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THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND THE MIGRATION

MIGRATION AND ITS RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

Anna Stemmer

Migration from the Republic of Moldova is a relatively recent phenomenon, as the opportunity for people to leave the country has only really existed since the fall of the Iron Curtain and the Republic's gaining of independence. However, many Moldovan citizens have already taken advantage of this opportunity and have left their homeland. Economic, social and political factors have been the driving force behind this migration flow. This huge drain on the workforce has led to lower production, increased social pressures, families being torn apart, demographic changes, and changes to the whole political structure

CURRENT MIGRATION MOVEMENTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA¹

Migration is not a new issue in the Republic of Moldova's political arena, but it is a highly charged one. Most emigrants leave for economic reasons. The Republic of Moldova is the poorest country in Europe and is ranked 99th of 169 countries worldwide that are listed in the *Human Development Index 2010*. By comparison, its neighbour Romania is ranked 50th.² Despite the fundamental importance of

- 1 | The author and editorial team would like to thank Dr Holger Dix, the head of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung office in Bucharest, and Natalia Corobca-Ianusevici, Project Coordinator in the office in Moldova, for reading through this article and offering their comments.
- 2 | "Human Development Index and its components," *Human Development Report 2010, The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2010), http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2010_EN_Table1_reprint.pdf (accessed August 17, 2011).

this issue there are no exact figures for the number of emigrants who now live and work in other countries. One of the possible reasons for this lack of information is the absence of long-term relevant data relating to the emigration process. There is also a lack of effective governmental control over the country's eastern border. This is due to an ongoing conflict with Transnistria, which actively encourages migrants to cross the eastern border and then falsifies the number of migrants who actually do cross. The Moldovan government also lacks any information on migration out of Transnistria, as this region has not been under the control of the Moldovan authorities since 1992. Because of this, all the facts presented in this article refer only to the Republic of Moldova, and exclude the disputed region of Transnistria.³

Fig. 1

Moldova and self-declared state Transnistria



With a population of around 3.5 million inhabitants,⁴ the Republic of Moldova has one of the biggest migration levels

3 | Mihail Salvir, *Trends and Policies in the Black Sea Region: cases of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine*, (Chişinău: Institute for Development and Social Initiatives „Viitorul”, 2008).

4 | Biroul Naţional de Statistică al Republicii Moldova, *Moldova în Cifre. Breviar statistic 2011*, 8, http://www.statistica.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/Moldova_in_cifre/2011/Moldova_in_cifre_2011_rom_rus.pdf (accessed July 22, 2011).

in the world. A mass emigration movement started at the end of the 1990s and reached its highpoint in 2005 with around 400,000 people leaving the country. This number is based on a survey, but if reports from the Moldovan border police are to be believed, the figure was in fact nearer to 750,000. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimates that the true number of emigrants was around 600,000. The IOM is currently working with the Republic of Moldova to improve the sources and processing of the relevant data in order to get a much clearer picture using the Extended Migration Profile.

Almost one in three of the Republic of Moldova's labour force is involved in the migration process.

Since 1999 there have been two major migration flows, one in the direction of CIS countries (predominantly the Russian Federation – around 60 per cent) and the other towards the European Union (mainly Italy, followed by Portugal, Romania, Spain and France). Sociological studies carried out between 2004 and 2008 confirmed that almost one in three of the Republic of Moldova's labour force is involved in the migration process in one way or another.⁵ There are many different reasons why people choose to migrate.

Labour Migration

"Labour migration" refers to migration in or out of a country in order to take up employment in another country which is not the migrant's country of origin. This could also be referred to as "labour market-driven migration".⁶ There is a strong tendency with this type of migration for people to move to large towns and cities. Three-quarters of all Moldovan migrants who moved to find work now live in 10 major cities (including Moscow, Rome, Saint Petersburg, Istanbul and Odessa).⁷

5 | Valeriy Moschneaga, regional summit in Moscow 2009: CIS partnership on migration and finding effective solutions.

6 | Marianne Haase and Jan Jugl, "Arbeitsmigration," Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (German Federal Agency for Civic Education), November 5, 2007, in: <http://bpb.de/themen/3HSUHY,0,0,Arbeitsmigration> (accessed February 20, 2011).

