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***Being damned if you do and damned if you
don't* - a qualitative study about the life
situation of Romanian women who beg in the
streets of Malmö.**

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Abstract

Title: *Being damned if you do and damned if you don't* - a qualitative study about the life situation of Romanian women who beg in the streets of Malmö.

Background: Health is unevenly distributed within and among the countries of the world, and usually follows a population's socio-economic status. The lower this is, in comparison to others', the poorer the health. Romania is one of the poorest countries in Europe. Its Roma minority live under more deprived socio-economic conditions than its majority population. During the past years Scandinavia has experienced an influx of poor EU-citizens, who beg in the streets. Most of these are from Romania, and the majority is Roma. While debates on this phenomenon are vivid, the research body on the experiences of the population in question is scarce.

Aim: The specific aim of this study was to explore the experience of Romanian women who beg in the streets of Malmö, Sweden, focusing on socio-economic living conditions in Romania, daily life in Malmö and coping strategies to deal with their current situation.

Methods: This qualitative study was guided by a Grounded Theory approach. Eight semi-structured individual interviews were conducted. These were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Codes, categories and a conceptual model were constructed and memos were written, in parallel with and after data collection.

Results: The living conditions of the study population, both in Romania and in Sweden, were characterized by a continuous struggle to fulfill basic needs for themselves and their families. They coped with the situation through trying to make a living abroad, through cherishing their social relations and through engaging in a mental act of seesawing.

Conclusion: The study population lives with multiple determinants of poor health, regardless of their efforts to improve their situation. Policy makers should therefore urgently take action to target both underlying and immediate causes of their poor health.

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1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) poverty is the most important determinant of poor health, pervading all other. Health is unevenly distributed among and within the countries of the world, and in general the health status follows the socio-economic status of the population in question. The poorer the economic and social conditions in comparison to others, the poorer the health. WHO recommends their member countries to increase health equity among their populations by targeting the *Social Determinants of Health*, i.e. the circumstances under which people live and work. This includes promoting education, social inclusion, good employment and working conditions, sustainable housing, sustainable communities and adequate minimum incomes. Although partly implemented in some countries, universal implementation of such policies are a long time coming, and the socio-economic and health gaps throughout the world remain (WHO, 2017; Marmot, 2013).

Romania is one of the poorest countries in the EU and 40% of its population is considered to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion (World Bank, 2016). In Romania, as in the rest of EU, the Roma population is specifically exposed to poverty and exclusion. The history of the Roma people is fraught by exclusion, and throughout the history they have been object to persecution, genocide and slavery and in Romania discrimination and anti-Gypsyism is still very much present. In comparison to the non-Roma population living in the same areas as the Roma, the Roma population faces higher rates of poverty, of un- and underemployment, has fewer years of education, more deprived housing conditions and considerably lower life expectancy (Amnesty international, 2017; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2016a; FRA, 2016b; FRA, 2016c; Hammarberg, 2017; SOU, 2016:6).

During recent years, there has been an increasing influx of poor eastern European EU citizens to the Northern European countries. In Sweden this population is commonly referred to as 'Vulnerable EU Citizens' (VECs) and they typically support themselves by begging in the streets and are usually intermittently homeless while in Sweden. The majority is from Romania and many, but not all of them, are Roma. In past years, many migrated to southern European countries for temporary jobs, but due to the economic crisis and the consequent problems of unemployment in southern Europe, those job opportunities are no longer available (Amnesty International, 2017; Hammarberg, 2017). The Governmental subsidies in their home countries are low and not sufficient for survival (Hjärta till Hjärta, 2017; SOU,

2016:6).

For approximately the past 60 years, Sweden has had a relatively well functioning welfare system. During these years begging, solely due to unemployment, has hardly existed in Sweden (Nylander, 2015). The phenomenon of suddenly having quite a lot of people begging in the streets, especially in the larger cities of the country, has caused political and media debates. In 2014, the populist and right-wing party, the Swedish Democrats, launched a campaign, which proclaimed that ‘organized’ begging had to be stopped. They suggested a ban on the activity of begging and deportation of those who beg. The conservative party of Sweden (Moderaterna) shortly joined in and supported the suggestion of such a ban, while other Swedish parties, at least to some degree, have taken a stand against it. The political parties have different approaches as to how the phenomenon should be handled, as have the different Swedish Municipalities. The degree and character of support provided for VECs, has partly depended on the initiatives of voluntary organizations (Hammarberg, 2017). In the media debates about the phenomenon there are those who argue that begging is not a solution, but that it rather perpetuates exclusion, that begging is associated with criminality and that Sweden has no responsibility for the VECs, as they are not Swedish residents and are here on a voluntary basis. Others point out that there are very few cases where there is evidence of any connections between begging and organized crime. They argue that criminalization of begging would make the situation worse for the VECs and their families back home, and that Sweden *does* have an ethic responsibility to treat this vulnerable population in a humanitarian way and in accordance with basic human rights (Hammarberg, 2017).

There are statistics illustrating the harsh conditions of life for the Roma population in Romania and its neighbouring countries (FRA 2016a; FRA 2016b; FRA 2016c). The Norwegian research foundation FAFO released a report in 2015, based on surveys among VECs in Oslo, Stockholm and Copenhagen. Among other things, the authors of this report revealed data on VEC’s poor living conditions in Romania, the very rare relation between begging and crime, their deprived material living conditions in the host cities and issues of discrimination, harassment and lack of protection (Djuve et al., 2015). Qualitative studies on the *experiences* of VECs who have migrated to Sweden are scarce. In 2015 a Swedish master thesis in Business Management and Health focused on the topic of the health of VECs (Gaga, 2015). Gaga examined eight VEC's experiences of their health before and after supporting themselves as beggars, and their strategies to maintain health. The author found that the rough

living and the very activity of begging resulted in new negative physical or mental health conditions for the VECs, or worsened already existing conditions. Petra Wagman at Jönköping University has recently led a qualitative study on VECs in regards to their views on everyday life, health and the future, but the results of this study have not yet been published (Jönköping University, 2017). Within the field of migration research, there are studies published on the nature of Romanian Roma migration. Pantea (2012) concludes that the 'gender regimes' of Transylvanian Roma women's communities determine the degree and character of costs and benefits of their migration and that the reasons for migrating ranges from ensuring family survival to achieving social mobility in the home community. She also points out the importance of the existence of and participation in networks for the decision to migrate, for both men and women (Pantea, 2013). Vlase and Voicu (2014) put the Romanian Roma migrants' own agency at the center of their research and conclude that gender, religion and subgroup identity play a part in the decision to migrate. The authors of these studies do not explicitly examine health issues, but when describing the conditions for Romanian Roma, they touch upon many of the determinants of poor health: poverty, poor housing conditions, discrimination, poor education, and low levels of gender equality. Neither do they explicitly explore the experiences of those who engage in begging at the destination, although Pantea (2013) briefly mentions it. The activity of begging, in an urban context in the USA, has been examined by Lankenau (1999), who concludes that begging is a highly stigmatizing activity and that the person who begs often faces public harassment and humiliation. Homelessness, in general, is associated with high rates of morbidity and mortality (Fazel et al., 2014).

