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# ***Circular Migration of the Population of the Republic of Moldova***

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*Mass labor migration of the Moldovan population aggravated the labor market situation, and is threatening the social-economic and demographic development of the country. In these conditions the problem of circularity in migration processes becomes particularly relevant.*

*Circular nature of Moldovan migration is quite specific due to the fact that the Republic of Moldova, its population in migration processes, tends to integrate in large regional migration systems - Commonwealth of Independent States and European Union.*

*The specific nature of Moldovan circular migration to the CIS and EU is determined by two criteria: vector (direction) of migration and nature of employment in destination countries. According to the results of public opinion poll, mainly people from the villages participate in circular migration to the CIS; heads of households, men with secondary or vocational education. For them labor migration abroad is a secondary form of employment, and it is seasonal. Circular migrants to the other countries are predominantly women, and a great share of them have higher education. There are significant differences which determine circular nature of migration, especially in the impact of push and pull factors. Labor migration to the CIS countries is determined to a greater extent by the migrants' and their households' need to survive, while migration to the EU countries is conditioned by the greater living (functioning) opportunities for migrants and their families.*

*Visa regime, high travel expenses have a significant impact on the nature of circular migration to the EU. It explains greater length of trips. Work trip to the CIS (mainly to Russia) usually lasts around 7 months, while in the EU it's twice longer, 15 months. Quite often it stimulates non-return migration.*

*In the conditions of modern financial and economic crisis of 2008-2010 circular migration acquired several new features. These include delayed nature of migration, greater comparable choice possibilities in terms of destination countries and countries of origin, uncertainty and mass multiple choices of its implementation.*

*Moldovan authorities undertake certain steps aimed at consolidation of circular labor migration. We shall point out some of them: - pilot participation of Moldova (along with African state Cape Verde) in mobility and circular migration strategy (since 2008) implemented in the framework of more than 70 projects; - implementation of visa free regime with EU countries (Action Plan Republic of Moldova-EU on visa liberalization, March 2011), - engaging Moldovan labor migrants in modernization and social-economic development of the country (Pilot program on attracting remittances of the labor migrants in the economy "PARE 1+1", 2010-2012, State program for support of small and medium business (2009-2011), etc.*

*We define circular migration as temporary stay of permanent residents of the country of origin in receiving country for employment or humanitarian purposes (education, professional training, volunteer work, etc.). Circular character of migration suggests that the migrant has to return home from the country of temporary stay upon the achievement of his/her purposes<sup>1</sup>.*

## **Moldovan Circular Migration: Current Situation and Specifics**

The population of the Republic of Moldova massively takes an active part in labor migration. According to the World Bank data over 700 thousand people participate in labor migration, which is in fact every second employable citizen of Moldova<sup>2</sup>. It leads to less favorable situation in the labor market and threatens the demographic security of the country.

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<sup>1</sup> The objective of this article is to consider circular *labor* migration of Moldovan population.

<sup>2</sup> Moldova after the global crisis: promoting competitiveness and shred growth". April 4, 2011. World Bank, c.60

In such conditions it is quite understandable that Moldovan authorities strive to minimize the negative consequences of mass labor emigration of Moldovan population abroad, attempting to return labor migrants back home, at least to turn labor emigration into labor circular migration.

According to the national opinion poll in the Republic of Moldova labor migration of Moldovan population nowadays is mostly circular. However, this circular nature of Moldovan international labor migration is not evident enough.

Examining labor migration processes in the context of such criteria as: a) inclusion of the country in large modern migration systems (Commonwealth of Independent States and European Union); b) social-demographic image of modern Moldovan labor migrant, nature of his/her employment abroad, allows us to uncover the specifics of circular migration of the Moldovan population<sup>3</sup>.

Based on the nature of employment and region where labor resources are applied, there are the following groups distinguished by social-economic characteristics, destination and money transfer model. In the CIS (mainly Russia) two major groups can be identified: construction workers and others (mostly sales, transportation, agricultural, industrial, mining workers, etc.). In the EU primary areas of occupation are service sector, taking care of old and/or sick people, children, international truck driving, constructions. In other countries (Turkey, Israel, USA...) - housekeeping, taking care of old and/or sick people or children, constructions, service sector<sup>4</sup>. Each of these groups is quite numerous and important for understanding the nature and specifics of circular migration in the Republic of Moldova.

