

LABOR MIGRATION AND THE PHENOMENON OF TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Dorin VACULOVSCI*¹

Abstract. *Currently, international migration in the world is experiencing spectacular growth. According to United Nations estimates, in 2020 globally there were around 281 million international migrants, or 3.6% of the global population (IOM, 2022). The upward trend in migration, especially labor migration, continues, so that migration has become a defining feature of the modern global economy.*

An intensification of labor migration is also observed in the Republic of Moldova. According to the Labor Force Survey in 2022, the number of people who went abroad for a period of up to one year in search of a job was about 93 thousand people or about 7.5% of the population out of the labor force for 15 years and over. (Labor Force Survey, 2022). However, the cumulative number of labor migrants in the last 25 years from the Republic of Moldova is much higher. Various sources estimate the extent of labor migration from the Republic of Moldova from 400 thousand to one million people (Zwager N, Sințov R., 2014). The lack of employment opportunities, especially in rural areas, has led to the fact that most labor migrants are from rural areas - about 70%. (NBS, 2022)

Labor migration processes from the Republic of Moldova have become an important factor in combating poverty and increasing the well-being of the population of the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, the economic growth registered by the Republic of Moldova during the last years is precisely due to the remittances of migrant workers.

However, the migratory phenomenon in the Republic of Moldova also generates certain risks, such as human trafficking, accelerated demographic aging and the expansion of the number of transnational families, which also generates the problem of children left without parental care. As such, the phenomenon of transnational families is a global phenomenon, and various countries, through their policies, try to mitigate its negative effects.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the impact of labor migration on the expansion of the phenomenon of transnational families in the Republic of Moldova, as well as the situation of children left without care as a result of labor migration. The article comes with a series of conclusions and recommendations regarding the minimization of the negative effects of labor migration, as well as the development of social services necessary to prevent the phenomenon of children left without parental care as a result of labor migration.

Keywords: *labor migration, transnational families, children left without care after migration*

UDC: [331.556.46:316.356.2](478)

JEL Code: J62

*¹ Dorin VACULOVSCI, PhD degree, is associate professor at Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, E-mail: dorinvaculovsky@yahoo.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1500-0113

Introduction

The contemporary era can certainly be called an era of migration. In 2020, according to United Nations estimates, international migration reached over 281 million people or 3.6% of the world's population (IOM, 2022). Although the COVID-19 pandemic, in a way, has reduced the intensity of migration processes, the trend of increasing migration, especially labor migration, continues. The migratory phenomenon is characteristic of practically any state, and migration has become a defining feature of the modern global economy.

Currently, for the Republic of Moldova, considered as the country of origin, the migratory phenomenon, especially labor migration, has become a defining element of economic development. Labor migration processes from the Republic of Moldova have become an important factor in combating poverty and increasing the well-being of the population of the Republic of Moldova. And the economic growth registered by the Republic of Moldova during the last years is precisely due to the remittances of migrant workers who complete the economic circuit of the country.

According to the Labor Force Survey in 2022, the number of people who went abroad for a period of up to one year in search of a job was about 93 thousand people or about 7.5% of the population out of the labor force for 15 years and above (NBS, 2022). However, the cumulative number of labor migrants in the last 25 years from the Republic of Moldova is much higher. Various sources estimate the extent of labor migration from the Republic of Moldova from 400 thousand to one million people (Zwager N, Sințov R., 2014). According to data from the Population Census over 10 years, from 2004 to 2014, the population witnessed a decline caused by labor migration, from 3.3 million people to 2.6 million people NBS Yearbook, 2022. It should be noted that the share of people who left rural areas constitutes about 70% of all migrants (Labor Force Survey, 2022).

Although for the Republic of Moldova the migratory phenomenon has contributed to several beneficial effects, it also generates certain social risks, such as the decline of employment, the aging of the population, the expansion of the number of transnational families, the problem of children left without care as a result of labor migration. It should be noted that the problem of transnational families is becoming more widespread throughout the world, becoming a global phenomenon.

