

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HUMAN MIGRATION AND SOCIAL PROGRESS. REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Countries of origin, transit, and destination all benefit from migration on a national and local scale. Migration, which is sometimes associated with negative connotations and stereotypes, really facilitates the formation of bonds, the transformation of communities, and the empowerment of men and women worldwide. Strengthening local development in countries of origin requires a focus on the connection between emigration and local development. Evidence from Moldova shows that not all nations have to see emigration as a permanent loss for their country of origin. To the advantage of their native societies, the diaspora's representatives act as catalysts for progress and carriers of invaluable social capital. The European Union (EU) has created a well-rounded and all-encompassing external migration strategy via its Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, which counts migration and development as one of its four operational priority areas.

KEYWORDS: *development; migration, remittances; Republic of Moldova*

INTRODUCTION

In political and academic rhetoric, the term development was connected to the phenomenon of migration only in the 1960s. Since that moment, constant fluctuations have been recorded in the opinions regarding the univocal positive relationship that could exist between migration and development (Carling, 2014).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) mentions the two processes in tandem for the first time with the launch in 1964 of programs to attract and retain migrants with high professional qualifications. In the 1970s and 1980s, migration was associated with the failure of development policies and the inability of states or other institutions to ensure the well-being and safety of citizens, and in the 1980s and 1990s the prevailing view was that migration diminishes the prospects for local economic development, leading to stagnation and addiction. Regardless of the period in which they were issued, most opinions regarding the migration-development day fall into the optimistic-pessimistic register, with this classification being agreed by most authors in the field.

In the last 10-15 years, the binomial migration-development has transformed from a subject of academic debate to a distinct field of study and a real concern for policy makers (Profiroiu, Rădulescu & Burlacu, 2020). The change in vision also assumed that migrants were accepted as important actors in development, as international donors - states or organizations - recognized the failure of many programs aimed at reducing poverty in underdeveloped regions of the world (Abel & Sander, 2014).

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International or national entities, such as the OECD, the International Organization for Migration, the IMF, the World Bank, banks and national governments, non-profit organizations have shown the volume and nature of the effects of migration on development.

In a broad sense, development means sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction, social progress, emancipation of individuals, social-economic equity, etc. The interest of this suite of actors was manifested in official approaches that tried to measure and quantify the real benefits and/or disadvantages of the migration-development binomial (Abram et al., 2017).

The purpose of this body was to create a favorable context in which the representatives of the states identify multi-dimensional aspects of migration and ways in which countries can maximize the development benefits of migration, while minimizing, at the same time, the negative effects of human mobility at the international level.

Since the empirical link between migration and development cannot be universally and unequivocally accepted, it is appropriate to ask whose interests it succeeds in satisfying such a relationship. In this article, an attempt was made to articulate some ideas related to a series of less obvious effects of population migration in the Republic of Moldova on the development of this country, starting from the assumption that the binomial migration-development targets the interests of all parties participating in the international mobility process and represents a major transaction between the three types of actors.

1. MIGRATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA - TRENDS AND PREMISES

The decisive historical moment that influenced the evolution of migration phenomena in the Republic of Moldova is anchored in the breakup of the Soviet Union. This unprecedented event induced change in the economic, political and social order both regionally and internationally. Regarding the pressure created by the transition to democracy and the market economy, in the early 1990s, the situation of the Republic of Moldova was not different from that of other states in the former Soviet and socialist bloc. The closure of state-owned enterprises and the stagnation of exports were the main catalysts for rising unemployment and job losses (Radulescu et al., 2020). Consequently, more than 70% of the population ended up being impoverished.

Aspects such as the inopportune and inadequate way of planning and carrying out the reforms, the lack of measures to guarantee social protection, the unavailability of jobs, the lack of a viable mechanism for the relaunch and recovery of the private sector, combined with the failures of the government and political decision-makers, have contributed to creating the necessary prerequisites for triggering a mass emigration process in the Republic of Moldova (Ladaru et al., 2022).