In order to develop adequate policies and health promoting interventions for VECs, be it in the host country or in Romania, it is crucial that their own perspectives and experiences are explored and taken into consideration. That is what this qualitative study aims to contribute to.

2. Aim

The overall aim of this study is to contribute to the scarce qualitative research body regarding the situation of Romanian VECs coming to Sweden.

Specifically, the study aims to explore the experience of Romanian women who beg in the streets of Malmö, focusing on the socio-economic living conditions in Romania, daily life in Malmö and coping strategies to deal with their current situation.

3. Methodology

Overall research design

The author used a qualitative approach, to be able to capture the informants' experiences of life in Romania and in Sweden. *Grounded Theory* was chosen, since it is a methodology commonly used for exploring processes, strategies and actions - suitable for pursuing the aim of this study (Charmaz, 2014). More specifically, the research process was guided by Kathy Charmaz's *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2014). Grounded Theory, as she describes it, is an approach and method based in the theoretical assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism, which puts actions, language and symbols at the center of the *construction* and *reconstruction* of human life and society. The constructivist view implies that the researcher and the informants construct the data together. The researcher aims to keep an open mind towards what is being communicated during the interview, but also acknowledges that his/her own experiences and personality play a crucial part in both interview and analysis. Thus, self-reflection and transparency are important throughout the research process and in the end product. What specifically distinguishes Grounded Theory from other qualitative research methodologies is the parallel work with data collection and analysis, and its ambition to create an abstract theory from the results. The Grounded Theory design is *emergent*, which means that the researcher keeps a very open mind towards what new insights the data bring and consequently is open to even go as far as to changing the initial research question, should that turn out to be necessary (Charmaz, 2014). Interviewing was chosen as the method for collecting data for this thesis, since the author of the thesis aimed to explore the *personal experiences* of the informants. The interviews were inspired by the style that Charmaz (2014) refers to, 'Intensive Interviewing', which is characterized by the aims to gather rich data and at the same time deeply respect the informants.

Study setting

The study was conducted in Malmö, the third largest city in Sweden, with approximately 300 000 inhabitants. It is situated in the very south of Sweden, neighboring the Danish capital, Copenhagen. The city is multicultural, with around 30% of its population born in other countries (Malmö Stad, 2017a; ekonomifakta.se, 2017). The growing gap between rich and poor, observed in Sweden in general (OECD, 2015), is accentuated in Malmö, where 30% of the city's minors are estimated to live in households with an income below the national poverty threshold (Rädda Barnen, 2015). In 2016, the unemployment ratio in Malmö was 14.9% - twice as high as the Swedish average (ekonomifakta.se, 2017). The civil society

engagement is vivid in Malmö, where there are currently 270 registered, democratic nonprofit organizations (MIP, 2017). In the European Commission report, ‘Quality of life in European cities 2015’, Malmö ranked high on the overall satisfaction with life among its citizens (European Commission, 2016).

It has been estimated that more than 200 VECs were temporarily staying in Malmö during the fall of 2016 (SR, 2016a; Sydsvenskan, 2016). Apart from the VECs there were, during that same year, 1740 homeless persons in Malmö, out of which 30 were sleeping on the streets or in parks (Malmö Stad, 2016). In the late fall of 2015 a VEC settlement, which had gradually been established at a vacant lot in Malmö, was torn down by the authorities of the city and its inhabitants were evicted (DN, 2015). Since then, 40 beds at shelters have been available for VECs, but only during three of the winter months. (Malmö Stad, 2017b) Other services for VECs in Malmö, such as free meals, medical advice/services, social advice and the possibility of scheduling showers and washing machine uses, are offered by different sorts of NGOs. These are partly, or entirely, based on voluntary work and donations (Kontrapunkt, 2017; lakareivarlden.se, 2017; Stadsmissionen, 2017).

Study population

The author chose to interview Romanian women, who temporarily make a living through begging for money in the streets of Malmö. There is a gender-based difference when it comes to the situation of the Roma population in Romania. In many important areas of life, which affect health, the situation of Roma women is more problematic than that of Roma men. Fewer women than men have attended school and fewer are literate. More girls than boys get married at an early age, resulting in negative consequences for their education level and prospects for employment. Roma women still have the main responsibility for taking care of the children and the household. They spend more time in the house than their partners do and are therefore more affected by the poor housing conditions, including heavy domestic work and indoor pollution from firewood. Furthermore, they are often subordinate to their partners, due to traditional patriarchal structures (FRA, 2016a). The author makes no claims about male VECs *not* being vulnerable while in Sweden, but assumes that there may be gender based differences to their vulnerability. Since the scope, in terms of the number of informants, for this thesis was limited, the author chose to focus on the experiences of *only* women. A certain variation in age among the informants was aimed for. Apart from that, the inclusion criteria were that the informants originated from Romania, that they spoke Romanian and that they

engaged in begging in Malmö.

Sampling of informants

Personal contacts and/or gatekeepers are sometimes a prerequisite when trying to access this hard-to-reach population for research purposes. Historical and current experiences of persecution and discrimination have effects on the population's readiness to trust people whom they do not know. The author had a couple of personal contacts, VECs whom she had met and talked to on the streets during the past years. She had also volunteered at a social organization for VECs during a short period prior to and during the data collection. Thus, some of the women who agreed to participate in the study recognized her and felt some level of trust. When looking for potential informants, she was accompanied by a fellow student, who was fluent in Romanian and English and who assisted as an interpreter throughout the project. He had volunteered at the mobile clinic of Doctors of the World where he had previously met a couple of the informants.

Snowball sampling, i.e. letting the first informant put you in contact with the next informant, who puts you in contact with the third, and so on, turned out not to be possible (Dahlgren et al., 2007). None of the informants could or wanted to pass the ball on to someone else. The procedure of finding informants instead implied that the author and the interpreter approached women who were begging in the streets, informing and asking them if they would be interested in participating in the project. This was a time consuming activity. Most of them did not want to participate and several times, when a time for an interview was scheduled, the woman would not show up. In some of these cases it was later revealed that the reasons for not showing up were that they had changed their minds about participation, that something had prevented them from coming, or that they had forgotten about it. Twice it occurred that an informant agreed to participate *if* she could bring a friend/two friends who would also participate. Because of the difficulties of finding informants, this was accepted. However, all of the interviews were held with one informant at a time.

Data collection

The data collection was performed during a period of five weeks, from February to April of 2017. The interviews were conducted in places where they could be held in privacy, without noise and disruptions; seven in a group room at CRC (the Clinical Research Centre) in Malmö, and one in the home of the author/interviewer. The interpreter was present at all the

interviews. He interpreted the posed questions from English into Romanian and then interpreted the informants' answers from Romanian into English. A semi-structured interview guide and a mind-map containing the subject areas that were to be covered in the interview were used as guidance for the interviews, see appendices 1 and 2. The questions were mainly open-ended and concerned the decision to leave Romania, everyday life in Romania and in Sweden, health and the future. The interview guide was not strictly followed and order and phrasing of the questions were adjusted to the content of what the informants said. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 33 and 118 minutes. In total eight informants were interviewed.