7 | The figures are taken from the 2008 trilateral project "Managing Migration in the Black Sea Region: Improving the Implementation of National Policies in Ukraine, Moldova and Romania through Regional Cooperation between NGOs". Source: Institute for Public Policy Institute for Development and Social Initiatives "Viitorul" International Centre for Policy Studies.

Two thirds of Moldovan migrants are male and one third female, though the female percentage is growing. The average age of a Moldovan migrant is 35 and most of them already have families. One consequence of this is that many children of migrants become neglected as a result of their long stays abroad and many families find it difficult to survive the pressure, despite one partner being financially supported by the other.

Table 1

Target cities for Moldovan migrants

Rank	City	Number of migrants	%
1	Moscow (Russia)	145,388	51.69
2	Rome (Italy)	12,815	4.56
3	Saint Petersburg (Russia)	9,084	3.23
4	Istanbul (Turkey)	8,597	3.06
5	Odessa (Ukraine)	7,650	2.72
6	Lisbon (Portugal)	6,294	2.24
7	Milan (Italy)	5,801	2.06
8	Padua (Italy)	4,849	1.72
9	Paris (France)	4,222	1.50
10	Tyumen (Russia)	3,893	1.38

Source: Salvir, *Trends and Policies in the Black Sea Region*, n. 3.

Male migrants looking for work tend to prefer Russia, the Ukraine, Spain and Portugal, where they mostly get jobs in the construction industry. Women on the other hand tend to opt for Italy and Turkey where they can find work in domestic service or in retirement and nursing homes. Many Moldovan citizens believe that the number of people leaving the country to look for work will grow significantly, irrespective of changes in demographic factors, GDP figures or the amount of money sent back home.

The main reason people emigrate is the low average monthly income in the Republic of Moldova, which in 2011 is around 180 Euro. An average increase in income of 8 per cent would suggest that incomes are rising steeply, but high inflation in the Republic of Moldova means that in real terms incomes have only risen by 2.2 per cent in comparison to last year. The best-paid jobs are in the banking and finance sector, while the lowest-paid are in

agriculture and forestry. Almost half of family income goes on food. In January 2010 the Moldovan government passed a law to impose a minimum wage, which in 2010 was 66.5 Euro per month.⁸ With people working an average of 169 hours per month, this works out at around 0.40 Euro per hour. Businesses in the agricultural and forestry sector are treated as an exception and here the minimum wage is even lower at around 50 Euro per month.⁹

“Push factors” for those leaving Moldova to look for work include the uncertain political situation and economic factors that have led to high youth unemployment, low incomes and a low standard of living. The

Moldova’s rural population in particular relies on development cooperation. The number of people who have to get by on a dollar a day or less has risen significantly since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

collapse of the Soviet Union was what prompted many people to leave the country in search of a better life, because the Republic of Moldova’s economy cannot survive without external support. Moldova’s rural population in particular relies on development cooperation. In many villages in southern Moldova there is a lack of essentials such as food, drinking water and clothing. The number of people who have to get by on a dollar a day or less has risen significantly since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Elite Migration

The migration of the country’s elite is an economic and political problem for the Republic of Moldova. The country is losing its most valuable scientists, engineers and business people. This kind of brain drain could also become a problem for Russia and the EU. Both sides have a vested interest in the educational elite of their neighbouring countries staying where they are, as this is the only way to create stability in the region. Russia, and to a lesser extent the EU, continue to act as mediators and guarantors of peace in the Transnistria conflict.

Today there are two types of migration flow of elite workers out of Republic of Moldova: the first group consists of the migrants who are financed by foundations and businesses

8 | The original amount in local currency is 1,100 Leu. The conversion rate as of February 24, 2011 has been used.

9 | Biroul Național de Statistică al Republicii Moldova, population income figures 2009.

abroad. These include academics, gifted students, artists, top sportsmen and women and managers of multinational businesses. The number of people in this category is, however, very small and they are dependent on financial assistance or scholarships. The second group consists of those people who can finance their stay in their target country themselves. This group includes the moneyed classes who are looking for better education or career opportunities and who therefore tend to migrate to either

Russia (Russian speaking people), Europe (mostly to Germany, England or Romania) or the USA. Many highly qualified specialists or young people then settle in these countries and either get a specialist job or become self-employed. This is a major drawback for

Moldova, where there is a real need for highly educated specialists. It is precisely these specialists who are turning their backs on their homeland because, following the high numbers of emigrants leaving the country before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there are now very few professors, teachers and researchers who are prepared to put up with the kind of unsatisfactory working conditions that are to be found in universities or research institutes in Moldova. So, although the number of the country's elite workers leaving the county is quite small in real terms, it is still a serious problem for the Republic of Moldova.

