

Migration from republic of Moldova

Abstract

According to a BBC study, the Republic of Moldova is the country with the highest population decline rate in the world. This paper examines the causes that lead to an advanced emigration from the Republic of Moldova, such as political instability, high unemployment rate, and collapsing incomes. It also presents the economic consequences of this phenomenon, the risks that it has for the European Union and the impact of labor migration on children left behind.

Undoubtedly, there are some solutions to this problem. Fighting with corruption, workplace improvement, raising salaries, all give the country more opportunities for the future.

Keywords: corruption, children, emigration, population, unemployment

Introduction

Moldova is a very small and uniquely charming country, tucked away between Romania and Ukraine. On the map it looks like a bunch of ripe grapes, which is no coincidence – Moldova has the highest percentage of land dedicated to vineyards in the world. Moreover, it has plenty of wine cellars with a collection of millions of bottles of wine. Some of them are even included in the Guinness World Records. Also, Moldova is considered to be a piece of paradise, because it has fertile land, divine landscapes with a rich history, and warm, friendly people.

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But over the years, emigration became the plague which consumes Republic of Moldova. It has only 27 years of independence, but Moldova may remain without people. It may happen that on the anniversary of the 40 years of Independence, there will no longer be anyone to celebrate the holiday. While in the late 1980s the Republic of Moldova had a population of about 4.5 million people, in 2016, according to the data from the National Bureau of Statistics in Chisinau, there are just around 3 million people living in the country (NBS 2017).

At the same time, according to a BBC study, the Republic of Moldova is the country with the highest population decline rate in the world, and 106 people daily go to other more developed countries (CEEM 2018).

To investigate which countries Moldovans prefer, I conducted a survey. The survey methodology employed was a questionnaire, which was used to interview 50 people from the Republic of Moldova. With the help of the questionnaire I found out that Russia is the most popular among Moldovan emigrants, followed by Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, Romania, Ireland, Greece and others.

Moreover, statistics from the Center of Sociological Investigations and Marketing “CBS AXA”, also show that Russia and Italy are the main destination countries for Moldovan emigrants, followed by Greece, Portugal and others. By labor type and gender preferences countries differ from “male” (Russia, Ukraine, Spain, Portugal – work in construction industry) to “female” (Italy, Turkey – services) destinations (Edgardo et al. 2005).

Causes

The beginning of the emigration phenomenon was after the collapse of the USSR. In that period, the Republic of Moldova had numerous economic difficulties. The country could not deal with the financial problems: a string of inconsistent reforms resulted in stagnation of economic activity. Hence, it led to the impoverishment of 70% of the Moldovans. Other big causes that led to advanced emigration from the Republic of Moldova were economic slumps, political instability, high unemployment rate, and collapsing incomes. To feed their families and to support their households at a decent level, people had to get used to the new living conditions. Thus, more than a quarter of the population made the decision to leave the country and work abroad.

Another question on the questionnaire was about the main causes that determined people from Moldova to leave the country. Figure I shows the responses to the question, indicating that the biggest problem for the Moldovans is low wages. Also, 15 percent of people voted for corruption, few job positions and 10 percent of people said that there were few or inexistent development opportunities. There are also 10 percent of people that think that all of these are equally important problems for the country.

Undoubtedly, the main reason for emigration is the low wages in the country. The average annual salary in the countries of the European Union is about 29.6 thousand euros. This amount is approximately ten times higher than the average annual salary in the Republic of Moldova, where citizens receive an annual average of 2.9 thousand euros. For instance, in the European Union, Norway has the highest salary – 47.6 thousand euros per year. This amount of money is 16 times higher than the amount Moldovan citizens receive.

In 2017, the average salary in the Republic of Moldova amounted to around 280 euros, 12.1% more than in the previous year. The highest salaries are paid to the employees in the financial and insurance sectors – 662 euros, IT and communications employees – 652 euros, and those of the heating, electricity, gas and water supply areas – 560 euros. The lowest salaries are in the arts and leisure activities – 170 euros, and for those working in the field of accommodation and public catering – 210 euros. Employees in education also have modest salaries – 235 euros and in the areas of medicine and social protection – 315 euros. Moreover, WB estimated that 21.9 per cent of the Moldovan population is below the national poverty line. Thus, mass migration is basically economically driven, a mechanism to alleviate poverty, also representing a survival strategy. Migration strategies are sometimes supported by the success stories of emigrants and by social networks established abroad (relatives, acquaintances and close friends who already live and work overseas).