Analytical approach

After finishing each interview, all of its English content was transcribed verbatim. Notes were included in the transcripts on *how* the informants answered the questions, i.e. if they, for example, made pauses, started crying or laughed. After having finished a transcription, its content was coded. Charmaz (2014) calls this step of the process *initial coding*, and its purpose is to turn the data into conceptualized entities, which are more manageable in the process of analysis than the original quotes. Following Charmaz (2014), the initial coding was kept close to the informants, by to some extent using their own expressions and by not becoming *too* analytical, although some codes of a more abstract character were also made. An example of this step is provided in appendix 3.

Memos were written throughout the data collection process. These contained descriptions of persons, situations, the interviewer's/author's own feelings, general thoughts and reflections about the codes and how they might be connected. The author continuously returned to previous transcriptions, to make comparisons and to digest the data. The memos also resulted in tentative categories. When a new tentative category was constructed during these intermediate steps of the analysis, the exploration of it was pursued by dwelling deeper into it during in the following interview(s), until feeling that a certain degree of saturation in the variations of the phenomenon had been reached. This is what Charmaz (2014) calls *theoretical sampling*. As part of this process some questions were added to the interview guide at later stages.

When having finished all interviews, the author went back and forth between creating categories, figuring out how they might be interconnected, and going back to the transcripts

and their codes. Some of the initial codes turned out to be of more importance and interest in relation to the aim of the study, than others. These became the *focused codes*, the codes that at the end became the components of the categories in the analysis. These were in some cases renamed. When writing up the results constant comparisons were made by returning to the transcripts, in order to make sure that the interpretations actually were well founded in the data.

Ethical considerations

Ethical guidelines on autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice of research (Beauchamp and Childress, 2001) were considered and followed throughout the project. In this study the principle of doing no harm (non-maleficence) was of utmost importance. The vulnerable situation of the informants and the sensitive nature of the interview posed a risk of causing them emotional suffering. Thus emphasis was put on designing the questions carefully and appropriately, trying them out in pilot interviews and having them approved by the thesis supervisor. A suggestion given by Charmaz (2014), about sequencing the questions in a way that would give the interview a somewhat positive ending, was followed. The informants were well informed that they were performing the interview on a completely voluntary basis and that they were free to end it whenever they wished. Furthermore, they were well aware that they could opt out of answering certain questions if they wanted to and that their names and information that could be used to identify them would not be revealed. They were also informed that the interview would be audio recorded and that they would not receive any economical reimbursement for participating, but that they would be given something to eat and drink before or after the interview. When first meeting the informants, an information letter, translated to Romanian, was handed out to them. It explained the conditions of participation and the purpose of the project. They were also orally informed of the conditions of participation several times. In order to avoid associations to authoritative control or registration and potential awkwardness, should it be that the informants were illiterate, the informed consent was kept oral.

4. Results

In total, eight women, between 21 and 65 years old, were interviewed. Seven of them identified as Roma. All of them had children, and the older ones had grandchildren. There were married, divorced and widowed women in the sample. Most of them had been in Sweden for more than two years, and many had gone back to Romania to visit their families

several times during that period. In general, their level of formal education was low. Specified background data about them are presented in the table below.

Table 1. Background data about the informants

Informant	Identifying as Roma	Civil Status	Partner being in Sweden	Number of children in Romania	Time since first arrival in Sweden	Years of formal education
1	Yes	Married	Yes	2	3 years	5
2	Yes	Widowed	---	3	3 years	5
3	Yes	Widowed	---	4	1.5 years	4
4	Yes	Married	No	5	Almost 3 years	7
5	No	Divorced	---	3	2 years	8
6	Yes	Married	Yes	2	2 years	11
7	Yes	Married	Yes	1	2 years	7
8	Yes	Married	Yes	5	1 month	2.5

The analysis resulted in the construction of a grounded theory model (see figure 1) illustrating two frames, the Romanian and the Swedish. The categories placed *at* the frames represent the socio-economic living conditions and characteristics of daily life of the informants, while the categories inside of the ‘framework’ represent their strategies. The core category ‘Being damned if you do and damned if you don’t’ reflects their overall situation.

The detailed descriptions of the results are presented under the headings of the categories (bolded) and the sub-categories (italicized) and provide quotes to illustrate how the interpretation is grounded in the data.

...and damned if you don't

The Romanian frame: Having nothing but family

- Constantly worrying due to inability to make ends meet

- Having no safety net

Feeling obliged to take action

- Stories from others creating hope
- Sacrificing oneself for the family
- Finding leaving both simple and painful

- Family meaning everything

- Being referred to substandard housing

- Seeing limited possibilities for educational improvement



Figure 1. Conceptual model, illustrating socio-economic living conditions, characteristics of daily life and coping strategies of Romanian women who beg in Malmö.

Being damned if you do...

The Swedish frame: Lacking tools to take control

- Feeling a complete no-body without a common language

- Being at the mercy of random handouts and own thoughts

Cherishing relations

- Parenting from a distance
- Talking to relieve stress and worries
- Receiving help from Swedish friends



Mentally seesawing not to succumb



Accepting to be submissive

- 'Only god knows what will happen'
- Being thankful and ashamed
- Having no hope for the future or passing it on to younger generations

Defending own dignity

- Aiming to be in charge
- Allowing oneself to be dissatisfied and refusing to feel ashamed for begging
- Daring to pronounce modest hopes for the future

- Endlessly struggling to satisfy basic needs

- Being defenseless to harassers

Figure 1, continued.

Core category: Being damned if you do and damned if you don't

This notion permeates the entire life situation described in the categories below, but it specifically depicts what it means to move between the two frames represented in the conceptual model (Figure 1). The informants simply can not make a good choice. If they stay in Romania with their families, they can't make a living, and if they go to Sweden, they can't be with their families and have to endure difficult living conditions and harassment. If they don't beg, they can't feed their children, and if they beg, they are being cast with guilt and shame. If they mentally accept their situation, they lose their sense of self-worth, and if they refuse to accept it, they get disappointed and exhausted.

The Romanian frame: Having nothing but family

This category describes the 'frame' that constitutes the living conditions of the informants in Romania; a frame of deep poverty and very limited possibilities for change. It is composed of the following sub-categories:

Constantly worrying due to inability to make ends meet

The informants described that it was very difficult getting a job in Romania, and that the salaries of the temporary jobs that were sometimes available, were very low. The scarce help given to the informants and their families from the Romanian State often constituted their entire income, but was only enough to cover a fraction of their elementary expenses. Families with children received child allowance, equaling 200 SEK per child and month. Some informants received social assistance, equaling 300 SEK. The older informants described not having, or having a very limited pension. The economic situation for the informants had always been tough. There were experiences of previously having gone abroad, mainly to Southern Europe, to support the families through engaging in short term, insecure employment. Those who had become widowed, had children or parents who had fallen ill or who had seen their family business gone bankrupt had experienced a worsened economic situation. The income that the families of the informants described having, regardless of whether some family members had jobs or not, was simply not enough to pay for the basic expenses for living.

“It's very difficult to live in Romania if you don't have something to lean on. My children work, but it's not enough. No. No, because if they have their own children... Even if my children work, they can't have the necessary conditions for them [the grandchildren] to grow up. They will end up begging as well.” -14

The informants described that there were days when they could not afford eating.