The problem of transnational families and children left without care as a result of labor migration is already known in the Republic of Moldova. During the last years, several researches were initiated in the field, and the public authorities, being aware of the seriousness of the problem, developed policies and intervention tools, including the Strategy for the Protection of the Child for the years 2014-2020, (Decision of Government no. 434 of 27.11.2014) the normative framework was perfected by the launch of Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013 "Regarding the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents", (Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013), several social services provided at the community level by the assistants were developed social workers, school psychologists, etc.

The most effective management of the situation of transnational families becomes more and more important in the situation where, against the background of globalization processes, labor migration from the Republic of Moldova will register an even greater intensification, and the problem of transnational families and children left without care will become even more widespread and will lead to the emergence of various new social risks. In this context, current research into the situation of children left without care after migration becomes increasingly important.

The purpose of the given article is to analyze the impact of labor migration on the expansion of the phenomenon of transnational families and the situation of children left without care following migration from the Republic of Moldova, to highlight the problems they face, as well as the specific needs of this social group.

1. Literature review

In the process of developing the article, a vast literature in the field was analyzed, studies, monographs, articles, normative acts, official data from government institutions concerned with the social protection of children left without care whose parents are away working abroad who are reflected in the references at the end of the article.

3. Data and Methodology

In the writing of the article and the analysis of international labor migration, its impact on the expansion of the phenomenon of transnational families and children left without care following migration from the Republic of Moldova, various quantitative and qualitative research methods were used, including the analysis of statistical data, the analysis of various documents and normative acts, sociological observation, etc. Statistical data of the National Bureau of Statistics, of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection were used, as well as some data taken from various studies carried out in recent years. The given article is largely based on the research results of the CASTLE project on the impact of migration on the situation of transnational families and children left without care following parental migration. The results of 36 in-depth interviews with parents who migrated for work or stayed at home, 4 interviews with children left behind after migration, 4 focus groups conducted later with these social groups, 11 in-depth interviews with representatives of central and local public authorities were analyzed .

3. Assessment of the situation at the national and local level

The phenomenon of labor migration from the Republic of Moldova has become more widespread in recent years, and both men and women participate in the migratory processes. As mentioned, in 2022, according to the Labor Force Survey, the number of people who went abroad for a period of up to one year in search of a job was about 93 thousand people or about 7.5% of the population outside the labor force for 15 years and

over. (NBS, 2022). However, the cumulative number of labor migrants in the last 25 years from the Republic of Moldova is much higher. Various sources estimate the extent of labor migration from the Republic of Moldova from 400 thousand to one million people (Zwager N, Sințov R., 2014).

It is considered that the migratory phenomenon contributes in a beneficial way to the development processes, both from the countries of origin and from the countries of destination by balancing the demo-economic correlation. Thus, if the country is faced with a relative overpopulation, only the migratory factor represents the most operative and efficient solution that would ensure the balance between the population and the availability of economic resources and would avoid the triggering of unforeseen human cataclysms, related to the increase in unemployment and pressure on the labor market. For the countries of destination, the migratory factor can compensate for the shortage of human resources that the country faces due to the specificity of the reproduction processes and the intense processes related to the aging of the population.

Therefore, international labor migration can be considered as an important factor for overcoming imbalances on the labor market both for the countries of origin and for the countries of destination, and migration flows become a mechanism for globally balancing the deficiencies on the domestic markets as well as an important development factor.

For the Republic of Moldova, the main reason for contemporary migration can be considered economic. The economic decline related to the effects of the transition to the market economy, the lack of investments needed to create new jobs, the lack of real employment opportunities, especially in the rural area, led to an essential deterioration of the population's well-being, to an expansion of the risk of poverty, which led a large part of the population to go abroad in search of a job. And the remittances that migrant workers send home to family members really contribute to overcoming problems related to welfare and poverty. It should be noted that in 2022 the volume of remittances in the Republic of Moldova reached the level of USD 1745.74 million (NBM, 2022).

