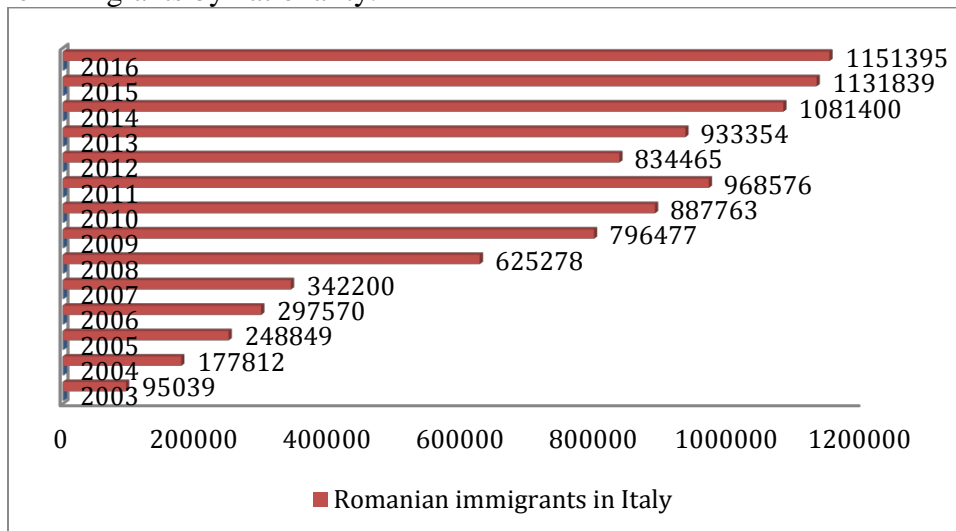
Italy is one of the most attractive western countries in Europe for immigrants (Joly, 2004). Starting 1990 when the iron curtain fall a very large number of immigrants from Eastern Europe came to Italy. Moreover, with the E.U. enlargement waves towards former communist countries, more immigrants fled their countries towards Western Europe (Kofman, 2000). Romanian immigrants represent, in 2016, the most numerous foreign populations in Italy. There are officially over 1.1 million Romanian immigrants in Italy according to the Italian Statistical Institute. These are people officially registered with the Italian institutions, but there are voices that the real number of Romanian immigrants in Italy exceeds 3 million people.

| Year                          | 2003   | 2004       | 2005   | 2006       | 2007        | 2008    | 2009        |
|-------------------------------|--------|------------|--------|------------|-------------|---------|-------------|
| Romanian immigrants in Italy* | 95039  | 17781<br>2 | 248849 | 29757<br>0 | 342200      | 625278  | 796477      |
| Year                          | 2010   | 2011       | 2012   | 2013       | 2014        | 2015    | 2016        |
| Romanian immigrants in Italy* | 887763 | 96857<br>6 | 834465 | 93335<br>4 | 108140<br>0 | 1131839 | 115139<br>5 |

However we can see that the number of Romanian immigrants increased spectacularly after Romania became part of the European Union in 2007. Italy considered different conditions for access to its labor market for Bulgarians and Romanians: The former were able to work there freely in exchange for Bucharest’s willingness to cooperate on combating organized crime (Porumbescu, 2015). Actually, Romania and Bulgaria ”are considered

to be the EU countries with the lowest standard of life, with a high rate of unemployment” and the population from these two counties are ”the leading providers of manpower for the European market” (Niță, 2016).

The number almost doubled between 2007 and 2008 as the borders became free and Romanian became European citizens and had the same working rights as the local people. Romanian immigrants in Italy represent 22.9% of the total immigration population placing them in the first place of the immigrants by nationality.