“A [normal] day for me in Romania is...eh...I don’t know what to cook, [...] I don’t know what to cook for the kids. Not because I don’t *know* what to cook, but because I don’t know what I *have* to cook. And then, when I can’t make anything, I try to explain [to the kids] that I can’t make anything, but then I still do my best to capture anything, I mean I’ll even go out of my way to get a loaf of bread.” –I5

In order to pay urgent expenses, like those for food, one solution was to buy groceries on credit or take other types of loans. These debts accumulated and were difficult to pay off.

“And then, when we do receive the social assistance we have to pay back our debts, particularly at the corner store where we get our food. And after that, well what do we have left over? Nothing! You can’t pay the electricity, you can’t pay the water, you can’t pay for the house. And of course, the debts accumulate. And then you won’t be able to pay the debts at all.” –I2

The informants ended up in a downward spiral of economic troubles.

Being referred to substandard housing

Typically, the informants' houses in Romania were small and overcrowded. They either lacked running water, electricity, heating, kitchens and bathrooms or all of those amenities. In some cases, the family members had to walk far to fetch non-potable water from the community well for cooking and washing. Clothes were washed by hand. Normally firewood in some type of stove/fire place was used for cooking and heating the house. Often the houses were in need of continued construction or urgent repairs.

“And then we had a house that wasn’t very proper, the roof was about to collapse. And then, when it rained, [because of] the design of the house [...] water would rise steadily inside the house [...]. I was crying every night. And I was thinking: ‘My God, the roof is gonna collapse on the children.’ I was climbing on the roof to put on the cardboard, because the wind would often take, would blow off the roof. And then I was on the roof, trying to nail down the roof, and it was just an awful life.” – I2

Having no safety net

Generally, the informants and their families had no health insurance. Having relatives who were ill, or who had passed away prematurely, was commonly described by the informants. Some of them were ill themselves, and one had a life threatening disease. They had to pay

their own, or family members', health care expenses out-of-pocket to the extent that they could, but often they simply could not afford the treatment that they needed.

"[...] I would have to have the operation in 2015, two years ago. And I didn't want to. I couldn't do that, because I don't have enough money. 15 000 Euros. And that's why I don't want to. And later I found a different doctor, but that would still cost 10 000 Euros. And they keep on saying that if I don't have this operation, I will die." -I5

Furthermore, when an adult in the family got bed ridden or passed away, the informants' families would often lose either some kind of income (salary or pension), or a caregiver for the children. The people around them, in their community, were often as bad off as they themselves were, and many of the informants described how nobody in Romania is willing to help them with anything when they are in need. When facing illness, death, or other challenging events, the informants thus were on their own and risked falling headlong.

Seeing limited possibilities for educational improvement

The informants had attended school relatively few years during their childhood. They wanted their children or grandchildren to go to school for more years, but this, too, was an economic question, since school supplies, clothes and in some cases transportation had to be paid for.

"And for them [the grandchildren] to go to school, they're in need of a lot of money. At school, not even a pen is free. Everything is based on money." – I4

Family meaning everything

What the informants *did* have in Romania was family. There was a consensus among the participants that the family, especially the children and grandchildren, was the axis around which they spun. The family was the principal source of both joy and misery.

Feeling obliged to take action

This category describes the informants' breaching out of the Romanian frame. For most of them, this is a repeated action, since they often end up going back and forth between Romania and Sweden. Once they know what awaits them in Sweden, their feelings become somewhat different from the first time that they leave, however. The process of breaching out is described in the sub-categories below.

Stories from others creating hope

When the informants decided go to Sweden, they did so because they had heard from others that there were possibilities of supporting their families from there. There was also a notion that people in Sweden would be kinder than people in other places. The most common experience was to have had hopes of getting jobs when leaving for Sweden the first time. The plan of going to Sweden to beg was also represented, however.

Sacrificing oneself for the family

The informants expressed great frustration and suffering due to the family's situation and felt a demanding responsibility to do whatever was in their power to relieve it. This mainly meant sending money home for the family's expenses and making sure that the children/grandchildren could attend school. However, for the elderly, it could also mean not constituting a burden to their families.

“[Sighs] And then, [the scarce pension] is the reason why I came to Sweden to beg. In order for me to live, in order for me to take care of myself here. Because the children can't take care of me, because I also need food, I also need clothing, I need shoes. And then I also need some pills [medication].” -13

The situation was desperate enough for the informants to be willing to throw themselves out into the unknown in hope of being able to improve it. The same occurred when they had already been in Sweden, came back to Romania and then once again witnessed their family's suffering.

“When I see that [...] we don't absolutely even have a loaf of bread, or my parents don't have anything, I feel completely obligated to return here [to Sweden] to make some money... It's very difficult in Romania” -16

Finding leaving both simple and painful

The informants went to Sweden accompanied by husbands, relatives or friends and they travelled by bus or airplane. Their children stayed in Romania and were taken care of by grandparents or other relatives. The decision to leave was described as simple, because the informants could not see any better way of supporting their families, but on an emotional level, leaving was very painful. To be away from the family was described as something that is ‘burning our soul’ and ‘hurting our hearts’ by one informant (I3). There was a ‘twofold punishment’, in accordance with what is described in the core category, for the women who had young children. One informant described that her seven-year-old child had stopped

talking to her on the phone, while she was in Sweden, because he was angry with her for having left. The women left in order make life better for their children, but because they left, their children suffered.

“Usually I can’t wait to go back to Romania, in order to see my kids again. But when I [...] know that I *have to* return here I feel really, really bad. Because the kids cry. [...] And they tell me ‘please don’t leave us alone’. [Sobs]” –I5

The Swedish frame: Lacking the tools to take control

This category describes the informants’ daily life in Malmö, which is characterized by being in very limited control, and being in the hands of others. The components of this category are described below.

Feeling like a complete nobody without a common language

Some of the informants spoke a little Spanish, French or Italian. Most of them did not speak English. Not knowing Swedish or English cut them off from communication with most people they met, and made it very difficult for them to find ways to look for and get jobs.

“[...] without [the language] you can’t do anything, you can’t work, you can’t do anything. You can’t interact with people, you can’t communicate, you can’t try to find a job. [...] [If I’m thirsty] this is what I say [says something that sounds like the Swedish word for water]. And when I’m hungry I look at women on the street and I do this motion [puts her hand to her mouth] and say “papa”. [Whispers] But what can you do?” –I8

Except for the practical limitations of not speaking/understanding the language, there was also a more existential dimension to it, which some the informants expressed. There was a feeling of being stripped of their personalities and thus becoming ‘complete nobodies’ (I5).

[In a bitter tone] “All I know what to say is ‘Hej’. That’s it.” – I7

Endlessly struggling to satisfy basic needs

As mentioned above, most of the informants had hopes of getting a job, when coming to Sweden the first time. Quite quickly, they realized the difficulties of finding employment, however, and thus turned to begging.