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In Moldova there are plenty of vacancies for qualified professionals but there is a dearth of young people to fill them. Low salaries amongst teachers, professors, trainers and vocational college teachers has resulted in many people opting to either work in industry or leave the country. As a result many schools have insufficient teachers or trainers or the quality of the teaching is very low due to a lack of books or technical equipment. This means that it is very difficult for low-income people to achieve any kind of social advancement through study or vocational training.

Au-pair Migration

While many people think of au-pair work as an opportunity for young people to enjoy some kind of cultural exchange or improve their language skills by staying with a host family, for many young people it also offers the possibility

of entering the EU legally for one year, something they would otherwise have little or no chance of doing legally, due to restrictive immigration policies for those living in non-EU countries. For a variety of reasons many au-pairs hope they will be able to extend their stays. Some want to study or do some kind of training, while others are hoping to break away from traditional gender roles or employment opportunities.¹⁰

Many young Moldovans with limited prospects see being an au-pair as the only way to get into an EU country legally, with a view to then trying to increase their financial or cultural capital in order to improve their future prospects.

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A majority of young au-pairs set off with the intention of creating a better future for themselves. It is normally possible to get an extension to their visas in the EU if they study, do a year of voluntary social work or get married. Almost every Moldovan woman who decides to become an au-pair does so because it seems like a good idea to leave the country in order to improve their education and enhance their future prospects.

Marriage Migration

Marriage migration into EU countries has always existed, but the numbers have fluctuated over the years. For the Republic of Moldova, this type of migration really started to take off at the beginning of the 1990s.

According to the newspaper *Komsomolskaya*, 9,000 Moldovan women married men from other countries in 2006 alone. "In 2009 almost 16,000 marriage certificates were issued to couples in the Republic of Moldova where one of the partners was from another country. We can safely assume that the figure for the last ten years is at least ten times this amount" claimed the paper.¹¹ This migration

10 | Cf. "Au-Pair Migration," *Aus dem Schatten. Recherchen zu den Lebens- und Arbeitsbedingungen illegalisierter MigrantInnen im Großraum Stuttgart*, Antira, <http://ausdemschatten.antira.info/methode/migrationswege/Au-pair-migration> (accessed October 10, 2010).

11 | *Комсомольская правда (Komsomolskaya Pravda)*, September 20, 2006.

flow continues to grow and could have a significant impact on Moldova's demographics. Moldovan politicians may well have put the issue at the top of their agenda, but so far nothing has really been done about it. According to Moldova's own statistics, Moldovan women tend to marry men from the Ukraine, Turkey, Russia, Italy, Germany, Portugal and Greece, which are also the countries where the majority of migrant workers now live.¹²

Marriages of convenience with foreigners often result in women being forced into the sex industry or being used as unpaid housekeepers or carers for their husband's parents. While many people are aware that marriage migration can often pose a problem due to the potential for human trafficking, the difficulties encountered by those who enter into such an arrangement voluntarily are often overlooked. Even voluntary marriage migration can exact a high price on the women who leave their homeland.¹³

Circular Migration

Circular migration is a type of migration where migrants retain their homes in their country of origin but regularly move to another country for different periods of time to do business or to work. The possibilities for this type of circular migration increased for the people of Moldova when Bulgaria and Romania became members of the EU. Circular migration is possible either with the relevant visa or work permit or can be done illegally. In the latter case most circular migrants arrive on a tourist visa, which allows them to visit but not to work. What actually constitutes circular migration is not really clearly defined. It includes people who stay in another country for several months, but it also includes those who only go there for a few days, such as a working week, but who do this on a regular basis. It includes people who only go to neighbouring countries but also those who travel further afield, and their activities

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12 | Cf. "Гражданки Молдовы предпочитают выходить замуж за иностранцев" (Moldovans favour foreigners), *Sanatate*, January 22, 2009, <http://sanatate.md/?l=ru&a=news&i=1778> (accessed August 17, 2011).