**Table 1. Number of Moldovan Labor Migrants Abroad by Major Groups (2006), thousand people<sup>5</sup>**

<i>Group</i>	<i>Number of People</i>	<i>%</i>
CIS - construction workers	103.837	34
CIS - others	74.030	24
European Union	94.476	30
Others	37.730	12

Differences between these groups are easily distinguishable in the context of push and pull factors of labor migration. Comparing the impact of push and pull factors of international labor migration we would like to note that the "CIS" groups include poorer and more marginal migrants than the "EU" group. The respondents answer quite eloquently about this (no jobs, poverty).

This fact is also confirmed by the answers of the respondents about the pull factors affecting the choice of destination country. Migrants going to the EU and other countries of the world are mostly guided by the societal factors: the destination country was recommended by a person they asked for advice; there are social contacts (capital); good working conditions; guaranteed job. While for labor migrants to the CIS (mainly to Russia) material and financial factors determine their decision, the cost of the trip is attractive. Quite often it is the decisive factor that makes them choose Russia and Ukraine for employment, as trips there are incomparably cheaper than to the EU countries. That is, labor migration to CIS countries is determined to a greater extent by the migrants' and their household

<sup>3</sup> Lucke M., Mahmoud T.O., Pinger P. Migration and Remittances in Moldova. – Chisinau, IOM, 2007, p.26.

<sup>4</sup> Moraru V., Mosneaga V., Rusnac Gh. Mayatnik Migratsii ("Pendulum of Migration"). - Chisinau: Printing house Sirius, 2012, p.40-47

<sup>5</sup> Lucke M., Mahmoud T.O., Pinger P. Migration and Remittances in Moldova. – Chisinau, IOM, 2007, p.26.

members' need to survive, while migration to the EU countries is conditioned by greater living (functioning) possibilities for migrants and their families.

**Table 2. Push And Pull Factors Stimulating International Labor Migration (public opinion poll CBS AXA)<sup>6</sup>**

	<i>CIS - construction</i>	<i>CIS - others</i>	<i>EU</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Average</i>
<i>Push Factors</i>					
No job	38,61	37,72	26,43	33,01	34,27
Consumer reasons (living standards)	49,62	50,17	46,56	32,90	46,78
Poverty	24,87	24,30	12,69	20,68	20,51
<i>Pull Factors</i>					
Availability of social contacts (capital)	22,48	20,83	31,90	50,97	27,54
Guaranteed job	33,97	33,91	38,57	42,18	36,06
Good working conditions	29,90	32,52	44,72	25,36	34,21
Destination country was recommended by a person they asked for advice	36,20	35,51	51,55	43,21	40,86
Quality of life is better abroad	0,63	4,65	5,89	2,21	3,36
Low cost of the trip	66,66	68,96	14,18	27,64	49,10

While Moldovan labor migrants can go to Russia and Ukraine without any difficulties, benefitting from the visa free regime and spending money only on their tickets, they do need visas to go to the European Union countries, and applying for/receiving one requires additional financial expenses. At that, unofficial cost (receiving visa urgently, often through corrupt schemes) can differ significantly from the official cost of visa.

Certainly, Moldovan labor migrants also resort to illegal crossing of the state borders of EU countries. We would like to mention, that illegal crossing of the border in the "green zone", traveling to the destination country with fake documents has never been the primary way of Moldovan labor migration<sup>7</sup>. In the conditions of enhanced border control between the European Union and neighboring countries, illegal migration flows went down significantly; people tend to look for more acceptable and secure ways of labor migration. Recently such ways include receiving citizenship of EU countries (Romania, Bulgaria, other countries), tourist visas, labor contracts, family-based immigration, etc. According to the research data, the total cost of trip to the European Union countries varies (depending on the country) from 2,500 to 4,500 euro<sup>8</sup>.

