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Readmission, return and reintegration: Moldova

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Readmission in the Context of Moldovan Migration Policy

The issue of readmission of Moldovan citizens from host countries became particularly relevant for the Republic of Moldova during the period of mass international labor migration of the Moldovan population.

The Moldovan authorities have long opposed the signing of readmission agreement with the European Union. The reason for this was the fear that they would have to pay the transportation and other costs for expulsion of Moldovan and foreign citizens who entered EU from the territory of the Republic of Moldova, back to their home country. Given the volumes of Moldovan labor migration abroad, this could result in collapse of the national budget.

A solution was found in the package agreed in the Readmission Agreement and Facilitated Visa Regime Agreement with the EU (2007). The agreement entered into force on January 1, 2008 for Moldovan citizens and in 2010 for third country nationals. In 2009-2013 the readmission agreement with EU entered into force, as well as provisions of the implementation protocols with 11 countries (Austria, Benelux, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Germany, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovakia and Estonia); as well as with non-EU countries: Switzerland, Norway, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia, Turkey, and Ukraine (1997).

These agreements apply not only to readmission of Moldovan citizens, but also to foreign nationals who entered these countries from the territory of the Republic of Moldova. Today Moldova aspires to sign readmission agreements with the top countries of origin of illegal migrants. In 2007, proposals to sign bilateral agreements of this kind were sent to the authorities of Russia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Syria, Bangladesh, India, Lebanon, Pakistan, Jordan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and China. Negotiations with Russia are currently in progress.

Return and Readmission: Quantitative Flows

There is no concrete answer as to how many labor migrants have returned to Moldova. The most common answer is 1,000 persons (according to the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family), while less frequently the number of 2,000 persons is mentioned (IOM data). It is unlikely that any of these numbers is reliable, since both are too "rounded-up", and also due to the lack of adequate methodology. The first number is based on the requests submitted to the regional offices of the Employment Committee when people state that they do not have a job because they returned from abroad. However, if people do not ask for this service, they are not registered as repatriates. There is, therefore, no answer to the most important question: what is the share of migrants submitting requests for employment in the total population of returnees.

Possibly, the information obtained from the Moldovan border police may be more adequate, as it registers the balance of entries and exits at the national border of the Republic of Moldova. Migration balance shows that exits (departures) of Moldovan citizens abroad traditionally and largely exceed entries (arrivals) to the country. The exception is in 2009, when the global economic crisis caused a huge wave of returning Moldovan migrants who lost their jobs in the host countries, above all, in the European Union.

Table 1. Annual number of crossings of the national border of the Republic of Moldova, 2005-2010, (cases)

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Annual number of entries of citizens of the Republic of Moldova at the national border	3,608.600	4,105.200	4,474.800	5,304.000	5,241.400	4,990.000
Annual number of exits of citizens of the Republic of Moldova at the national border	3,731.200	4,217.500	4,600.200	5,404.300	5,131.400	5,071.600
Entry-exit balance	- 122.600	- 112.300	- 125.400	- 100.300	90.000	- 81.600

Source: Border-guard service / Police of the Republic of Moldova

One way or another, these numbers hardly accurately reflect the scale of returns. This is explained by the following facts: 1) The Moldovan state does not control the national border in the Transnistrian sector of the country, and therefore does not have the numbers for entries and exits Eastward; 2) Migration balance of entries/exits is not equivalent to the number of people who departed and arrived (migrants). Some people undertake several entries/exits within one year; 3) Migration is a dynamic phenomenon, both in terms of total numbers and in terms of the individual personal parameters of migrants: some withdraw from the migration process, some join it. This is true for the representatives of both old and new demographic cohorts/generations.

A certain portion of Moldovan labor migrants went through involuntary return and were deported from the EU. According to the Eurostat data for 2008-2010, 9,515 Moldovan citizens were deported from the EU.¹ Their destiny in Moldova is unregistered.

There is also voluntary return from the EU, which is possible due to financial support from international organizations. According to the IOM data in 2010, 110 persons returned to Moldova, which is 25% higher when compared with 2009, and three times more than in 2007. Most of them returned from France, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Spain and Austria.

Table 2. Number of Moldovan citizens returned from the EU under readmission in 2005-2010 (cases)

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<i>Returned Moldovan citizens</i>	33	18	14	45	88	110

Source: IOM office in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova

Recently, there has been readmission of foreign citizens from the Republic of Moldova, which takes place on the basis of court decisions or administrative decisions by the Bureau of Migration and Asylum of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Moldova.