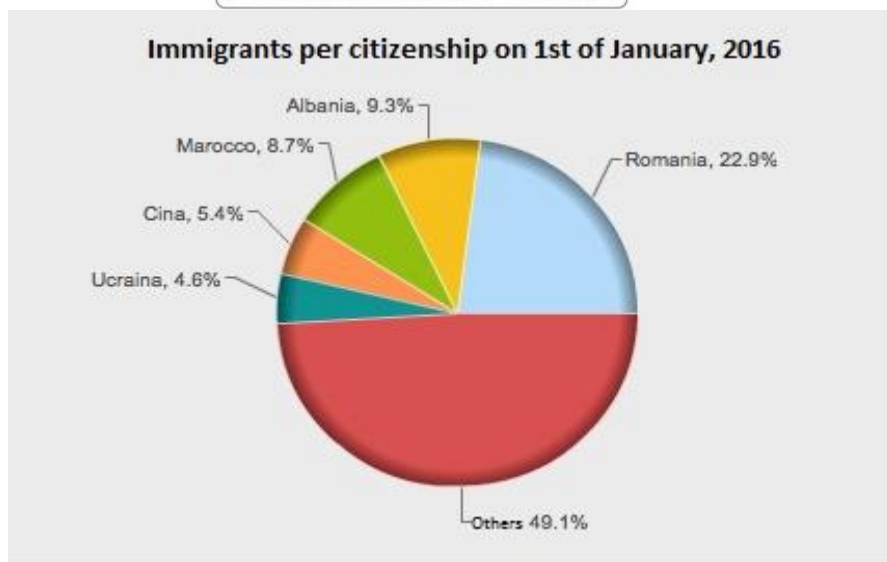
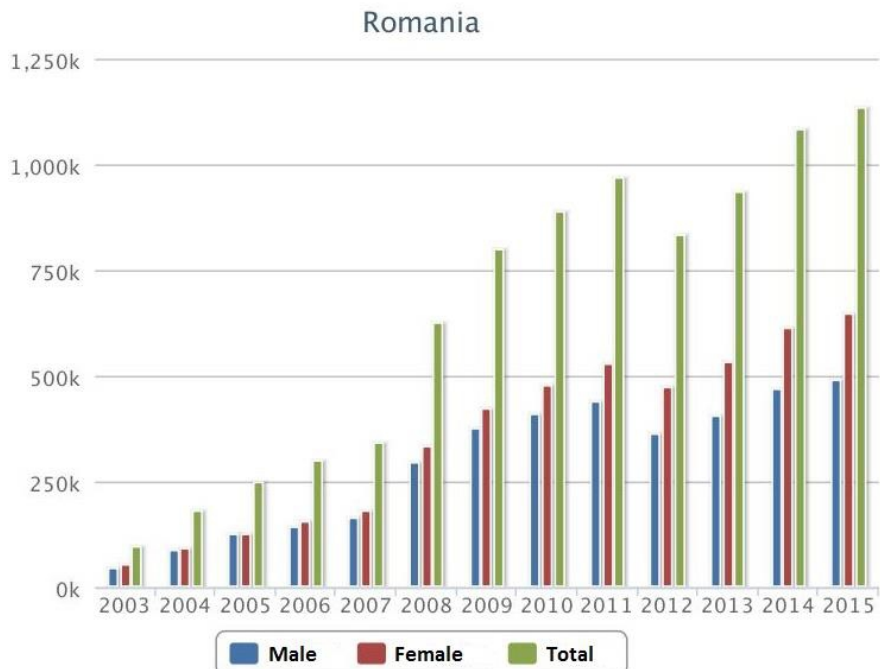


\* Data collected from the ISTAT– Istituto nazionale di statistica (<http://dati.istat.it/#>, July 2016)

From the 1.1 million Romanian immigrants from Italy, more than 650.000 are women and more than 80% of these works as badante. They provide cheap services helping a weak welfare system at important costs for their personal life such as humiliation, lack of opportunities to a fulfilling career witch should award any hard working people with promotions and pecuniary satisfactions, lack of a health insurance for them and their family (often consists with one or more children), lack of medical care as a paradox for people who take care of other people, lack of personal social life and tremendous efforts for social integration.

Even if the badante are appreciated for their hard work by the Italian social care system, sometimes in mass media they are humiliated publically because of their status of immigrants.

Nevertheless they never fail to do their job well and even if are seen, by some, as a threat to the Italian social care system more and more they are the ones picked for these kinds of jobs despite other offers (even ones provided by the Italian care system).