The intensification of international labor migration from the Republic of Moldova has strongly affected the employment situation. The massive exodus of people working abroad was determined, first of all, by the lack of real employment opportunities, especially in rural areas, as well as by the extremely low salary incomes that cannot ensure a decent standard of living. Both low wages and poor employment opportunities in the Republic of Moldova are caused by economic factors inherited from the period of the socialist economy and persisting in the contemporary period, namely: the excess of labor supply, an unfavorable occupational structure, the lack of investment resources, the lack entrepreneurial spirit. All this has led to the establishment of an economic situation that cannot ensure a significant increase in added value, i.e. an increase in the social productivity of work necessary to ensure the increase in the population's income necessary for a decent living.

The data of the Labor Force Survey show that during the last two decades the activity rate, the employment rate and the unemployment rate have decreased, respectively,

from 59.9%, 54.8% and 8.5% in 2000, up to 43.3%, 42.0%, and 3.0%, respectively, in 2018. (Figure 1.).

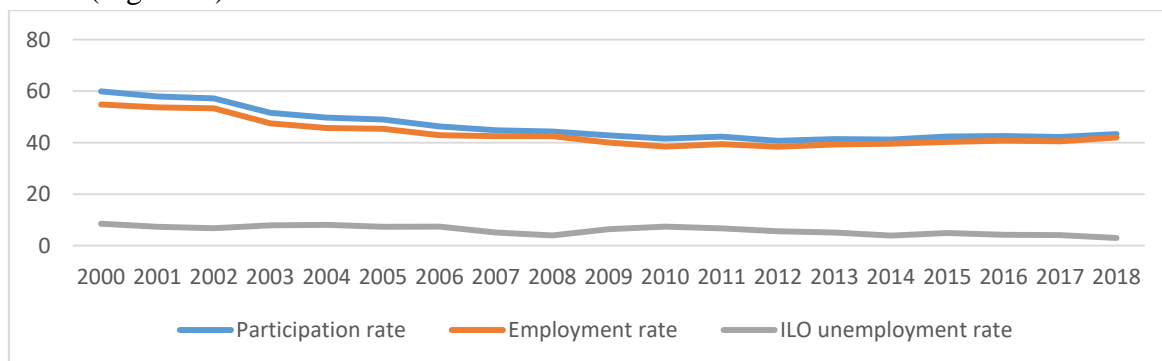


Figure 1. Activity, employment and unemployment rate in the period 2000-2018, %

Source: NBS

These trends on the labor market in the Republic of Moldova have put the public authorities on guard, motivating them to take certain measures to rectify the situation, which have materialized in various National Employment Strategies (respectively, for the period 2007-2015, 2017-2021, 2022-2026). Although the efforts of the government authorities have been major, the situation in the field of employment continues to be critical. The level of employment in the following years did not register any increases, oscillating around the 40% level, while the unemployment rate registered a stable downward trend.

The decline of occupational indicators is taking place on the background of the accelerated growth of labor migration, as well as the number of able-bodied people who do not want to work. In 2022, the number of people outside the labor force constituted 1240.1 thousand persons or 58.2% of the total population of the same age group, of which 46.7% were pensioners, 13.1%, respectively students, 13.0% - people who take care of the family (homemakers), 10.2% - people who are in the country, but who do not want to work in Moldova, because they already have a job (permanent or seasonal) abroad or people planning to work abroad. In this context, the continuous increase of NEET's² should also be noted. In 2022, the share of NEET young people constituted 17.2% of the total number of young people aged 15-24, 26.2% - among young people aged 15-29 and, respectively, 29.7% among those 15-34 years (NBS, 2022).

Thus, it can be stated that the population of the Republic of Moldova is not motivated to be present on the labor market in the republic, preferring either work abroad, or activities in the informal economy, or other types of activities than work. Indeed, in the

² The NEET group (Original English term: "Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)") represents young people aged 15-29, who are not part of the employed population, do not study/learn within the formal education system education and does not attend any courses or other training outside the formal education system.

situation where people of working age cannot find themselves in their hometowns, and cannot ensure a decent living, labor migration is the most beneficial solution.