13 | Sabina Stelzig, *Heiratsmigration nach Deutschland*, Hamburgisches WeltWirtschaftsinstitut (Hamburg Institute of International Economics), 2005.

range from salaried positions to working as (travelling) salespeople. The distinctions between cross-border trading, travelling sales and seasonal work are somewhat hazy.¹⁴

Many Moldovans who are allowed to enter the EU without a visa, such as those who have Romanian passports, often travel regularly to countries like Germany or the Netherlands to buy used cars in order to sell them back home in Moldova. They often combine these trips with transporting paying passengers.

Irrespective of whether they need a visa or not, many rural Moldovans go abroad to work on farms (often in England, Germany, Italy or Romania). The majority of unemployed Moldovan women over 40 look for domestic jobs or work as carers in Italy. In 2010, for example, 80,000 non-EU citizens were given work permits in Italy.

In 2007 the American Embassy in Moldova also issued 5,000 visas in connection with the popular Work and Travel study programme. This programme mainly offers students the opportunity to gain work experience in the United States during the summer holidays. According to the Moldovan ambassador in the USA, Nikolai Chirtoaca, 40 per cent of the students stayed beyond the expiry date on their visas and 20 per cent never returned to Moldova at all, despite the fact that returning to the Republic of Moldova was obligatory under the terms of the visa.¹⁵

The U.S. Embassy issued 5,000 visas in connection with the popular Work and Travel study programme in 2007. 20 per cent of the students never returned to Moldova.

In order to try to avoid this type of situation, in October 2009 the Moldovan government introduced an economic action plan aimed at encouraging Moldovan seasonal workers to return to their homeland. It is hoped that in this way the Moldovan workers who return home will be able to help compensate for the lack of qualified people in the country. Both the Moldovan National Agency for

14 | Cf. Franck Düvell, *Europäische und internationale Migration*, Hamburg, 2006, 130.

15 | Lilia Gurez, "Программа Summer Work & Travel в США: для одних – прибыль, для других – кошмар" (Summer Program Work & Travel in the USA can be for some moldovan people an asset but for some of them a nightmare), *Timpul, Centrul de Investigatii Jurnalistice*, February 29, 2008, in: <http://migratie.md/news/1307/ru.html> (accessed August 17, 2011).

Employment and EU-backed projects offer various job opportunities within the country, along with free training courses to improve the job prospects for migrants.

Forced Migration

Between 1989 and 1996 the CIS was home to around 870,000 refugees and people who felt forced to migrate. These were people who fled from armed conflicts and who sought asylum mainly in the Russian Federation, the Ukraine or EU countries. In 1992 more than 60,000 people fled to the Ukraine from the Republic of Moldova as a result of the conflict between Transnistria and Moldova.¹⁶

It is often suggested that many people were forced to return home against their will. Immediately following the founding of the new Moldovan state there were heightened tensions between Moldova and the area to the east of the Dniester, where the majority of people were Russian and Ukrainian speakers. This led to a serious internal political problems and forced migrations. The end result was that when the Soviet Union collapsed, Transnistria split from the Moldovan heartland to the west of the Dniester, which had much closer links to Romania in terms of history and language. This led to the formation of the self-proclaimed "Trans-Dniester Republic", which is not recognised anywhere in the world.¹⁷ Many Moldovans with Russian citizenship were forced to return to Russia against their will as a result of the Transnistria conflict.

A relatively small group of those considered refugees and asylum-seekers come from the Republic of Moldova. These refugees are not really part of the forced migration in the strictest sense, as they are predominantly economic migrants. They use neighbouring countries as transit countries and are generally to be found in countries to the west, such as Poland, Romania, Belarus and the

Economic migrants use neighbouring countries as transit countries and are generally to be found in countries to the west. Their migration routes are very similar to those of illegal migrants.

16 | Valeriu Prohnitchi, Alexandru Oprunenco and Ion Lapteacru (eds.), *The quality of economic growth and its impact on human development*, Chişinău 2006, 10 (Study by the International Organisation for Migration).