Consequences

The magnitude of the emigration from the Republic of Moldova recorded over the past two decades had a huge impact on the country. Furthermore, it led to 3 salient consequences: children left behind, risks for the European Union and less effectiveness in the country.

Children left behind

Firstly, a great challenge for the state in this situation is the problem of children left home. The International Organization for Migration estimated that there are around 177,000 children under 18 left behind, which means that one out of every five children in the Republic of Moldova has a parent working abroad (Salah 2008).

The absence of parents has a negative impact on the moral and academic education of children, on their physical and psychological health. Parental migration implies a maximum stress for children aged 2-6, stress that causes the delay of both linguistic and general development. Migration also affects parents' communication relationships with children, which is just episodic. Moreover, these children who did not feel the love of their parents when they needed it, who did not understand the essence of the family, would perpetuate the patterns of life they had known and experienced. Studies of the effects of parental emigration on the welfare of children left behind from the Republic of Moldova show that they deal with a myriad of problems:

- lower school performance and school absenteeism;
- disturbance of appetite, painful headaches, abdominal pain, insomnia;
- the feeling of loneliness;
- the difficulty of joining a group of fellowship;
- depression and negative emotional states due to lack of affection;
- formation of an inadequate identity;
- higher incidence of consumption of alcohol and tobacco;
- aggressive manifestations of one parent or both parents;
- opposition and conduct disorder (Turchină 2009).

Furthermore, children left behind are more likely to have these kind of problems in comparison with children who have their parents near them.

In the Republic of Moldova, around 20 percent of children left behind don't go to school. They lack job opportunities and are more likely to develop psycho-emotional problems associated with an inferiority complex. Thus, In Moldova youth unemployment and juvenile delinquency persist. Also, migrants' children are more vulnerable to drug use and labor exploitation. A study made by UNICEF showed that the in-

crease in juvenile crime rates in Moldova was positively connected with the number of children left behind, who accounted for almost 60 percent of juvenile offenders (Cortés 2007).

Risks for the European Union

Another consequence of the emigration from the Republic of Moldova is the risk for the European Union. Since 2007, when Romania became a member of the European Union, the number of Moldovans who had Romanian passports, migrating to EU countries has grown significantly. They preferred to emigrate to countries like Italy, France, Greece, Portugal and Spain, because of higher wages, the chance to live among other Romanian language speakers or relatives and because of geographical proximity. Another salient pull factor that has caused the growth of emigration was the black economy in these states. Italy, the country with the highest number of emigrants, is the second most preferred state amongst Moldovan people. According to estimates from the Moldovan Embassy in Italy, there are 80,000 Moldovans residing there. However, the Italian estimate is 300,000 (Sabates-Wheeler–Black 2014). Moldovan emigrants help to create this black economy, which became a meaningful part of the Italian economy. Over the years, workers who do not have legal residency status formed a big proportion of the workforce. They are considered “cheap workers” because they do not need any qualifications and they have to do the physically-demanding work which nobody else wants to do. The areas where black economy is developing continuously are: domestic services, supply services, agriculture and construction. They are less structured, representing a risk for European Union.

A great number of emigrants from the Republic of Moldova, when coming to more developed countries, have their qualifications unrecognized or they do not have a work permit. This movement of so many illegal emigrants has a negative effect on working conditions and the economic structure of the country. Furthermore, there are not exact numbers that show how many children of the illegal Moldovans cannot attend local school because their parents are afraid of being caught and deported. Thus, now there is growing up a whole generation of illegal emigrants which remains uneducated. In Italy, the birth rate of the Moldovan emigrants is increasing by 20 percent per year. Consequently, they represent a danger for the state because more unskilled labor enters the job market.