\* Data collected from the ISTAT – Istituto nazionale di statistica (<http://dati.istat.it/#>, July 2016)

In the Lazio Region, which is one of the most developed ones in Italy because the capital Rome is part of it, we find the biggest Romanian community from Italy. Officially the Romanian immigrants in Rome are 227,009 according to the Italian Institute for Statistics but unofficially there are over one million. From these, 124,018 are female and 103,011 are males.

| Year                          | 2003    | 2004    | 2005    | 2006    | 2007    | 2008    | 2009    |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Romanian immigrants in Lazio* | 44.019  | 46.002  | 51.203  | 54.709  | 64.256  | 122.346 | 146.509 |
| Year                          | 2010    | 2011    | 2012    | 2013    | 2014    | 2015    | 2016    |
| Romanian immigrants in Lazio* | 179.469 | 196.410 | 149.877 | 164.163 | 207.050 | 224.537 | 227.009 |

\* Data collected from the Istat – Istituto nazionale di statistica (<http://dati.istat.it/#>, July 2016)

#### Romanian immigrants in Lazio

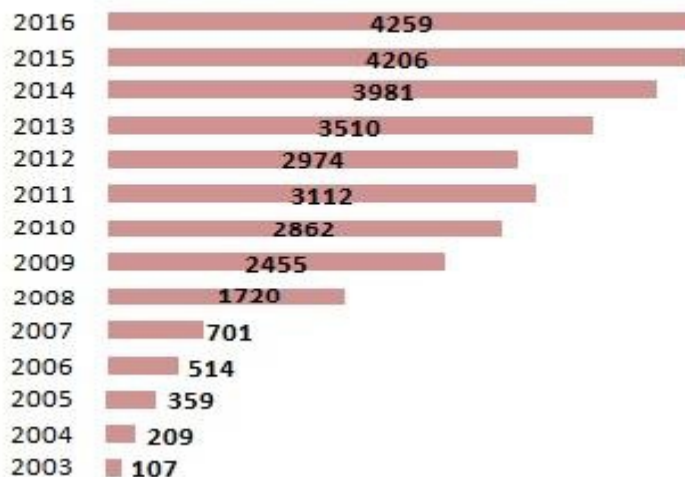


A similar situation we see in the Molise region, keeping the proportions. Here we can observe a Romanian population of immigrants over 4.200, representing almost 38% of the total immigration population by nationality.

| Year                           | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|--------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Romanian immigrants in Molise* | 107  | 209  | 359  | 514  | 701  | 1720 | 2455 |
| Year                           | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
| Romanian immigrants in Molise* | 2862 | 3112 | 2974 | 3510 | 3981 | 4206 | 4259 |

\* Data collected from the ISTAT – Istituto nazionale di statistica (<http://dati.istat.it/#>, July 2016)

### Romanian immigrants in Molise



From the 4.259 Romanian immigrants in Molise more than 2.500 are women and almost 90% of them work in social care as badante.

### Research results regarding the Romanian badante in Lazio and Molise Region

The results of the research conducted in two Italian regions, Lazio and Molise, revealed that over 80% of the Romanian women immigrants work in social care as badante.

For example, in Lazio region, from 124.018 Romanian female immigrants, 79% work as badante. The rest of them are divided between waitresses (7%), baristas (2.9%), hotel industries (2.2%), shop cashier (1.9%), shop women (2.3%), cook (0.9%) and others (4.1%).

In the Molise region the percentage is even bigger. From the total of 2.542 female Romanian immigrants, 88.2% work as badante in the home care system, while the rest are divided between waitresses (4%), baristas (0.9%), hotel industries (1.2%), shop cashier (1.1%), shop women (1.8%), cook (1.2%) and others (1.6%).

The data are collected from Romanian female immigrants that work in these services and combined with the official data from the Italian Institute for Statistics.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, even if are many voices that condemns immigrant female that work in this field as badante the truth is that they are doing a big favor to the Italian social system for providing quality services that the official system cannot provide. The truth is that this kind of service is

unqualified and can be sometimes dangerous for the children or for the elderly. Also, it is not normal to have a parallel social care system and take advantage over it as long as you keep it “underground” and unqualified (Triandafyllidou, 2006).

In European Union, the health and social work sector (which includes residential care and non-residential social work) is counting today approximately 10% of employment (Ilie Goga, 2014: 203).

In our case, the solution could be a simple one and that is to help this badante to become qualified social workers and then both parties would win.

Until then, the parallel system of social care will continue to exist with all the risks it implies both for the badante and the elderly or the children to watch the provide social services.

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