“So, I arrived here, I was here and I had a sign, cardboard sign saying I’m looking for work. And after holding the sign for about two days, a girl took me to a restaurant [...] and the owner said there would be

work available a month later [...] to be a dishwasher or helping around the restaurant. But the, unfortunately this owner was able to find someone else who spoke English and then they didn't need me. [...] And then I stayed a few months after that, begging." – I6

Typically, the informants slept in parks. Sometimes they had tents, blankets and/or mattresses to lie on. In order not to carry all those things around with them all day, it happened that they tried to hide them in the park, at times with the consequence that these belongings were taken and thrown away. The women found it awful, shameful and/or very frightening to sleep outside, but stated that they had no other choice. One of the informants deviated from the others when talking about sleeping outside:

"[Kind of laughs] It's ok [to sleep in a tent in the city], it's not that bad. [...] [Now we don't get disturbed by the Police], but up until the holidays they always came and bothered us at night. [I can sleep all night] We're not afraid, because we're in the center of the city. [...] [In English:] No scared for people." – I1

However, the predominant experience among the informants was that they did not get much sleep, due to feeling unsafe, being uncomfortable and freezing, sometimes due to worries and often due to being chased off from the parks by the Police.

The informants spent all day and night outdoors, even in wintertime. Some of them sat down at the same spot all day, not to lose that spot and thus missing out on being given money by their 'regulars'. Others walked around, actively asking people for money. When not supporting the cold any longer, they sought warmth at supermarkets, malls or at hamburger restaurants, but many times they could not stay for a long time at those places, because the guards would then yell at them/chase them off.

The most accessible places for the informants to wash themselves were the public toilets. Some said that they only did this in the summertime. It also happened that they would have a shower at a social organization for VECs. Taking showers was not risk free when it was cold outside, however:

"Once a week we go [to the help organization]. But [...] I think that's why I got sick, because I washed myself and then I went out in the cold after taking the shower [with the hair wet]." – I8

The informants did not have any cooking possibilities while in Malmö. Many expressed that

they only ate what people on the street would give them. One person described how she, due to the language barrier and the lack of experience of being in Malmö, did not know how/where to get drinking water during her first week here. Some of the days in Sweden, the informants ate very little or nothing at all.

The informants who normally sat down and begged, described that they were often in a lot of pain. One of them said that she had fallen ill due to sitting still too much, but that she was confined to stay at her spot in order to make money.

In general, the informants stated that their health was good. But yet, most of them described having health problems, ranging from stress and depression, muscular- and head aches, to severe tooth infections, kidney stones, liver problems and life threatening illnesses. Most of them had been forced to seek urgent health care in Sweden. Their knowledge (and possibly that of the health care staff) about what rights to health care they had and how much they should pay, differed a lot. Some described having received health care for free, some not receiving it at all, while others had received high bills to their homes in Romania, without having understood that this would be the consequence. Several described that they trusted that the Swedish authorities, as opposed to the Romanian ones, would not let them die in the streets, however.

“If I get sick here, well I’d collapse, then somebody’s gonna call the ambulance, and then I’m gonna find out what the consequences are, cause now I don’t know anything. But I know that I’ll be treated here.” – I5

Being at the mercy of random handouts and own thoughts

The informants had no control over when and how much money they would be given. They simply had to bide their time and stay at their spot from morning until evening, although some of them actively approached people and asked them for money. This lack of control was described as stressful. The informants were left out to their own thoughts, which typically consisted of worries and longing for their families. The more they thought about the problems of their families, the more stressed out they would get.

“There’s some stress, sometimes they give you money, sometimes they don’t. I have this stress that when I walk around, I think about the children, and then I get stressed, because I have no money to send them, and then I start thinking about the kids and they have nothing to do, because I can’t send them money... It’s kind

of a general stress, always concerned about my children. [...] And, I'm also, with the stress sometimes [...] I lose my appetite, because I'm worried about my father [who's ill] and my kids." -11

Not being in control over how much money they earned also made it difficult for them to make plans for the future.

"[There may be a possibility for me to get a job three weeks from now], but the problem is that I'm planning on a trip back to Romania, but then I'm uncertain if actually I'll have enough money to come back here to work." -I6

Furthermore, there seemed to be a common notion among the informants, that passers-by were less willing to help them now, than a couple of years ago.

Being defenseless to harassers

The informants described frequently being harassed by passers-by, who would yell and spit at them, and kick their cups. Some described having been chased and physically attacked. The harassment left the informants feeling sad, hurt and ashamed. Some expressed being afraid of the harassers and some felt guilt when the harassers told them to go find a job. One informant expressed feeling very sad that no one around her had interacted when she once was physically harassed. This same person described that at the spot where she was regularly sitting, she felt relatively safe, because there were people who knew her and who would not let anything happen to her. Another woman described once having been helped by a passer-by, when someone chased her. The general notion among the informants was that they could not really do anything when being harassed. The reasons for this seemed to be language barriers, being afraid of the harassers, and/or being afraid of drawing attention to them.

"...What can I say? I don't know what to do [when being harassed], I just try to ignore them. I just kind of close my eyes, just ignore them. Cause I'm afraid of them. I can't do anything, I don't really comment anything, I just try to stay calm, and let them speak and then [bows her head down] [...] But it hurts my soul."
- 12

One informant stated that they were being harassed because they were Roma and she used the word 'racist'. However, the more common approach, or explanation, was that there was not much they could do about it, because it simply was a fact that there were 'good people' and 'bad people' in the world.

Cherishing relations

Relations with others is what keeps the informants going, what gives them a sense of meaning, release of stress and what sometimes gives them possibilities to get a temporary job, or to temporarily enjoy some kind of material relief. The sub-categories describing this are presented below.

Parenting from a distance

The informants were constantly thinking and worrying about their children and grandchildren and suffered greatly from being away from them. Being apart physically did not mean that they put their relations on hold, however. The women who had young children described talking to them at least a couple of times a week, and in some cases even several times a day. They asked their children what they had eaten, if they were wearing clean clothes, and how they were doing in school. They also talked to the children's temporary care givers to make sure everything was all right. The children were the only source of joy for their mothers/grandmothers, who felt relieved and happier when they spoke to them on the phone and heard that they were ok. Being able to make phone calls home and thus maintaining the relations with their closest relatives seemed to be a priority to the informants.

“[...] All my happiness and all my joy is my children. When I speak with them I feel much better. [Sighs] [...] When I speak with the kids I feel almost *new*. [...] Sometimes there is a time when I can't afford one of these phone cards, and then I feel much more sad. And then I try to have a conversation with anyone I know, and then I say I can't afford a card, and I ask around and eventually maybe someone will give me a phone card. And so, it's not really a big problem. I mean, if you put your mind to it, if you really are devoted to getting a card, you'll ask a lot of people and eventually you get one.” – I5

One of the informants mentioned not having a cell phone and having to borrow others' and therefore only being able to call her children a couple of times a week.

Talking to relieve stress and worries

Except from talking to close relatives at home on the phone, the informants described how it gave them a certain relief to talk to Romanian friends and acquaintances here in Malmö.

“I usually just kind of speak with my friends [to feel better]. [...] I speak with my cousin, with some other girls, we kind of gossip, we exchange stories.” – I7

“[...] There’s a few other people that I know, they’re from the same village, same community where I’m from. [Having them is] good, it’s very good. Because then you’re able to kind of discuss and you’re able to open up and disclose your troubles. You’re able to discuss the troubles back at home. [...] You’re able to get some advice.” –I8

The informants who spoke some French, Spanish or Italian, gave great importance for their well-being to the personal conversations that they were able to have with Swedish people who showed them empathy.