We examine the cost of traveling abroad for temporary employment, comparing the financial cost for the first trip by major groups of migrants in the table below. We emphasize that currently there is a decrease in the cost of travel to EU countries and other regions. This is due to enhanced means of transportation and greater possibilities, as well as greater competition between transportation companies.

<sup>6</sup> Lucke M., Mahmoud T.O., Pinger P. Migration and Remittances in Moldova. – Chisinau, IOM, 2007, p.27.

<sup>7</sup> Moraru V., Mosneaga V., Rusnac Gh. Mayatnik Migratsii ("Pendulum of Migration"). - Chisinau: Printing house Sirius, 2012, p.36-38

<sup>8</sup> Mosneaga V., Rusnac Gh. My stroim Evropu i ne tol'ko... ("We build Europe, and not only...") - Chisinau, Moldovan State University, 2005, p. 14

**Table 3. Labor Migrants' Expenses for the First Trip Abroad (in US dollars), opinion poll CBS AXA, 2006<sup>9</sup>.**

	<i>CIS - construction</i>	<i>CIS other</i>	<i>EU</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Average</i>
2000	74	132	3.584	880	654
2006	171	170	2.051	285	540

Difficult access, high cost of travel, visa regime with EU countries maximize the material, financial, physical, and moral psychological value of presence in the receiving country, thus affecting significantly the circularity of labor migration: duration and seasonality of one's stay, labor migrant's willingness to stay in the destination country permanently.

**Table 4. Structure of Migrant Groups and Length of Stay abroad (public opinion poll CBS AXA, 2006)<sup>10</sup>**

	<i>CIS - construction</i>	<i>CIS - others</i>	<i>EU</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Average</i>
Seasonal workers (%)	74,90	59,18	18,39	48,17	51,78
Duration (months)	5,22	7,22	15,5	9,06	8,31
To stay permanently (%)	6,66	12,99	23,30	20,60	14.35

In the CIS most of the labor migrants are seasonal workers who are employed abroad for about 6-7 months a year, while in the EU only every fifth labor migrant is a seasonal worker (see table 4). Their length of stay also differs significantly - over 15 months. In fact, this is a labor emigrant. This is also supported by the intention to stay in the destination country permanently. This number among migrants to the EU is 2.5 times higher than among migrants to the CIS. We emphasize that this refers only to the respondents who *expressly* stated they were intending to stay permanently in the destination country. Most of the migrants do not hurry to come back and condition their return on a number of considerable requirements towards the Moldovan authorities which the latter are unable to fulfill.

Comparing social demographic characteristics of labor migrants one can also note important differences between the listed groups of labor migrants. In particular this applies to the group "CIS - construction workers" which includes predominantly men from villages, with secondary or vocational education, heads of households<sup>11</sup>. At the same time women are predominant in the other groups.

<sup>9</sup> Lucke M., Mahmoud T.O., Pinger P. Migration and Remittances in Moldova. – Chisinau, IOM, 2007, p.36

<sup>10</sup> Lucke M., Mahmoud T.O., Pinger P. Migration and Remittances in Moldova. – Chisinau, IOM, 2007, p.35

<sup>11</sup> Mosneaga V., Turcan V., Rusnac Gh. Moldavskiye stroiteli v Rossii: problemy tolerantnosti i integratsii (comparativistskiy analiz po rezul'tatam sotsiologicheskikh issledovaniy). ("Moldovan construction workers in Russia: problems of tolerance and integration (comparative analysis based on opinion poll results). // MOLDOSCOPIE (Probleme de analiză politică). Partea 1 (Political Analysis Issues. Part 1 (XXXVIII), 2005. - Chişinău: CEP USM, 2005, p.69-109

**Table 5. Social Demographic Characteristics of Migrants<sup>12</sup>, per cent (public opinion poll CBS AXA, 2006).**

	<i>CIS - construction</i>	<i>CIS - other</i>	<i>EU</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Average</i>
<i>Average age</i>	34.43	34.83	35.39	32.33	34.56
Under 30	36.77	35.39	34.20	50.58	37.34
30-50	53.90	55.50	57.02	38.93	53.41
Over 50	9.33	9.11	8.78	10.49	9.25
<i>Female</i>	15.51	46.13	58.53	67.75	41.62
<i>Education</i>					
Primary	5.46	4.93	2.57	17.52	5.32
Secondary	48.68	35.58	31.35	33.58	38.45
Vocational	36.75	36.37	35.37	32.83	35.76
Higher	7.96	22.39	28.86	19.23	19.12
<i>From villages</i>	76.30	66.28	56.46	51.31	64.82