¹ Cirlig V., Mosneaga V. (2012) *Migration Movements between Moldova and the REU: Policies and Numbers*. In: *ICMPD. Research Papers drafted within the framework of the "Building Training and Analytical Capacities on Migration in Moldova and Georgia (GOVAC)" project. Internship to ICMPD, September 2011*. Vienna, OstWest Media, p.64-65.

**Table 3. Readmission of foreign citizens from the Republic of Moldova, 2010-2012
(number of cases)**

	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Based on court decisions</i>	58	70	85	213
<i>Based on administrative decisions</i>	...	49	185	234

Source: Bureau for Migration and Asylum of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Moldova

In 2010-2012, 213 foreign citizens have been expelled from Moldova based on court decisions. Mostly, these were citizens of CIS countries that have a visa-free regime with Moldova. Based on administrative decisions, 234 persons have been expelled from Moldova in 2011-2012. Mostly, these were citizens of Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The growth of the number of persons subject to forced expulsion from the country can be explained by the efficiency of the procedure. The Ministry of Interior (Bureau of Migration and Asylum), which conducts forced expulsion based on its own administrative decisions, allocates special funds for this purpose. Furthermore, the IOM Office finances both forced expulsion from Moldova according to court decisions and voluntary return of foreigners to their homeland.

Reasons for Return

Sociological surveys show that the main reasons for return of Moldovan labor migrants are:

- Age. Labor migrants of retirement age are more inclined to return to their home country, as it is difficult to find employment in the destination country;
- Children's education and their future;
- Difficulties in integration, unwillingness to perceive oneself as a "lesser human being";
- Loneliness, which can manifest itself in a feeling of being tired of migration, nostalgia;
- Willingness to reunite with one's family;
- Parents or a spouse asking the labor migrant to return home;
- Health problems;
- Desire for self-fulfillment in accordance with one's training/qualification;
- Accumulation of sufficient capital to open one's own business;
- Deportation;
- Expired residence permit in the host country, etc.²

The social-demographic image of labor migrants who return back to their home country is as follows: most had vocational training, 12.8% - higher education, 9.5% graduated from colleges, 23.8% had incomplete secondary education, and 1.0% had received primary education or less. Most migrants who returned to Moldova were middle-aged or older, 1/3 were young people under 30 years old.

Male migrants have been mostly employed in construction; female migrants - in trade and services (household services). About 2/3 of migrants (especially women) were engaged in unskilled labor. Almost 2/3 migrants with higher education were employed as unskilled workers.

² ETF (2008). *The contribution of Human Resource Development to Migration Policy in Moldova*, p.40. [http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/\(RSS\)/C125782B0048D6F6C12574B90057DA98?OpenDocument&LAN=EN](http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/(RSS)/C125782B0048D6F6C12574B90057DA98?OpenDocument&LAN=EN)

Moldovan Policy on Return and Reintegration of Migrants

The reintegration and return of Moldovan migrants is an important trend in national policy. The Moldovan authorities implement a Program for the Attraction of Remittances into the Economy "PARE 1+1" for 2010-2014, and a National Program for Economic Empowerment of Young People (PNAET), which implies training in entrepreneurial skills and providing financial support to entrepreneurs at the beginning of their activities. Certain measures are undertaken that aim at the recognition of skills and qualifications (in accordance with the provisions of the National Concept of recognition of informal and formal education approved in November 2011). Furthermore, actions are implemented in the framework of EU - Moldova mobility partnership. Over 200 campaigns took place to inform Moldovan citizens in the country and abroad about the social-economic situation in the country and on the labor market, to attract remittances, to develop small and medium businesses, etc. Although the timeframe of the Action Plan for return of Moldovan labor migrants from abroad, approved by the Government on October 9th, 2008, has expired, the return and integration of Moldovan migrants remains an important objective defined by the National Strategy of the Republic of Moldova in the field of migration and asylum (2011-2020) and the Action Plan for 2011-2015.