A major social risk for the Republic of Moldova related to labor migration also represents the negative impact on demographic processes. Indeed, migration leads to the decrease of the population and therefore of the human potential, which is extremely necessary for the economic and social development of the country or community. At the same time, migration also leads to the modification of the demographic structure of the country or the community in the sense of the accelerated aging of the population, which generates serious social problems. The fact that people of working age and therefore of reproductive age migrate, migration also leads to a reduction in the birth rate, as well as an increase in the economic dependency ratio.

A recognized social risk of labor migration from the Republic of Moldova can also be considered the expansion of transnational families and the increase in the number of children left without care as a result of migration. The expansion of the number of transnational families can be seen as a challenge for the social development of the country, for social cohesion at the community level.

The expansion of transnational families affects family integrity and can generate certain risks related to the situation of children left without parental care following labor migration.

It should be noted that the problem of transnational families is becoming more widespread throughout the world, in the context of globalization processes. Various countries, through their policies, try to mitigate its negative effects.

Currently, the public authorities of the Republic of Moldova, aware of the seriousness of the problem, especially the one related to the situation of children left without care as a result of labor migration, have developed several policies and intervention tools. Can be mentioned such activities as improving the legislative framework related to the protection of children, the development of various services community level, monitoring children left without care after migration. Thus, in 2013 Law no. 140 "Regarding the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents" (Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013), the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection initiated an investigation, the purpose of which is to monitor children at risk and children separated from their parents Investigation CER-103. According to the CER-103 Survey (Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, 2021), in 2021 the total number of cases of children separated from their parents on the records of local public authorities was 34,107 children, of which 24,763 children from rural areas. Of these, 29,186, including 21,684 from rural areas, are children whose both parents or one parent are temporarily abroad.

Migration affects, first, the family balance, which has a strong impact on the psycho-emotional balance of the wives and children, as well as the husbands who stayed at home or left for migration to ensure their livelihood and that of their families. Migration strongly influences the psycho-emotional development of children left without parental care, as well as their health, education, and socialization.

Interviews with migrant and stay-at-home parents, as well as with children whose parents are abroad as part of the CASTLE research, showed that the absence of one or both parents causes affective deficiencies in the relationships between parents and children. Affective deficiencies are more severe and irreversible in children abandoned at an early age. Sadness, longing, emptiness, are the consequences conditioned by the lack of parents, the lack of maternal affection, the lack of a secure environment. Children especially feel the lack of parental warmth and love at holidays, including birthdays. The situation is similar when the parents are not with the children even on the most important family holidays - Christmas, Easter, etc.

The psychological impact of parents' migration on children left without care is characterized by the feeling of loneliness, lack of affection, emotional deprivation, these being accompanied by early maturation, anxiety and fear of a possible divorce of the parents. Lack of affection and emotional deprivation cannot ensure children's attachment, security and protection, and this negatively influences children's personality development. They become frustrated not only because of the inability to receive affection, but also to give it. Emotional deprivation leaves its mark on the child's psychological development, influencing self-perception and hindering the process of social integration and assimilation of social roles.

Parents' migration can affect children's diet and nutritional balance. Children feed themselves insufficiently and incorrectly, a fact that leaves its mark on the appearance and development of some diseases. It also increases the risk of developing unsanitary conditions.

CASTLE research has shown that when parents go abroad, children take over their roles not only in maintaining the household, but also in caring for younger brothers and sisters. The internal balance of the family is disturbed by the departure of a parent. The family has to reorganize and adapt, which is a long process that can take several months.

At the same time, children do not possess knowledge and there is no one to inform them about health risk behaviors, about life skills and sexual education. Under these conditions, they fill this informational vacuum by talking with peers, searching for information on the Internet which does not always provide correct information.

Children with parents who have gone to work abroad often do not establish friendly relations with their peers either because they are not understood, or because they do not want to divulge family secrets, or because of a lack of free time, etc. The support networks of these children are poorly developed, most often limited to discussions with managers, teachers, psychologists. Migration conditions the weakening of the interaction of the child with migrant parents with the educational institution due to the lack of supervision and control on the part of the parents, the multiple "new" responsibilities of these children, the misunderstanding on the part of teachers, peers; lack of partnership between family and school, etc.