17 | Cf. National Model United Nations 2005, 8, Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, Fachhochschule Kiel as representation agency in Moldova Republic of Moldova.

Ukraine. Their migration routes and networks are very similar to those of illegal migrants.

Human Trafficking

The huge migration pressures in Moldova mean that this small country now has a significant problem with human trafficking, an issue which has grown in importance over the last ten years. Poverty forces a lot of women to go down the illegal migration route and as a result thousands of victims of human trafficking turn up all over the world, even though nobody working in the field or organised crime can put an exact figure on the actual number of victims. The Republic of Moldova is a good example of how migration and human trafficking are often inextricably bound.

Moldova, Romania and the Ukraine are the top supplier countries for the trafficking of women in Eastern Europe. Poverty and misery are common features amongst supplier countries.

When the trafficking of women is analysed in terms of supplier, transit and target countries, then the Republic of Moldova, Romania and the Ukraine come out as the top supplier countries in Eastern Europe. Poverty and misery are common features amongst supplier countries. In many ways the women from Moldova who become the victims of human trafficking are already victims of the difficult conditions that exist in their country. According to the Ministry of the Interior, Moldovan women and girls usually end up in one of five regions where they suffer sexual exploitation:

1. Turkey, Cyprus, Greece, Lebanon, Syria, Israel, United Arab Emirates
2. Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland
3. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia
4. Italy, France, Portugal, Germany
5. Russia¹⁸

18 | Anton Cosa and Burkhard Haneke, "Armut-Migration-Frauenhandel: Das Beispiel Republik Moldau," in: Renovabis (ed.), *Die Würde der Frau ist (un)antastbar. Zehn Jahre Aktionsbündnis gegen Frauenhandel*, Freising 2010, http://gegen-frauenhandel.de/sites/gegen-frauenhandel.de/files/2007_vortrag_bischof_anton_cosa-burkhard_haneke.pdf (accessed August 17, 2011).

Many people associate human trafficking with girls and women who are forcibly removed from their country, held prisoner and forced into prostitution, but the phenomenon is in fact much more complex. Along with human trafficking, the trade in human organs is a major cause for concern.

According to the Moldovan Ministry of the Interior, there are 30 people currently living in the village of Mingir who only have one kidney. In the surrounding area there are another 20 in a similar situation. And these are just the cases which have been officially recorded. For many Moldovans internal organs are the only assets they can possibly sell. In line with "international standards", a Moldovan citizen can get around 1,000 to 3,000 U.S. dollars for a kidney, before deductions for the middle-man's commission. A kidney can then be sold for 50,000 to 100,000 U.S. dollars. In Western Europe alone around 40,000 patients are on the waiting list for a healthy kidney. A third of them will die before a kidney is found for them, so demand far outstrips supply. It is not too difficult to see how much profit middle-men have made and continue to make out of this situation. The village of Mingir is just the tip of the iceberg.¹⁹

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In August 2001 changes to the law were introduced and today those found guilty of human trafficking for profit can be sent to prison for terms ranging from five to 25 years. Prior to 2001 the maximum sentence for human trafficking or trading in internal organs was one year. The main problem for the authorities in dealing with this issue is that it is almost impossible for them to get sworn statements from Mafia victims. They tend to either say nothing about their illegal journey or maintain that they went of their own free will.

Illegal Migration

Dealing with illegal migration has become a key issue for both politicians and the media in the Republic of Moldova. The main focus of the debate is the sheer number of

19 | Дария Горская/Ирина Копровская, Факты" (Daria Gorskaya/Irina Koprovskaia, Facts), *Semya.kz*, <http://semya.kz/news/2008-09-07-901> (accessed August 17, 2010).

illegal migrants from such a small country. The majority of migrants who currently have no legal residency status initially travelled to their destination country legally and only lost this legal status after taking up work or staying beyond the legal time limit specified on their visa. The EU countries are home to the highest proportion of illegal Moldovan workers.

It is estimated that up to 95 per cent of all Moldovans who live abroad have settled in their host country illegally in order to work.