“But here, I’ve met people with a heart of gold. Extraordinary! I never thought I would ever be able to meet some people like I’ve met here, that cry together with me, that suffer along with me, I just don’t know how to explain, they are actually *interested* in me.” – I2

Receiving help from Swedish friends

Getting to know people who permanently live in Sweden provided additional possibilities. Some of the informants described having had the possibility to, every now and then, sleep or take showers at Swedish friends’ places. Through relations with Swedish people, one of the informants had been able to get regular medical check-ups for her life threatening illness. Another informant had gotten in touch with a Swedish woman who had set up the contact between her and an employer, for whom she then had worked during five months. One informant described that she had a little network of Swedish friends who continuously helped her out:

“[Sadly] Yes [I will come back here]. Yes, because now I have a lot of friends here. And they help me quite a lot with money. And even when I’ll be staying in Romania for two weeks, three weeks, maybe a month, somebody will help me out and send me some money, a transfer, while I’m in Romania. So then, this is how I’m able to take care of my children. From here, not from anywhere else...” –I5

However, it was clear that having these kinds of close relations with people who live in Sweden was rare.

Mentally seesawing not to succumb

This category underlines the limited possibilities of the informants to influence their own situation and to experience good physical and mental health. It illustrates how they mentally seesaw between two different sets of attitudes in order not to succumb. Some of the

informants seemed to dwell to a greater extent at one of the ends of the seesaw, but every now and then a flash from the other end was made visible.

On one side - Accepting to be submissive

On this side of the seesaw, the attitude was characterized by an acceptance of the things that the informants felt that they could not change, an acceptance of the firm frame of conditions that they found themselves in. Here the informants could mentally rest and avoid getting too disappointed with what happened in their lives, by accepting their inferior position in society and in relation to others. The consequence of staying for too long at this end of the seesaw was that they then risked losing their sense of self-worth and their own agency. The attitudes on this side are described in the sub-categories below.

‘Only God knows what will happen’

Many of the informants put what happened in their lives in the hands of God. They prayed to God for the strength to get through their hardships, to be able to continue begging and/or to maintain good health. They seemed to comfort themselves by the faith that everything that happens is part of a divine plan.

Being thankful and ashamed

A common attitude among the informants was to express thankfulness for the help that was given to them by people on the streets. This thankfulness was often accompanied by a great shame regarding the activity of begging.

“I haven’t really lived long with begging. I never have before, and neither has my family. [...] So it was something that brought a lot of shame for us, but... [starts to cry] It makes me wanna cry, but... [...] I saw how much my children were arguing and how they couldn’t send their own kids to school. And so I came to Sweden. Such a magnificent country, where people are extraordinary, magnificent. [...] We were able to get enough to keep my grandchildren in school. [...] And in general the young people here, they are so warm. So warm. And with their help we were able to meet the demands for living.” – I4

To some extent, all the informants defended their own decision to beg. Yet, at the same time it was clear that their fundamental attitude towards this activity was that it was shameful, and something that they had to apologize for doing. The thankfulness for what was arbitrarily and voluntarily handed out to them together with the shame of asking for and accepting the handouts, is the very emblem of submissiveness.

Having no hope for the future, or passing future on to younger generations

When dwelling at this side of the seesaw, the informants expressed having given up on their own future, either because they were too old to have time to change things, or because they simply did not see *how* things would change. The woman who had the life threatening illness expressed that her only hope was to live long enough for her children to grow up and be able to take care of themselves. For some of the older women there was hope that their grandchildren would be able to finish school and have a better life than they, themselves, had had.

“[The hope is] for my grandchildren to get higher up in school. For me, I don’t really care anything about my future. It’s all about them.” -13

On the other side - Defending own dignity

On this side of the seesaw, the informants mentally did what they could to defend their self-worth and rights as human beings. The consequences of staying for too long at this end of the seesaw were that it was exhausting and difficult, due to the immense headwind they were facing in their everyday life.

Aiming to be in charge

All decisions that the informants talked about having made could potentially be seen as their ways to be in charge over their situation. There was, however, a variation in how they *presented* their decision making. Some presented their decisions as inevitable consequences of the frame that surrounded them. They thus put their own agency in the background. Others used their thinking and reasoning in a way that gave them a certain *feeling* of power over the situation, or over their own feelings about it. One example of this is the statement of an informant, who once had the chance of pressing charges against a man who had harassed her:

“But with one person, I told the Police. I took a picture as this person ran after me. And then this person asked me, ‘Well, do you wanna take me to court, or do you wanna forgive me?’ And then I saw his mother crying. And then I saw that he was mentally unfit, and I decided to forgive him. [...] I didn’t wanna do any harm. I didn’t wanna cry to the Police.” -16

This informant put emphasis on her decision to forgive the perpetrator and on not wanting to present herself as a victim. In this way, she became a person in charge, a person who had the power to hold someone accountable, or forgive him. Another example was how the woman

who had the life threatening disease, after some time in Sweden had decided not to tell others about her illness. Exposing that piece of personal information had made her feel vulnerable to people's gossip and suspicion and it had felt unworthy that her illness should be the demanding reason for people to give her money. This was her way to take charge, in order to protect her integrity.

Allowing one self to be dissatisfied and refusing to feel ashamed for begging

At this side, the informants allowed themselves to be dissatisfied. They *knew* that it was deeply unjust that they, by a roll of the dice, had been born into miserable conditions and that their only solution was to humbly ask for help from individuals who, by chance, had been born into better ones. They were frustrated and angry about not being given the opportunity to be employed and to be able to provide for and live with their families. They *knew* that they deserved something better than to live on the streets in a foreign country and in many cases be treated like pariah. The system had let them down, and their survival was dependent on the arbitrary generosity of luckier individuals. Therefore, rather than feeling thankful when passers-by voluntarily gave them something, they felt offended when *not* being given anything, not being seen or helped.

“Sometimes I stay two, three hours and I don't receive a single crown. But I feel very *hurt*. I feel like people don't pay any attention to me.” – I7

The informants engaged in begging, because that was their best option for providing for their families. They, themselves, were not responsible for having such scarce options to choose from; they *wanted* to have 'normal' jobs. Thus, when on this side of the seesaw, they refused to feel ashamed for begging. They were just doing what they could legally do in order to support their families.

“And then [when not getting a job] I took an empty cup and I grabbed something to sit on, a blanket, I had all my belongings with me, and then I started saying “Hej, hej”. [...] I didn't really feel anything [when starting to beg]. Because then I say that hey, I was making a lot, four or five, six hundred crowns a week. [...] And then I was actually quite happy, because I was collecting money and I was able to send money back home, to my family.” – I6

Some statements showed that the informants were reluctant to call the activity of begging a 'job', but that they at the same time felt that this was exactly what it was. This was their best option for making money and it meant long days and hard work.

"I was told that [having a coordination number] I could be looking for some kind of work. And then I kept on trying, but since I don't know the language I wasn't very successful... And then I just kind of remained here. At my current *job*. [laughs]" – I5

Daring to pronounce modest hopes for the future

There were informants who expressed dreaming of being able to provide a house for their children, getting an apartment and a job in Sweden and bringing their children here, or simply being able to live with and provide for their children in Romania. Yet they did not see how any of those dreams would become reality. Others, however, pronounced more tangible plans about how things might work out for them, or hopes on how things might change in the future.