Beginning in the late 1990s, mass economic migration contributed to the establishment of two migration poles in terms of the preferred destination areas of Moldovans. For a large majority of them, Russia was the country of destination, mainly due to common membership of the Soviet Union, geographical proximity, lack of major access constraints or prohibitive conditions of stay, low migration costs or lack of language barriers etc. Another destination state from the East, in terms of the number of migrants, was Ukraine. At the other pole, i.e. in Western Europe, are receiving countries such as Italy, Portugal, France, Spain, Greece, Czech Republic, Belgium, Great Britain, Germany, Romania and Cyprus.

Rural men, who come from relatively poor families with several members, make up the predominant group for the first category of destination countries. People from urban areas, with a higher level of education and well-being, turned to the other states. As such, we could not say that the migrants' destinations are characterized by diversity, but, on the contrary, at least in the first part of the migratory process, Moldovans were consistent in choosing the destination state.

In the absence of data, we can only assume that the share of migration to the EU and other Western states has increased over time, as a result of the decrease in travel costs, the strengthening of migrant networks in most destination states, the facilitation, on the one hand, of the access conditions of

migrants to various Western states and, on the other hand, the imposition of restrictions on migrants heading towards Russia.

To these considerations should be added the assumption that the last waves of migrants were made up of young people with a high level of education and who show obvious propensities to migrate to states other than Russia or countries from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Starting from 2014, the visa regime was liberalized for citizens of the Republic of Moldova traveling to the EU. At the same time, in Russia, in the last 5 years, the measures applied by the Russian authorities regarding migrants have contributed to limiting the access to the labor market of a significant number of Moldovan citizens (Czaika & Orazbayev, 2018). The last two destinations make up the third category of states, as departures to the American continent have two distinct features in themselves compared to the external mobility of Moldovans in EU countries: the forms of migration to Canada and the USA are legal and, in most cases, permanent.

Migrants' choices regarding the area of destination delineate another important dichotomy, which relates to the predominant factors that led Moldovan citizens to leave their country. Thus, the movements abroad of the people who chose to go to the former Soviet republics are explained by the predominance of rejection factors, which we equate with the needs induced by poverty and unemployment, and the movements in the states of Western Europe were determined to a certain extent greater than the pull factors. In such cases, the Moldovans set out to explore the opportunity structure in the destination countries.

2. DEVELOPMENT BASED ON REMITTANCES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

The socio-economic connotations of migration from Moldova include general social, economic, political, demographic effects, etc. From the point of view of the economic impact, a widely shared opinion is that migrant remittances are a remedy for underdevelopment in Moldova, with the entire economy dependent on remittances from abroad by Moldovan citizens (Figure 1). About half of the foreign currency flows from Moldova are introduced through remittances, which exceed 8 times foreign direct investments (Siegel & Lücke, 2013).

Over the years, estimates regarding the volume of remittances sent by Moldovan migrants have been made with the help of data provided by the National Bank of Moldova. Since the balance of payments prepared periodically by the NBM includes only the amounts sent in the form of foreign currency in cash through commercial banks and electronic transfer services, in order to capture the real picture of the volume of remittances to the two previously mentioned sources, the amounts sent on informal ways. This detail is important because a decade ago the proportion of sums sent using channels other than electronic or bank transfers was approaching or even exceeding the 50% threshold of total remittances (Fiorio et al., 2021).

If we corroborate the two aspects with the following three trends derived from practical sense and partly empirically validated, we help to formulate a plausible explanation for the ever-increasing figures, which have been reported from one year to the next, regarding the money sent by Moldovan migrants: the number of the migrant population in the Republic of Moldova has been steadily increasing since the late 1990s, over time, migrants have turned to those states where potential earnings were higher, for example, Western European countries, and as they have gained experience and acquired new qualifications in the receiving regions, migrants were better paid for their work.

Thus, the share of remittances in Moldova's GDP, in 2015, represented 23.4%, and in 2021 – 22.9% (Figure 2). Since the previously presented figures exceed government transfers, domestic investments, and foreign direct investments, we allow ourselves to place Moldova among the states dependent on remittances.

Remittances are the third source of income for Moldovan families, after salaries and social payments. As a rule, migrants' incomes are affected by the economic conditions of the destination country, thus, in the case of the Republic of Moldova, starting from 2008, the volume of remittances decreased

significantly against the background of the financial crisis in Russia, a fact also explained by the considerable number of economic migrants from this the country.