For many Moldovans, breaking the law is the price they have to pay if they want to work abroad. They often have no chance of legally travelling to their country of choice, settling there and starting work. It is estimated that up to 95 per cent of all Moldovans who live abroad have settled in their host country illegally in order to work.²⁰

On average it costs a Moldovan migrant around 500 Euros²¹ get a work permit, visa and all the necessary paperwork for their host country. Migrating to Russia only costs around 80 Euro on average (mostly travel costs, as visas are not necessary), Portugal 1,400 Euro, Italy 1,500 Euro and Spain as much as 1,700 Euro. The visa itself is usually the smallest part of the costs. A tourist visa for EU countries costs as little as 35 Euro at the Common Visa Application Center in the Hungarian Embassy, where visas for 15 EU countries and for Switzerland are issued centrally. The living costs and risks involved in working illegally in Russia are much lower than in EU countries, but potential earnings in the EU are significantly higher.

Many different transport routes are used for illegal migration and they are constantly changing, depending on the latest situation in Moldova. There are various factors which influence the choice of route, ranging from geographical factors, the presence of customs investigators, attempts to minimise passport controls, visa procedures and the existence of social and migration networks. One of the main illegal migration routes involves transiting through

20 | Jan Blezinger, *Die Republik Moldau: künftiges Mitglied der Europäischen Union? Zur Finalität der Zusammenarbeit zwischen Moldau und der Europäischen Union*, Norderstedt 2010, 175-178.

21 | The original amount was calculated in Leu. The conversion rate as of February 24, 2011 has been used.

the Ukraine, which shares a border with the EU. According to expert estimates, 60 to 70 per cent of all illegal transit routes go through the Ukraine.

An alternative for Moldovan citizens who want to work in the European Union is to enter Romania on a tourist visa and then work illegally. Some even try to take a direct route out of Moldova and cross the border illegally. Analyses carried out at Romanian border crossings suggest that many illegal Moldovan immigrants hide amongst the goods in delivery trucks, use false documents or try to bribe customs officials.

Extensive social networks outside the Republic of Moldova ensure that Moldovans who leave the country to find work can find the support of family members, relatives, friends and acquaintances when they first arrive in a particular country. However, difficulties finding work, problems with local authorities and lack of knowledge of the local language can still make life very difficult for Moldovan migrants who move to a foreign country.

A LOOK AT THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF MIGRATION

The large numbers of migrants mean that the Republic of Moldova now has one of the highest proportions of money transfers from abroad relative to its GDP, currently at 31 per cent.²² As these transfers contribute nothing towards building the country's manufacturing economy, but are used for private domestic consumption of essentials or even imported goods, they do not help to create sustainable economic growth and are totally dependent on the migrants working abroad and the conditions prevailing in the countries where they are working. While the money that is sent back does pump foreign currency into the Moldovan economy, which helps to stabilise the Moldovan Leu, it also fuels inflation. The

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22 | "Статистический справочник 'Миграция и денежные переводы' 2011" (Statistical data 'Migration and money transfers' 2011), 4, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1110315015165/Factbook2011Russian.pdf> (accessed July 21, 2011).

property market in particular is experiencing sharp price increases which are clearly linked to the transfer of money into the country from abroad. A lot of positive potential is being lost as a result. The Moldovan government is already looking at measures to resolve this problem. It is trying to encourage those receiving money from abroad to invest it²³ and to make business conditions at home more attractive. Government programmes supported by the IOM are currently being run as pilot projects.

The transfer of money from abroad tends to result in informal channels being opened up that can lead to increased criminal activity and corruption. In addition to people bringing money home personally, some is sent by post or is transported by a third party, such as a bus driver or relatives who are making a short visit to their homeland. These unofficial methods have a lot of advantages for migrants and their dependents back home, as illegal migrants do not usually have access to banking facilities and these informal channels are usually much cheaper. Transferring the money themselves can save a family a lot of money because banks charge on average seven to 12 per cent for transfers.

The income of the customs authorities who often handle this flow of money into the country is currently around one billion euro²⁴ and, as such, is almost the equivalent of the country's total domestic product.²⁵ This flow of money into Moldova is of huge economic importance to the country, and in this respect migration can be seen as a positive thing. However, many jobs at home are not being filled, especially in the rural economy, because the potential income is so low. At the same time many highly-qualified young people are leaving the country because they can earn much more money helping with the harvests in another country than they can working as a teacher or engineer in Moldova. Desperately-needed

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23 | Programme PARE 1+1, cf. <http://odimm.md/news.php?nou=262> (accessed July 22, 2011).