Collaboration with diaspora and associations of Moldovan citizens abroad is also important in the context of migrants' return and reintegration. Dialogue with diaspora is the foundation for the programs of investment of remittances and social-economic reintegration of migrants. Currently the emphasis is placed upon the protection of Moldovan citizens abroad, the preservation of cultural authenticity, and the stimulation of migrants' return home. In this regard, the Action Plan for support of nationals of the Republic of Moldova residing abroad (Moldovan diaspora) for 2006-2009, the National Action Plan for 2008 for the Protection of the Citizens of the Republic of Moldova abroad, and the Action Plan for National, Cultural, and Social Support of Moldovan Diaspora in 2012-2014, can be mentioned. For better collaboration with Moldovan diaspora, the Government of the Republic of Moldova created the Bureau for Diaspora Relations, included in the organizational structure of the State Chancellery (November 2012).

There are a number of large-scale projects implemented in this area jointly with international organizations: the project entitled "Strengthening Moldova's capacity to manage labor and return migration" implemented by the Swedish Public Employment Service (SPES); the project entitled "Effective Governance of Labor Migration and its Skills Dimensions in Moldova" implemented by the WLO; the project entitled "Supporting the implementation of migration and development component of the EU-Moldova Mobility partnership" (SIMP), implemented by the IOM; the project entitled "Support to implementation of the EU readmission agreements with the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine: facilitation of assisted voluntary return and reintegration (SIREADA)"; the project "Supporting the implementation of the EC visa facilitation and readmission agreements in Moldova and Georgia (REVIS)," etc. The Ministry of Education of Moldova, together with the European Training Foundation, continues to work on the creation and strengthening of the mechanism of recognition and confirmation of migrants' skills based on the national concept of verification of informal and formal training ("Development of Vocational Training and Education System" project).³

The Republic of Moldova would benefit from receiving greater support from the European Union in the following fields:

- a) Labor migration (facilitation of return and circular migration);
- b) Social protection of migrants, which currently is not given enough attention by host governments;

³ Vremis M., Craievschi-Toarta V., Burdelnii E., Herm A., Poulen M. (2012) *Extended migration profile of the Republic of Moldova*. Chisinau, IOM.

- c) Strengthening national migration governance system, including development of institutional capacity, facilitated visa regime and readmission;
- d) d) Investment of remittances, development of small and medium businesses, etc.⁴

"Currently, Moldovan authorities are not ready for the return of labor migrants who went abroad. Of course, our ultimate goal is for the citizens to return home, for the families to reunite, but currently, we are not ready to come with a slogan "Come back home!", - stated V. Lutenco, director of the Bureau for Diaspora Relations.⁵ Moreover, as a result of poor communication and lack of transparency, many migrants are not aware of the migration policy of the Moldovan state and its actions aimed at return and reintegration.

Reintegration Problems of Moldovan Labor Migrants

The most significant reintegration problems faced by repatriates are the following⁶:

- the issue of psychological re-socialization of migrants. Returning migrants might find it difficult to integrate into the changed reality at home and to find their place in the society. They often remain alone face-to-face with their problems. Relatives and friends provide some support in the process of re-socialization in moldova. In the meantime, the issue of re-socialization in the host country is not less important. This applies to resolving one's internal personal conflict between what was "there" and what there is "here" and now. Relatives and friends, who are "here", cannot help with this issue. A solution can be found in the development of psychological counseling as well as in creation of conditions for communication with the persons who have similar migration experiences. This can be done, for example, in the framework of non-governmental organizations, such as "moldovan italy" (portugal, etc.), which facilitate re-socialization of repatriates in their home country, and contribute to the preservation of their language and socio-cultural identity on the territory of their host country.
- Family issues. Years of migration weaken marriages and family relations. Hence, it is important to provide support in restoring interaction and emotional relationships with relatives, children and parents, etc.
- health-related issues. At the time of migration, people often do not pay sufficient attention to health treatment, which results in lower health thresholds. Some migrants return with sufficient funds to afford proper medical assistance. However, advanced stages of diseases frequently result in loss of labor productivity, disabilities, and unemployment. Assistance to such persons should be included in the complex of actions aimed at the reintegration of repatriates.
- professional adaptation problems. Repatriates will have to work in moldova for wages that are significantly lower than those abroad. This affects the welfare of the family.

It should be taken into consideration that while abroad, moldovan labor migrants mostly have not been employed according to their training (construction is the most common exception), and have engaged in unskilled labor, losing skills and the profession acquired back home. Thereafter, it is difficult for them to find a job corresponding to their qualifications and training. Taking up employment of an unskilled worker is unprofitable in moldova.