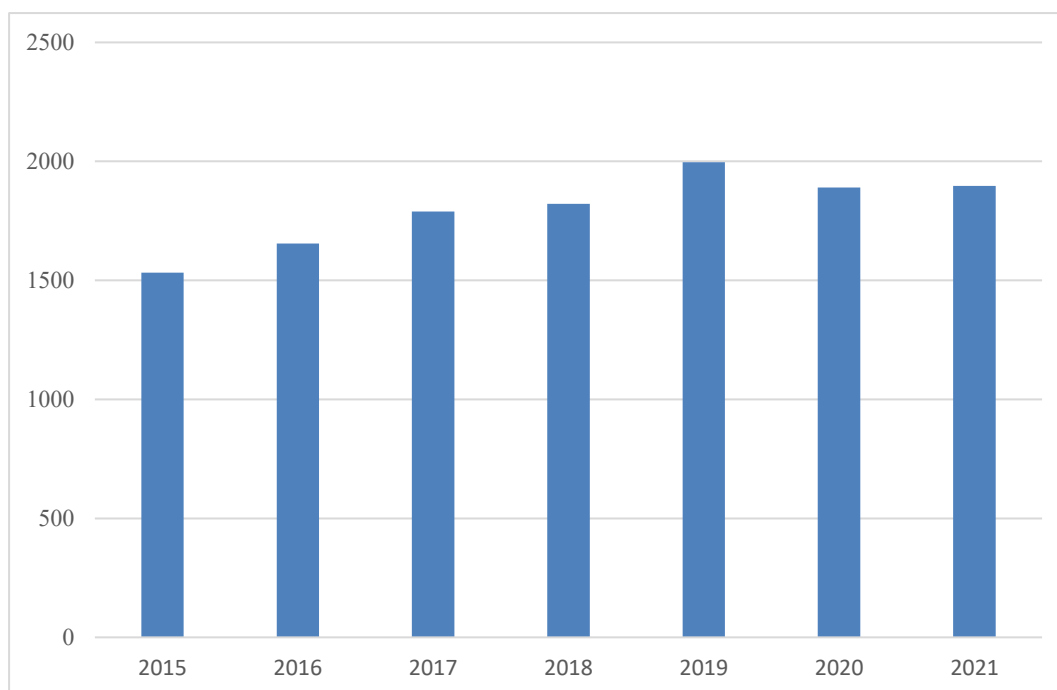


Figure 1. Total volume of remittances, billion \$ (2015-2021)

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (2022)

As for the purposes for which the money coming from abroad is used, we know that once it reaches its recipients in Moldova, between 60%-90% of the money is used to cover current expenses, only 10%-20% represents savings and 5%-15 % investments (CIVIS and IASCI, 2010; Orozco, 2007). Even more, the increase in consumption is largely due to remittances (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017). Thus, according to World Bank estimates, in poor households more than 40% of the increase in consumption is explained by the fact that those families are the recipients of remittances.