24 | The original amount was calculated in U.S. dollars. The conversion rate as of February 24, 2011 has been used.

25 | Jürgen Erfurt, "'La noi, în Republica Moldova' oder 'La noi, în Basarabia'. Moldova nach 15 Jahren Unabhängigkeit," *Europa Etnica*, Vol. 64, No. 1-2/2007, 45-49.

skilled workers are also leaving the country, if they haven't left already. In the 1990s it was just the odd person who left the country looking for work, mostly fathers, but now it is estimated that there are one million Moldovans living abroad.

The fact that one-quarter of the population of Moldova now lives and works abroad is having a dramatic impact on the country. There is now a significant lack of skilled workers left at home. The fact that a country which has a shortage of jobs, despite having plenty of well-trained workers, is now experiencing a severe lack of skilled workers shows the complexity of the cycles at play. It is mostly elderly people and children who stay behind in Moldova and so the country now has an older population, with all the usual factors that go with it. Children often become lonely because the proportion of women migrating abroad has grown significantly since the mid-1990s and has now equalled or even surpassed the proportion of men in certain host countries. Another consequence of this has been the feminisation of Moldovan society, which is a relatively new development, as in the past the mobility of women was very much determined by the patriarchal structure of families and society in general. The mass migration of young single women out of Moldova to the EU to work as au-pairs or for marriage has turned into an economics-driven migration flow that is having a negative impact on the country's demographics.

Life for young children and teenagers in particular is very difficult at the moment. Family life often revolves around alcohol abuse, violence and the absence of one or more parents. Around 38,000 girls and boys in Moldova are considered to be social orphans because their fathers or mothers work abroad and the children end up in homes. Since the collapse of socialism there is also a lack of further education opportunities for them or even the transfer of moral values. Many young children or teenagers, who see no prospects for themselves at home, also end up leaving the country.²⁶

In Moldova ca. 38,000 girls and boys are considered to be social orphans because their fathers or mothers work abroad.

26 | Don Bosco Mission, "Winter in Moldawien," January 4, 2007, <http://donboscomission.de/index.php?id=2026> (accessed August 17, 2011).

MIGRATION FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

Although the majority of Moldovans migrate to Russia and only around one fifth move to the EU, the number of people migrating to EU countries has grown significantly since 2007, when Romania became a member. For many, a temporary migration to Russia is seen as a way of financing

Italy, which has the highest number of working migrants, is the second most popular country amongst Moldovans. 132,000 of them live legally on Italian territory.

a move to the EU. Italy, Portugal, France, Spain, Greece and Romania are all popular destinations for Moldovan migrants due to their geographical proximity, higher pay, the chance to live amongst other Romanian-language speakers and large networks of informal business relationships and of compatriots and relatives. Italy, which has the highest number of working migrants, is the second most popular country amongst Moldovans. According to Italian government figures, 132,000 Moldovan inhabitants live legally on Italian territory. If we add to this all the illegal immigrants and the number of Moldovan citizens with Romanian passports, then the figure is probably nearer to 200,000, a figure that tallies with expert estimates and statistics from various social and welfare bodies.²⁷

The black economy in these EU countries has also been an important pull factor that has caused the migration flow out of Moldova to grow significantly in the last two decades. Italy is a country with a significant proportion of illegal workers, and recent estimates suggest the percentage is somewhere between 26.2 and 30 per cent. This black economy which Moldovan immigrants help to support forms a significant part of the overall Italian economy, and workers without legal residency status make up a high percentage of the workforce. The black economy tends to thrive in those areas which are less structured or regulated (agriculture, construction, supply services, domestic services, catering, retailing) and represents a significant risk for the EU. Cheap workers only need the minimum of qualifications and must be willing to do the mostly physically-demanding kinds of work which nobody else wants to do. Moldovan women have also taken advantage of the growth in social services such as welfare, childcare

27 | Валерий Мошняга, "Банки и Финансы" (Valeriy Moschneaga, Banks and Finances), 2010 Н. 3, 55.

and social work. Moldovan migrants often work in private households, hotels, offices, hospitals and other institutions where poor working conditions are not uncommon. It is unusual for those migrants who arrive with some kind of qualifications to be able to put those qualifications to practical use within the EU, either because the qualifications are not recognised or they don't have a work permit.