Although access to medical services, according to the legislation in force, is offered free of charge to all children, when children are left in the care of a minor, they do not know and cannot act promptly on the health changes of the little ones, respectively, the risk of developing complications and serious developments of the acute disease is growing.

The CASTLE research showed that children believe that parents' migration is determined by the intention to escape poverty or to improve life and living conditions, by the lack of employment opportunities at home, by the impossibility of providing children with a good education, etc. The children's acceptance or non-acceptance of parents' migration depends on their age, the way in which the parents requested the children's opinion, the person in whose care they remained and, last but not least, the frequency of communication between children and parents through modern information technologies.

The central and local public authorities in the Republic of Moldova are aware of the seriousness of the given problem and the need to undertake consolidated measures to meet the needs of children left without care whose parents are away working abroad, and to protect their rights in the most complex way possible. For this purpose, the first normative act focused on the issue of children left without care following migration was the National Action Plan regarding the protection of children left without parental care for the years 2010-2011 (Government Decision No. 450 of 02.06.2010). The plan provides for a series of multidisciplinary actions aimed to ensure the protection and well-being of children left without parental care.

At the same time, considering that the problem of transnational families and children left without care as a result of labor migration is becoming increasingly urgent, in 2013 Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013 "Regarding the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents" was launched. (Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013).

CASTLE research has shown that representatives of local public authorities believe that this law allows them to effectively exercise their functions vis-à-vis the situation of transnational families and children left without care as a result of migration.

The change in the real situation in the Republic of Moldova determined that the given law should be adapted to the new conditions. For this reason, in 2020 Law No. 112 of 09-07-2020 "For the amendment of some normative acts" (Law 112 of 27.12.2020) which provides for a more simplified mechanism for establishing custody for children left without care following labor migration instead of tutelage or guardianship.

In order to deal with the situation created in order to avoid the risks related to the problem of the expansion of transnational families and children left without care after migration, local public authorities are also making colossal efforts. At the local level, in order to overcome the risks related to the problem of children left without care after migration, various actors are involved: mayors, social pedagogues, family doctors, social workers, etc. representatives of civil society are also involved, coming up with various innovative social initiatives to make life easier for children in the given category. Effective communication with potentially migrant parents is ensured.

The representatives of the local public authorities also come up with some proposals regarding the improvement of the normative framework focused on the protection of children left without care. Thus, they believe that custody as a form of child protection is good, but with the determination of certain age criteria. However, an 80-year-old person who also needs care cannot be given custody of a minor child.

Thus, it can be concluded that the public authorities of the Republic of Moldova are aware of the seriousness of the situation and react promptly to the various forms of manifestation of the problem of transnational families and children left without care as a result of labor migration, and the problem given in recent years is managed quite effectively.

Conclusions

Labor migration from the Republic of Moldova had a rather beneficial impact on the economic and social development of the Republic of Moldova. By increasing the volume of remittances, international labor migration has led to an increase in the well-being of the population and the fight against poverty.

At the same time, labor migration has also generated a series of social risks, such as the decline of employment on the labor market, the aging of the population, the expansion of transnational families, the problem of children left without care as a migration result.

The central and local public authorities in the Republic of Moldova are aware of the risks of international labor migration and try to overcome them quite effectively, either by the adaptation of the regulatory framework, or by promoting coherent and efficient public policies, or by developing new public services for affected social groups of migration.