"[Takes a deep breath] I don't wanna stay here for the rest of my life, to beg for the rest of my life. No... I'm gonna stay here until something resolves in my country. I don't know what to say. For our Government to shift their attitude, and to understand that we actually, we do need help. And then so, we can come to our home, to our own families and children. Because nowhere else, nowhere is as good as being home with your family. Nowhere." – I2

5. Discussion

In summary, the results of this study illustrate how Romanians who beg in the streets of Malmö do what is in their power to keep their noses above the water surface and to support their families. They lack conditions for good health, but make use of what resources they have in order to endure the situation - relocating to a place where it is possible to make some money, cherishing social relations and engaging in mental strategies not to succumb. Furthermore, the life situation of the women is permeated by a sort of twofold punishment, a 'damned if you do and damned if you don't'. If they stay at home with their families in Romania, which is what they most long for, they suffer because there is no way of supporting their families, and if they leave and turn to begging they suffer due to the harsh living conditions and harassment in Sweden and due to being away from their families.

The results are presented as frames of conditions and strategies to deal with the situation framed by those conditions. The strategy to deal with the Romanian frame, i.e. to temporarily leave it in order to make a living elsewhere, is in a way self-evident. Part of the inclusion criteria was that the women had made the decision to beg in the streets of Malmö. The reasons for making this decision were *not* self-evident, but rather revealed during the interviews.

Marmot (2013) describes the Social Determinants of Health as ‘the causes of the causes’ of poor or good health, the factors which determine to what extent a group or an individual is able to lead a healthy life. The results of this study largely confirm what FRA (2016a; 2016b; 2016c), Djuve et al. (2015) and Gaga (2015) have reported about the living conditions of the Roma population and VECs in both in Romania and in the host cities. Likewise, it confirms the frequent harassment that Gaga describes, and how being harassed, begging and being intermittently homeless have negative consequences for physical and mental health for the VECs. These confirmations underline that the study population’s Social Determinants of Health are very weak – the conditions under which they live and work are extremely harsh and under such circumstances, their possibilities to enjoy good health are quite limited.

The results clearly indicate how the informants struggle to cope with their situation. Mitrousi et al. (2013) review the theoretical approaches to the concept of coping. They describe one of the first explanatory models of coping with stress, *the transactional model*, created by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). This model suggests that an individual who faces a stressful situation in his/her environment makes a cognitive assessment of his/her relation to the stressful situation, and deals with the problem. Dealing with the problem may include tolerating the situation or finding ways of reducing its negative consequences. This assessment and solution, to some extent, form the outcome of the problem. The categories describing the informants’ breaching out of the Romanian frame and their mental seesawing not to succumb fit this model of coping with stress. Within the Romanian frame, in which stress is created through severe deprivation, they make an assessment of the situation and find that there *is* in fact a tangible way of reducing its negative consequences – that of going to Sweden. Within the Swedish frame, the possibilities of dealing with the stressful situation are more limited, and the mental seesawing, which at one of the ends means namely *tolerating* the situation, becomes their strategy. Mitousi et al. (2013) also describe a model, which was later added to the transactional model, by Berg et al. (1998). This addition suggests that both the stress-inducing

stimulus and strategies to cope with it are matters of the social circle surrounding the individual, rather than of the individual him/herself. For the informants of this thesis, that would imply that the assessment and ways to deal with the stressful situations are made in interaction with the people around them. The stress-inducing stimulus, are clearly *not* created by the informants, nor by the groups that they belong to, but rather by the system surrounding them. The social circles around the informants do play a crucial part for the informants, however. The strategy described in ‘cherishing relations’ underlines this. It is plausible that the informants find their ways to mentally cope with the situation in their communication with people who are in a similar situation as they are. Likewise, the social relations that some of the women have with people who permanently reside in Sweden may affect, and maybe in some cases broaden their strategies. Possibly this is not only a result of the tangible possibilities that the Swedish friends may offer, e.g. that of getting a job, but also of the meetings with and the influence of persons who possess different experiences from the ones represented by the closest family and friends of the informants.

An observation concerning the ‘damned if you do, and damned if you don’t’, in relation to the mental seesawing of the informants, is that the informants seem to get ‘punished’ by passers-by when trying to defend their dignity and ‘rewarded’ when they accept to be submissive. It is a plausible assumption that passers-by prefer to make the decision to give money without any external ‘pressure’ and that they prefer it if the person they give it to seems pleased to receive it. Possibly this is why some countries have prohibited ‘active’ or ‘aggressive’ begging. (SR, 2016b) If this assumption is correct, then that would be yet another reason for the informants not to dwell for too long at the dignity-defending side of the seesaw. This is something for passers-by to consider, when encountering different styles of begging in the streets.

Anthony Giddens (1984) dwells on the topic of human agency in relation to social structure, in his Structuration Theory, and claims that they both play a part in the construction and reconstruction of society. While it may be a truism that all human beings possess some degree of agency within their given ‘frames’, the picture drawn in this study shows just how restricted those frames are for the study population. Although they persistently make use of what agency they possess, the social structure effectively prevents them from making any profound changes and thus their agency is, largely, limited to mental coping strategies not to succumb. The agency of others, i.e. empathetic individuals and organizations in the host country, are potent when it comes to temporarily relieving the situation for the informants.

Under the circumstances described in this study, it is clear that larger changes - changes of the social structure, have to be made in order to create a sustainable improvement and more room for the population's own agency.

Methodological considerations

Charmaz' (2014) proposes that the trustworthiness of a study be assessed through its *credibility, originality, resonance* and *usefulness*. *Credibility* refers to the quality of the data and the strength of the logic between data and analysis, *originality* to the new insights provided by the study, *resonance* to the relation between the analysis and the world it springs from and *usefulness* to the contribution that the study makes to research and to people in their everyday lives. Charmaz' (2014) claims that a strong mix of credibility and originality, to some extent, result in resonance and usefulness. The strengths and limitations of the study, presented below, relate mainly to the credibility of data. The thick description provided in the introduction and methodology, together with the results, aim to provide the reader with the tools to assess its originality, resonance and usefulness.

This study fills a research gap within Public Health, by focusing on the experiences of a population (female, Romanian VECs in Malmö), that has not been studied before and constitutes a hard-to-reach population. Low trust in external researchers, negative associations between interviews and media, and not always being the primary decision maker in the family regarding participation in a project like this were some of the difficulties faced when trying to recruit informants. It is likely that the prolonged engagement, i.e. the author's and the interpreter's prior and contemporary engagement with members from the population and organizations working for them, played a crucial part regarding the level of trust experienced by the women who agreed to participate. This trust, also contributed to by the long informal chats between the interpreter and the informants when first meeting and when walking to the interview location, resulted in interviews characterized by a good rapport.

The need for interpretation during the interviews might potentially have resulted in some linguistic nuances of the stories getting lost. The flow of the interviews and the non-verbal contact between informants and the interviewer indicated that the content of interpretation was accurate, however.