The question as to whether people without residency permits should be legalised has become a matter of intense debate within the framework of EU migration policy-making. It

Bringing illegal immigrants to the EU to exploit their labour has prompted the development of an extensive smuggling network.

is recognised that there is a market for cheap labour and that currently the work is being done by illegal immigrants. Bringing these people to the EU to exploit their labour has prompted the development of an extensive smuggling network. This movement of so many undocumented migrant workers can have a negative impact on local job markets, working conditions and the economic structure of the target country as a whole, while at the same time placing an additional burden on social services. 12,500 Moldovan children were officially registered in the Italian school system in the 2007/2008 school year.²⁸ However, there are no exact figures showing how many children of illegal Moldovan immigrants were not able to attend their local schools. The main problem is that the parents are scared that they will be caught and deported. As a result there is now a growing underclass of illegal immigrants who remain uneducated through no fault of their own, earning well below average wages and often having to cope with terrible working conditions. The birth rate in Italy among Moldovans is growing by around 21 per cent per year. So there is a danger that more and more unskilled labour will enter the job market while the demand for highly-qualified immigrants increases. It would make sense therefore to revoke some of the existing legal requirements to ensure that those migrants without a residency permit are guaranteed legal protection and access to healthcare and education. Job market-oriented migration policies need to focus more on migrants' qualifications in order to offer better opportunities to find work.

28 | Виктор Улятовский, "Банки и Финансы" (Viktor Uleatovskiy, Banks and Finances), 2010 Н. 3, 55.

Human trafficking is a particularly complex issue for the EU. Humanitarian aid and development cooperation can make a significant contribution to reducing the causes of migration by supporting sustainable economic, social and political development. Another solution would be to allow seasonal workers from Moldova to enter the EU legally.

Despite all these imponderables there are some grounds for optimism. Relations between the EU and the Republic of Moldova have improved significantly in recent years. Since the regime change in Chişinău the new Moldovan government has had some major successes, especially in terms of foreign policy. The Republic of Moldova experienced years of growing isolation under the previous communist government, but now EU rapprochement is high on the agenda for the pro-European Alliance in order to improve their relations with their neighbours, especially

Favourable working conditions make it possible for enterprises from the EU to set up in business in Moldova. Visits by high-ranking officials from the EU show how much relations have improved.

Romania. Recent tensions between Romania and Moldova have improved significantly under the new government. The waiving of the visa requirements introduced by the communist government is testimony to the improved relations between Moldova and its western neighbour. More and more businesses in Romania are starting to see the potential benefits of building a business in Moldova in the future. Low incomes and favourable working conditions can reduce production costs and make it possible for small and medium enterprises from the EU to set up in business there. Easing restrictions on the movement of goods and capital means that EU countries will be able to significantly increase profits on exports and imports. The fact that so many high-ranking officials from the EU are choosing to visit the Republic of Moldova shows how much relations have improved. An Association Agreement is due to be signed with the EU in 2012. The Republic of Moldova will therefore be the first country to sign a bilateral Association Agreement within the framework of the EU's Eastern Partnership.

Moldova certainly does not want to see its people leaving the country and taking their families with them. Surveys show that only a small minority of migrants are planning to leave the Republic of Moldova for good. Most of them see it as an opportunity to earn extra money in order to allow

their families to escape from the pressures of poverty and even to achieve a certain level of prosperity. The money that is sent back to families from abroad makes a significant contribution to alleviating poverty in Moldova. The employment of skilled Moldovan workers in EU countries, the potential for development in so many areas in Moldova and the replacement of the communist regime with a democratic government all give the country much more room to manoeuvre, better prospects and many more possibilities for the future. The EU has a constant need for new workers but is not interested (politically, at least) in the idea of permanent migration. If a comprehensive strategy is to be developed, then it must be based on a form of organised and legal circular migration which offers incentives for migrants to return to their home countries and which would create a win-win situation for all parties concerned. Cooperation and understanding of people's specific experiences and problems can make a significant contribution to the success of foreign policy issues and to the stability of the EU. If these issues are to be dealt with successfully, it will be necessary to create better ties for Moldovans between the job markets themselves and demand-driven offers of employment.