⁴ <http://www.mfa.gov.md/news-mobility-partnership-en/492435/>

⁵ Moldova admitted it is not ready for guest workers' return home [В Молдове признали неготовность к возвращению гастарбайтеров], 2013, January 12. Available <http://news.mail.ru/inworld/moldova/society/11578005/?frommail=1>.

⁶ Mosneaga V., Burdelnii E., Vasilyeva L., Malinovskaya E. (2012) *Problems of reintegration and return of labor migrants from the European Union to the near-border countries* [Проблемы реинтеграции и возвращения трудовых мигрантов из Европейского Союза в страны Пограничья]. Vilnius: EGU, p.198-240.

Furthermore, the knowledge and skills acquired abroad can not always be applied in the home country. Currently, moldova is undertaking certain steps for the recognition of skills and qualifications acquired while working abroad and not certified by any relevant official documents⁷. Another problem in this context is who will attest to the quality of skills acquired informally? From prior experience it is known that efforts to verify the level of skills of moldovan migrants who have been employed in construction in russia have been a failure, because the members of the board were not aware of new construction technologies that the examinees learned to utilize.

Another important aspect is that in order to find a well-paid job, one should have access to information, which is mainly available through social connections and informal contacts. The question remains to what extent a person who has just come back home after a long stay abroad have access to such contacts, and whether the moldovan state can assist its citizens with this issue. Perhaps, a solution to the employment dilemma can be found via the development of business and small entrepreneurship by the returnees whose finances and energy could improve the situation on the domestic labor market. A wide range of measures and well-developed mechanisms for their implementation is necessary to make it happen.

The implementation is indeed an important factor here. One example is the greatly publicized program "pare 1+1". 124 small and medium enterprises have been chosen for this program for 2010-2012. The authorities promised the program participants that for each lei invested in the domestic economy, the entrepreneurs will receive one *pro bono* lei from the state, . However, in the total value of investments for this period, private investments constituted 76.2 million, whereas state investments constituted 22.5 million. As a result, as acknowledged by the ministry of economics, the project turned from "1+1" into "3+1". According to the experts, the initial good idea got ruined, as it often happens in the republic, in the process of implementation and organization of the process. This makes labor migrants lose trust and renounce their participation in the program. For this reason, approximately half of the resources allocated for the pare "1+1" project had remained unused in the past two years.⁸

According to the results of the iasci / civis survey, returning migrants often face problems of reintegration, especially those brought about by lack of jobs and low wages. It is hard to open one's own business due to insufficient funds, lack of access to information and violation of the "rules of game" by the state agencies. In such conditions, some migrants choose to migrate again⁹.

- Adaptation of children who grew up and received education in a foreign country. They had difficulties adapting abroad, and it can be difficult for them to return to their home country. The key problem is knowledge of the language, for the purposes of both communication and study.
- Problems of adaptation to social conditions in moldova due to the underdeveloped household infrastructure, the existing level of medical services, etc.

It should be taken into consideration that while the economic reasons are the main reasons driving a person into labor migration, a person's decision to return can be determined by other factors of societal character. The latter include everyday life, transportation, streetlights, roads, prices, and wages, combating corruption and bureaucracy, taxation, administrative, official actions, an unfavorable environment for functioning of small business, freedom of movement in and out of

⁷ Antonov V., Ciurea C., Frunzaru V. (2012). *Recognition of previous studies for migrants who returned to Moldova: reality and trends [Recunoașterea învățării anterioare (RPL) pentru migrații întorși în Moldova: realități și tendințe]*. Chisinau, IDIS „Viitorul”.

⁸ *PAREd as always. The State has lived up to its promises regarding participation in "1+1" program only by one third [PAREшли как всегда. Государство лишь на треть выполняет свои обещания по участию в программе «1+1»]*, December 10, 2012. Available http://www.kommersant.md/node/11830?utm_source=mailru&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=gastarbaiter.

⁹ *Consolidation of ties between migration and development [Consolidarea legaturii dintre migrație și dezvoltare]* (2010). IASCI / CIVIS Chisinau, p.29-31. Available <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMOLDOVA/Resources/ConsolidareaLegaturiiDintreMigrațieDezvoltare.pdf>.

country, and a visa-free regime. All of this can be generalized in one common notion– an efficiently functioning democratic political system, social state, and developed civil society. That is, it is possible to create the conditions for the return of migrants, provided that there is a favorable investment climate and reasonable government policy, which takes the needs and the requirements of migrants into consideration.

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