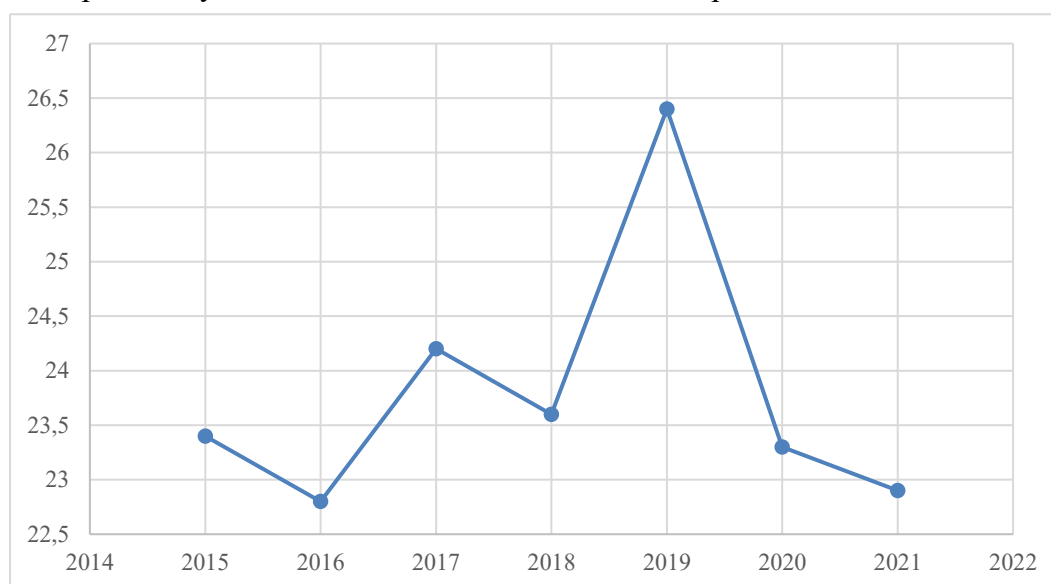


Figure 2. Share of remittances in GDP, % (2015-2021)

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (data processed by the author)

Therefore, only a small part of the migrants' earnings could be invested over time, thus having a potential to multiply development. Unfortunately, in such cases we could at most talk about the removal of some causes of poverty through remittances and not necessarily about a form of development induced by money transfers.

Moreover, the significant proportion of financial aid coming from abroad, in conjunction with the main destination of spending the money, exerts a negative effect on the degree of poverty of non-migrant families, and among migrant families it contributes to the creation of categories of people financially assisted. In the long term, this will lead to a deepening of the dependence on remittances of the families mentioned above, but also of the entire national economy. Although we would be tempted to believe that the money sent and spent in Moldova should bring clear and direct benefits to the national economy, this assumption cannot be validated in the conditions where a significant part of the consumer goods for which the amounts received from abroad are spent come from, in fact, from imports and not produced locally.

3. MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA - SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE

It is natural that the large volume of remittances and transfers made by Moldovan migrants have attracted the attention of many international specialists, who have studied the consequences of migration and the effects of remittances on the Republic of Moldova in the framework of predominantly quantitative economic analyses, but which do not consider and other characteristics of migration from Moldova and their implications on possible public policies are not drawn. Although the studies that focus mainly on the study of remittances, including the case of the Republic of Moldova, add to knowledge, they tend to oversimplify migration processes, limiting the scope of the analyzes to issues related to the determinants of remittances and the practices of migrants to send to family members sums of money intended for consumption and investments for personal purposes.

Currently, Moldova is experiencing one of the most accelerated population aging processes in the whole world, against the background of a drastic reduction in the total number of citizens. Overall, UN statistical forecasts state that by 2050 the population of Moldova will decrease by more than 15% (United Nations, 2015).

In the context of changing demographic indicators, we can expect a series of negative implications for the social and economic development of the country, including the increase in the rate of social pressure (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2013). Essentially, this scenario prescribes that one employed person will end up supporting several retired, welfare-aided, etc. people.

The mass migration of the young and able-bodied population, but also two other factors that contribute to maintaining a negative natural increase- the decreasing number of newborns and a high and relatively constant mortality rate- partially explain the new demographic trends in Moldova. Obviously, the low birth rate is also a result of population emigration. Also, another reality is that long-term or permanent migrants, married or starting families abroad, become parents in the countries of destination and not in Moldova.

Realistic forecasts of the decrease in the net flow of migrants: the maturation and permanence of the migratory process. In the matter of human mobility, time is perhaps the only element that cannot be controlled by any political decision-maker or migrant and cannot be managed through any public policy (Delhey et al., 2019).

On the other hand, it is very common for migrants to revise their plans to settle in the country of destination, return to the country of origin and the duration of their stay in the host country depending on certain individual or conjunctural factors.

The priority given to children's education, the acquisition of property rights or real estate in the country of destination, the launch of businesses and many others can be valid reasons for a migrant and his family to make the migration experience permanent (Luecke, Ganta, Radeke, 2015)

Another detail is related to the persistence of rejection factors in the migration experience of Moldovans. In this sense, in one of the surveys carried out by CBS-AXA, it was highlighted that in the absence of prospects for equalizing salary earnings in Moldova and the countries of origin, current migrants do not intend to return home even in the conditions of a decrease in income from the country of destination.

With the start of economic migration in Moldova, the volume of remittances increased constantly until 2008, when the financial crisis affected the incomes of migrants, contributing, at the same time, to the significant reduction of money transfers from abroad. But in the last two years, remittances have once again entered a downward trend.