Circular nature of migration is also affected by the labor migrant's status in the receiving country. Illegal arrival, stay, and employment in the receiving country has a negative impact on migration circularity. Realizing that he/she will not have another possibility to return to the receiving country in case of deportation, the migrant will do his/her best to stay/work abroad as long as possible, will seek ways to change one's illegal status into a legal one.

**Table 6. Illegal Migration, Stay, and Employment in the Receiving Country, per cent (public opinion poll CBS AXA, 2006)<sup>13</sup>.**

<i>Illegal Stay</i>	<i>CIS - construction</i>	<i>CIS - other</i>	<i>EU</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Average</i>
Migration (arrival)	21 <sup>14</sup>	14	43	27	26
Stay (presence)	33	23	47	41	35
Employment (work)	42	22	38	44	35

Global financial and economic crisis in 2008-2010 aggravated the problem of labor migration and return of Moldovan labor migrants from the receiving country. According to the research results<sup>15</sup> there is no direct linear relation between the departure from the receiving country and return home. Migrants demonstrate various individual departure / survival strategies in the conditions of the crisis.

<sup>12</sup> Lucke M., Mahmoud T.O., Pinger P. Migration and Remittances in Moldova. – Chisinau, IOM, 2007, p.28

<sup>13</sup> Lucke M., Mahmoud T.O., Pinger P. Migration and Remittances in Moldova. – Chisinau, IOM, 2007, p.33

<sup>14</sup> Such a high percentage of illegal labor migrants (in the "CIS" group) is highly doubtful in the context of "illegal migration (arrival)" to the CIS countries, given that Moldova has visa-free regime with these countries. We suppose that to a greater extent this applies to "stay/presence" than to "migration/arrival" to the receiving country.

<sup>15</sup> Moraru V., Mosneaga V., Rusnac Gh. Mayatnik Migratsii ("Pendulum of Migration"). - Chisinau: Printing house Sirius, 2012, p.159-181

Such strategies also affected the circularity of labor migration, adjusted it in a certain way, and uncovered its specifics in the conditions of the crisis. Firstly, circular labor migration became more of *delayed* nature, due to growing uncertainty about one's employment, decreased income of labor migrants in the receiving country. Secondly, as a result of the crisis, *more comparable opportunities* arise in the receiving countries, making possible a choice between the country of origin and destination country. Thirdly, labor migration circularity became more obviously *multi-optional in mass*. Migrants face a choice: whether to stay in the receiving country, or to return to the country of origin, or to seek another receiving country, or to stay in the borderline situation "in two places simultaneously". At that, it is noteworthy that migrants consider that in the receiving countries the crisis will be overcome faster and more seamlessly than at home in Moldova. That is why they do their best to retain the possibility to return to the receiving country, maintaining the old scheme of circular migration.

### **Moldovan policy on Circular Migration**

In spite of the fact that circular migration is not viewed as a separate priority in the National strategy for Migration and Asylum 2011 - 2020<sup>16</sup>, currently the authorities of the Republic of Moldova undertake certain steps for consolidation of the labor migration circularity. We emphasize that there are no discussions in the Moldovan society regarding labor migration circularity. All the political and social parties in Moldova realize the negative consequences of mass labor migration for the sustainable social-economic development of the country.

Undoubtedly, the main conditions for decreasing the numbers of labor migration and for implementation of its circular nature include approval and effective functioning of pluralistic democracy principles, sustainable social and economic development of the country, higher standards of living, social and legal protection for the population. In the conditions when Moldova is the poorest country in Europe one cannot realistically expect these problems to be resolved quickly.