Acknowledgement

This article was elaborated within the project "Children Left Behind by Labour Migration: Supporting Moldovan and Ukrainian Transnational Families in the EU (CASTEL), contract number: ICMPD/2021/MPF-357-004

References

- Bădescu, I. (2013). *International Migration as a Social Problem, Case Study: Labor Migrants in Italy*. <http://sociologia-azi.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Chestiunea-sociala-a-migratiei-pentru-munca.pdf>
- Cheianu-Andrei, D., Gramma, R., Milicenco, S., Pritcan, V., Rusnac, V., & Vaculovschi, D. (2011). *Specific Needs of Children and Elderly Left Behind as a Consequence of Migration*. USM. <https://sociopolis.md/uploads/0/images/large/110-necesit-cop-virst-en.pdf>
- Gagauz, O., & Buciuceanu-Vrabie, M. (2013). Calitatea vieții copiilor – un factor de impact în dezvoltarea durabilă a Republicii Moldova. *Monitorul social*, 17. http://www.viitorul.org/files/4292353_md_monitorul_soci_0.pdf
- Hotărâre Nr. 434 din 10-06-2014 privind aprobarea Strategiei pentru protecția copilului pe anii 2014-2020. [Guvernul]. (2014). *Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Moldova*, 160-166. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=18628&lang=ro
- Hotărâre Nr. 450 din 02.06.2010 pentru aprobarea Planului național de acțiuni cu privire la protecția copiilor rămași fără îngrijirea părinților pentru anii 2010-2011. [Guvernul]. (2010). *Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Moldova*, 87-90. lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=334796

- Hotărâre Nr. 785 din 16-11-2022 cu privire la aprobarea Programului national pentru ocuparea forței de muncă pe anii 2022-2026 și a Planului de acțiuni privind implementarea acestuia. [Guvernul]. (2022). *Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Moldova*, 411-412. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=134612&lang=ro
- International Organization of Migration. (2022). *World Migration Report 2022*. <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022>
- Lege Nr. 140 din 14-06-2013 privind protecția specială a copiilor aflați în situație de risc și a copiilor separați de părinți. (2013). *Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Moldova*, 167-172, art. 534. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=110518&lang=ro
- Lege Nr. 212 din 27-11-2020 pentru modificarea unor acte normative. (2020). *Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Moldova*, 344-351. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=124474&lang=ro
- Lege Nr. 315 din 17-11-2022 pentru aprobarea Strategiei naționale de dezvoltare „Moldova Europeană 2030”. (2022). *Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Moldova*, 409-410. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=134582&lang=ro
- Ministerul Muncii și protecției sociale al Republicii Moldova. (2021). *Raport statistic cu privire la copiii aflați în situație de risc și copiii separați de părinți în anul 2021*. https://social.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Raport-CER-103_Copii-aflati-in-situatie-de-risc-si-copii-separati-de-parinti_-pentru-2021c-1.pdf
- National Bank of Moldova. (2022). *Transfers of funds from abroad made in favor of natural persons (on a net basis)*. <https://www.bnm.md/bdi/pages/reports/dbp/DBP4.xhtml?id=0&lang=ro>
- National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. (2022). *Labor Force in the Republic of Moldova, 2022. Employment and unemployment in 2022*. https://statistica.gov.md/en/labour-force-in-the-republic-of-moldova-employment-and-unemployment-9430_60383.html
- National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. (2022). Population and demographic structure. In *Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova 2022* (pp. 35-58). https://statistica.gov.md/files/files/publicatii_electronice/Anuar_Statistic/2022/2_AS.pdf
- Robila, M. (2012). The impact of migration on children's psychological and academic functioning in the Republic of Moldova. *International Migration*, 52 (3), 221–235.
- UNICEF, & CIDDC. (2006). *UNICEF Working Paper Children "Left Behind"*. <https://www.unicef.org/media/83581/file/Children-Left-Behind.pdf>
- UNICEF. (2015). *Children left without parental care. Evaluation of official and unofficial guardianship within the child care and protection system in the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau*. <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/media/841/file/Copii-ramasi-fara-ingrijire-parinteasca.pdf>
- Zwager, N., & Sintov, R. (2014). *Market Study: Innovation in circular migration - Migration and development in Moldova*. IASCI. <http://civis.md/Archive/IASCI-CIVIS%20Migratie%20si%20desvoltare%20in%20Moldova%20studiu%20de%20piata%202014.pdf>