Conducting snowball sampling could potentially have provided a wider variation of experiences and thus a deeper understanding of the studied phenomena, but was not possible.

The power imbalance between interviewer and the interpreter, on one hand, and the informants, on the other, was an inevitable issue to emotionally and practically deal with throughout the data collection process. Even though no economical reimbursement was promised, the food and beverages offered may potentially have been an incentive making the informants decide to participate in the study without actually being that interested in sharing their experiences. This was a dilemma, but it felt more ethical and important to be sure that the informants were not hungry, than to have the certainty that this incentive would not affect their decision. Some of them may also have hoped to get some other 'rewards' for participating, even though the information letter and oral information were clear on that matter. It is also possible that some were strategic in how they presented their stories, hoping to win some sympathy and possibly receive some help. However, the overall impression from the interviews was that the informants were personal and sincerely willing to speak about their lives. As stated by Kvale (2009), being interviewed is often a positive experience. This seemed to have been the case for the informants of this thesis. Some of them expressed this explicitly afterwards. In general, the informants seemed relieved to step out of the daily activity of begging and, through the interpretation provided, break through the language barrier and verbally communicate. Some of them expressed that sharing their stories was their way of giving something in return for what they have been given while in Sweden.

Policy and practice implications

The results confirm that the study population is *indeed* vulnerable. Their situation is fraught by poverty and exclusion, both in Romania and in Sweden. In Malmö they are intermittently homeless and sleep under rough conditions, they engage in begging and are frequently harassed. In a society, which claims to strive for health equity, these multiple determinants of ill health ought to constitute an immediate call for action.

The roots of the difficult situation of the study population lie in the circumstances surrounding them in Romania. It should therefore be a priority that the Romanian authorities make policies, which respect the human rights and target the Social Determinants of Health for its entire population, not least for the Roma. National and external NGOs could play an important part in enabling inclusion for the Romanian Roma, together with the Romanian

authorities, working against discrimination and for a shift of mentality regarding the Roma among the majority population. Sweden and the EU should continue putting pressure on Romania to take these measures.

Until things change in Romania and the study population is able to live and be healthy there, they will, by necessity, continue going to Sweden and other countries to try to make a living. To improve their situation and health, while in the Sweden, many things could be done. The most urgent ones, related to the results of this study are the following:

- Provide night shelters, or places where the VECs can legally settle, where they are allowed to sleep safely, throughout the year and in an adequate scale. Ideally these shelters could also provide the possibilities for seeing to other basic needs. The Swedish Municipality of Lund, close to Malmö, has provided such solutions in collaboration with non-profit organizations. (Hammarberg, 2017)
- Give both VECs and health care personnel information about what rights to health care services the VECs have in Sweden.
- Intensify judicial assessment of the frequent harassment that the VECs face.
- Educate and inform the Swedish population about the situation of VECs, as an effort to prevent harassment and to increase the general understanding of the phenomena of VECs begging in the Swedish streets.
- Create and scale up the already existing initiatives of offering the VECs language (Swedish and English) workshops.

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Appendix 1.

Interview guide

Could you tell me a little about yourself?

- Interests?
- What do you like to do?

Leaving Romania for Malmö

Could you tell me how you came to Sweden?

- When?
- What were your thoughts and feelings when you were planning your trip to Sweden?
- Can you give me an example of that?
- What did you do then?
- Who else, if anybody, was involved in...?

Can you describe the events that led up to the decision to go to Sweden?

- You said that... Can you give me an example of that?
- What did you do then?
- (-How did that make you feel?)
- What did that make you think?
- Who else, if anybody, was involved in...?

What were your expectations of Sweden and Malmö before you came here?

The current situation in Malmö

Can you describe what a normal day and night may be like for you here in Malmö?

- You said that... Can you give me an example of that?
- What do you do then?
- How does that make you feel?
- What did that make you think?
- Can you give me an example of what you think about when you beg?
- Can you tell me what do you think about the help that is offered to people in your situation, here in Malmö?

Health

- What are your thoughts about your health?
- Has your health been effected by coming to Sweden? How?
- What do you do to maintain health?

Returning

- Can you tell me what it's like for you when you come back to Romania?

The Future

- What are you thinking about the future?
- What are your hopes for the future?
- Is there anything else that your think is important that I understand?**

Appendix 2.

Mind map**Leaving Romania for Malmö**

- Reasons
- Decision
- Expectations
- Practicalities
- Social networks
- Arriving in Malmö

Current situation in Malmö

- A normal day
- A normal night
- Attitudes from others
- Support from institutions/organizations
- Social networks

Health

- Mental
- Physical
- Prerequisites for health: Economy, housing, food/water, clothes, hygiene, sleep, work, education, etc.

Returning

- What changes?

The future

- Thoughts
- Hopes

Appendix. 3

Table 2. Examples of the analytical step between original quotes, and initial codes.

Original quotes	Initial codes
<p>[...] my dad is also unwell. I'm also concerned for my father, that he has this spinal condition, my father's handicapped with the spine, he's unable to walk. And, I'm also, with the stress sometimes I have no appetite when I'm walking around, because I'm also thinking about my father, and my kids, and I lose my appetite, because I'm worried about my father and about my kids. [...]</p>	<p>Father being sick. Worrying about sick father. Being handicapped. Loosing appetite due to stress and worries. Worrying about father and children.</p>
<p>Normally I think that I don't wanna be sleeping outside and I think daily of my kids, and I'm thinking "What am I doing here?" Of course, I have two arms, two eyes, two legs that God gave me, I should be working... And of course, I just wanna be at home to take care of my kids.</p>	<p>Not wanting to sleep outside. Thinking about kids daily. Asking herself what she's doing here. Feeling that she should be working. Wanting to be with her children.</p>
<p>I call [my children] to see if they've eaten, to see if their clothes are washed, to see if they're going to school, if they're not fighting with kids at school.</p>	<p>Making sure that children have eaten, have clean clothes, go to school and behave well. Parenting from a distance?</p>

Appendix 4

Popular science summary

Being damned if you do and damned if you don't – a thesis about the situation of Romanian women who beg in the streets of Malmö.

During the past years the Scandinavian countries have experienced an influx of people from Eastern Europe, who beg in the streets. A lot of these persons are from Romania, and many are Roma. This phenomenon is frequently discussed in society, but there is a lack of research about the experience of the 'beggars', themselves. What are their living conditions and daily life like, and what do they do in order to deal with their situation? Those are the questions that this thesis aims to answer.

The data were collected in Malmö, Sweden. Eight women were interviewed. The interviews were then analyzed and categories, explaining the situation of the women, were created.

The results of the study showed that the women come to Sweden in order to make money, because that's the best option at hand for supporting their families. In Sweden, their living conditions are very difficult. They are worried and stressed, they struggle to be able to satisfy their basic needs and are frequently harassed. This has negative effects on their physical and mental health. Maintaining and creating new social relations is one way for them to endure their situation. Their ways to reason/think about their situation is also important for enduring.

These findings underline just how limited the possibilities are for the group in question to improve its health deteriorating situation. This calls for policy makers to take urgent action to improve the living conditions for the group. This should be done both in Romania, where the roots of the problems lie, and in the host country, where simple measures could make the situation more endurable.