Moldova expressed its will to participate as a country in the pilot project on circular migration, presented several proposals and remarks for improvement of circular migration mechanism and mobility. In June 2008 the Republic of Moldova was selected (along with the African state Cape Verde) to implement the project on circular migration. In the framework of this agreement it was presumed to implement two projects (beginning in autumn 2008), with the total value of 5.5 million euro. Overall currently there are over 70 projects in this field<sup>17</sup>.

The main objective in the framework of the mobility and circular migration strategy is to minimize the negative consequences of labor migration of Moldovan population abroad. 70-80 employment service offices were opened domestically in 2010 in the framework of mobility and circular migration project, and 3 employment service offices were opened abroad (Padua, Berlin, Milan), their purpose being to inform the Moldovan labor migrants and their relatives, family members about employment possibilities, as well as possibility to return to Moldova. Note that 250 labor migrants returned home, and 450 persons opened their own business in the Republic of Moldova<sup>18</sup>.

Generally speaking, so far implementation of this project has not yielded the expected effect for several reasons. Firstly, the beginning of the project coincided with the global financial economic crisis

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<sup>16</sup> Hotărîrea Guvernului Nr. 1009 din 26.12.2011 "Cu privire la aprobarea Planului de acțiuni pentru anii 2011-2015 privind implementarea Strategiei naționale în domeniul migrației și azilului (2011-2020)" (publicat: 06.01.2012 în Monitorul Oficial Nr. 1-6).

<sup>17</sup> Buracec E. Moldova: Sozdat' uslovia dlea vozvrasheniya migrantov domoy. // Migratsiya XXI vek (Moldova: Creating conditions for migrants to return home. // Migration XXI century), #2 (11), March - April 2012, p.12-14

<sup>18</sup> Moraru V., Mosneaga V., Rusnac Gh. Mayatnik Migratsii ("Pendulum of Migration"). - Chisinau: Printing house Sirius, 2012, p.81-82

(2009 - 2010), making therefore EU countries less interested in it. Secondly, Moldovan authorities lack experience in implementation of such policies. They are just at the beginning of their way, accumulating experience, working out implementation mechanisms. Thirdly, and in our opinion this is the main reason, - the mobility strategy as labor market phenomenon is based on social and economic differences between the countries. However, in our case, compared to the European Union, it is based not only on social and economic differences. When people leave, indeed, in most of the cases they do it for social and economic reasons, but when they decide whether to return back home to Moldova, the societal factors have a priority (development and efficiency of democratic principles, standards of living and quality of life, ecologic, social and welfare conditions, etc). In the conditions of public transformations the labor market is also at development stage. Thus, nowadays it is quite difficult to establish actual needs of the country, as well as demand segments of the labor market, their potential.

Still, certain activities in several directions continue to be implemented. Thus, since January 2012 financial incentives are foreseen for the graduates of EU universities who return back home and are employed here.

Creating conditions for small business development, Moldovan authorities thus try to attract Moldovan labor migrants, their capital and potential for modernization and social-economic development of the country as a whole, and different specific locations in particular. Different projects are implemented for this purpose, one of them being the Pilot program on attracting remittances of Moldovan labor migrants in the economy "PARE 1+1" 2010-2012, State program to support the development of small and medium business (2009-2011)<sup>19</sup>.

Visa-free regime with European Union countries. Moldovan authorities base their judgment on the fact that existent visa regime is one of the factors preventing the migrants from coming back home. National program on implementation of EU-Moldova action plan on visa liberalization was elaborated and signed in March 2011. It is noteworthy that monitoring European structures noted a number of significant positive changes related to border security, introduction of biometric passports in Moldova, and others.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Svetlicinii R. Experiența internațională și practicile implementate în Republica Moldova privind strategiile de reîntoarcere și reintegrare a migraților de muncă. // MOLDOSCOPIE (Probleme de analiză politică). ("International experience and practice implemented in the Republic of Moldova on strategies of return and re-integration of labor migrants. // MOLDOSCOPIE Political Analysis Issues) – #2 (LVII), 2012. - Chisinau: AMSP, 2012

<sup>20</sup> Moraru V., Mosneaga V., Rusnac Gh. Mayatnik Migratsii ("Pendulum of Migration"). - Chisinau: Printing house Sirius, 2012, p.86-88.

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