Less efficiency in the country

Last but not least, the consequence of emigration from the Republic of Moldova is the decreasing efficiency in the country. Figure IV proves that a distinct feature of the emigration from Moldova is that a significant part of those who leave has a relatively good level of education: 28% of the total number of migrants graduated from higher education institutions and 63% graduated from high school or from vocational education institutions. Therefore, the “brain drain” phenomenon persists, which is defined as the migration of health personnel in search of a better standard of living and quality of life, higher salaries, access to advanced technology and more stable political conditions in different places worldwide (Dodani–LaPorte 2005).

Out of those who leave, intellectuals account for 18%. Before emigrating, they worked in Moldova as engineers, doctors, lawyers and economists. Thus, a significant part of high-skilled Moldovans is subject to “professional disqualification” when migrating, often being employed in low or unskilled work, because their studies are not recognized abroad. The intellectual exodus in Moldova does not necessarily become an intellectual gain for the destination countries but rather an intellectual waste for migrants. As a result, the Republic of Moldova becomes a cheap labor force provider, the phenomenon of brain drain is a problem, but there is no transfer of knowledge and technologies to the benefit of the preferred migrant countries (CIVIS, IASCI, 2010).

The problem of the lower levels of effectiveness in the Republic of Moldova is also caused by the phenomenon of the ageing population of the country. Over half of the expatriate workers are under age thirty, and eighty-eight percent are under forty-five, implying that workers in the prime age group were leaving the country. Thus, the demographic indicators are getting worse. Migration enhances the ageing of the country’s population, because young people are predominantly involved in migration. It should be noted that the coefficient of ageing reached the value of 15.7 approaching the critical value of 16, which shows a particularly advanced state of the phenomenon. According to World Bank forecasts, by 2050, as a result of the ageing phenomenon, the number of working-age population in the Republic of Moldova will be reduced dramatically, while the population which is older than 55 years old will be growing continuously, reaching 24% in 2050 (World Bank Moldova 2012).

Solutions

The country certainly does not want to see Moldovans going abroad and taking their families with them. Surveys show that few of them leave the country for good. Most of the emigrants had made this decision because it is an opportunity to earn money, in order to reach prosperity or to help their families to escape from the pressures of poverty. Indeed, the money sent back to Moldovans from abroad makes an important contribution to poverty reduction in the Republic of Moldova. Europe needs more workers, but it is not looking for having permanent emigrants. In this case, a comprehensive strategy should be developed, with organized legal circular migration which encourages people to return to their countries, thus creating a win-win situation for all parties. Understanding people's experiences and needs can make a big contribution to the success of foreign policy issues.

Being asked in the questionnaire which can be the solutions for the Republic of Moldova to combat the problem of emigration and to motivate them to come back, Moldovan emigrants mentioned a few things: fighting with corruption, workplace improvement, raising salaries, more development opportunities, education system development and state support to the small and medium enterprises, thus creating more jobs. 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. Another solution for the problem mentioned by Moldovan people was the implementation of some national projects that have the objective of economic growth and stopping migration. Actually, a project with this kind of objective already exists. The Moldovan Government has recognized the need for a coordinated and integrated approach to manage migration through the National Development Strategy 2012–2020, which includes a focus on harnessing remittances and youth emigration. Moreover, it has 7 main objectives:

1. Aligning the education system to labor market needs in order to enhance labor productivity and increase employment in the economy;
2. Increasing public investment in the national and local road infrastructure, in order to reduce transportation costs and increase the speed of access;

3. Reducing financing costs by increasing competition in the financial sector and developing risk management tools;
4. Improving the business climate, promoting competition policies, streamlining the regulatory framework and applying information technologies in public services for businesses and citizens;
5. Reducing energy consumption by increasing energy efficiency and using renewable energy sources;
6. Ensuring financial sustainability of the pension system in order to secure an appropriate rate of wage replacement;
7. Increasing the quality and efficiency of justice and fighting corruption in order to ensure an equitable access to public goods for all citizens (International Monetary Fund 2013)

The focus of this Strategy is to produce a social and economic impact on each of the above-mentioned dimensions. This approach makes it possible to prioritize areas of state intervention and subject them to a clearly defined objective of the strategy: ensuring qualitative economic development and, implicitly, poverty reduction.

Finally, with the hope that the project will have a considerable success, Moldovan people can be considered winners of their very first battle against emigration.

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