In another interpretation, which should have been empirically demonstrated, the gradual reduction in the volume of remittances occurs against the background of the dilution of the emotional connection of migrants with the country of origin, and consequently, with the decrease of attachment there will also be a reduction of symbolic meaning of remittances (Carling, 2014). At the same time, following the permanence of migration, the propensity to make remittances will also gradually decrease. Therefore, we believe that soon the remittances of migrants from Moldova will continue to decrease, this finding being frequently highlighted in the speeches of Moldovan dignitaries, but also in official documents such as national strategies, action plans, etc.

On the other hand, in the context of permanent migration, several studies have shown that we can still expect a strong link between migration and development, even if its dynamics are changing. In the case of permanent migrants, it is observed that their incomes increase over time because of obtaining a greater degree of individual and collective autonomy, but also through the accumulation of resources and capital.

Thus, migrants improve not only their economic position, but also their social one, by solving or reducing status inconsistencies/dilemmas, in the sense that they come to be recognized as full-fledged members of the destination society, their efforts are recognized professional plan, is professionally trained following requalification's/studies in the country of destination, etc. (Huang & Chen, 2020). The potential for development, but also the desire to contribute in various ways to the modernization of the country of origin will increase with the socio-cultural and economic integration of migrants (De Haas, 2021). In this chapter, a relevant fact must be considered, namely, in some cases, integration can favor the positive orientation of migrants towards the country of origin, and in others the effect can be the opposite, alienation reducing the probability that the migrant will feel still emotionally attached to his country. Regarding the change in the form of migration, an assumption, which we cannot yet empirically validate, is that seasonal or short-term migration will gradually decrease following the general stabilization of migration flows and new directions.

The reduced costs of migration due to the liberalization of the visa regime with the European Union and the expansion of transport services, the strengthening of migrant networks in various destination states, the large-scale use of technologies that facilitate communication between those outside the country and those remaining in Moldova and the virtual involvement of migrants through social networks in debates regarding the social, political and economic subjects of Moldova contribute to emphasizing the transnational nature of migration.

Migratory experiences contribute to changing values, perceptions, and behavior patterns among non-migrants by forming a culture of migration. Among young people, this effect is more pronounced, because they begin to see their future only outside of Moldova, and such an attitude reduces their desire to create a future at home and ultimately determines their life options.

The accentuation of the perceived or real economic and social difficulties in Moldova and the registration of increasingly pronounced delays in meeting the expectations that migrants from Moldova have towards their country of origin, can influence the behavior of migrants and non-migrants.

Therefore, the decisions to leave, respectively to return to the country, to invest their savings, etc. will be taken according to the perceptions of the economic, social and political circumstances in both the country of destination and the country of origin.

Any of the premises mentioned above will eventually lead to the consolidation of migrant communities and the formation of diaspora structures of Moldovans abroad. We can also expect that following the permanent migration, three types of identity orientations will appear among migrants: towards the country of origin, the Republic of Moldova, towards the country of destination, and a third category that assumes an ambivalent identity orientation, towards both countries.

CONCLUSION

Internationally, the debate on migration and development cannot be characterized as dominated by consensus. It would also be wrong to state that there is a direct causal relationship between the two processes, since the specialized literature does not indicate many reliable empirical studies that could give weight to one opinion or another.

For some of the authors, migration is both the cause and the consequence of development, which, instead, creates and intensifies the spatial disparities that generate migration.

In the available studies, things are approached in a repetitive manner as the research conclusions and results are only applicable to macro contexts, the emphasis tends to fall unilaterally on the role of remittances in development, the transnational side of migration is neglected, etc.

This reality is due both to the heterogeneous nature of the interactions between migration and development, and to the fact that migration is a complex phenomenon that can be analyzed from several points of view. For example, in order to say that migration leads to development, it is important to have knowledge about the characteristics of the people who migrate, the determinants of migration and the means by which this process takes place, what are the exact areas of origin and destination of migrants, what are the conditions social, political, economic and cultural conjunctures in which, on the one hand, migration takes place and in which, on the other hand, we expect development to manifest itself.

Referring to a specific case, in this article I described and analyzed some of the aspects that we considered important in the context of discussions about migration and development, while also aiming to highlight the less obvious valences of migration in the Republic of Moldova.

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