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*National Strategy for Migration and Asylum: an
Attempt of Holistic and integrated approach
towards Migration Issues in Moldova*
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Abstract

The labour migration has been a paramount phenomenon that has affected Moldova's society in numerous ways over the last decade. In response to this development the country's institutional set-up and policy framework evolved significantly. The current state of policy thinking on migration is increasingly driven by the following factors: consolidation of the role of state in managing the developments in this area; progressive adjustment to European policy framework; strengthening of the migration-development nexus and attempts at leveraging human and financial capital of Diaspora into development; fight against illegal migration that appear to be of strong concern for both international community and Moldovan society. At the same time the institutional set-up and policy framework remained disparate and not enough correlated with each other.

The newly drafted National Strategy on Migration and Asylum apparently should address these challenges and bridge the existing gaps. Moreover, the Strategy seeks to link realm of migration and asylum to the general development policy framework of the country. Thus, the Strategy marks a new stage in development of the migration management in Moldova and should address the migration-driven challenges in a comprehensive manner and in full compliance with the European commitments of the country.

This explanatory note tries to look at the major recent development in the national policy framework as represented by the National Strategy for Migration and Asylum (2012-2020). The note outlines main issues tackled by the Strategy as well as the chief objectives to be attained.

The migration is by no means a new trait in Moldova's development: it has been a paramount phenomenon that has affected Moldova's society in numerous ways. In order to address these challenges the relevant institutional set-up and policy framework evolved significantly throughout last decade (Mosneaga 2007, 2009). The current state of policy thinking on migration is increasingly driven by the following factors: consolidation of the role of state in managing the developments in this area; progressive adjustment to European policy framework; strengthening of the migration-development nexus and attempts at leveraging human and financial capital of Diaspora into development; fight against illegal migration that appear to be of strong concern for both international community and Moldovan society. At the same time the institutional set-up and policy framework remained disparate and not enough correlated with each other. Furthermore, adoption of the Action Plan on visa liberalization with the EU now appears as the main driving initiative demanding stronger policy correlation and better institutional coordination. The newly drafted National Strategy on Migration and Asylum apparently should address these challenges (Strategy 2011). By the same token, the Strategy seeks to link realm of migration and asylum to the general development policy framework of the country. Thus, the Strategy is closely intertwined with the Government's activity program as well as will feed in into the new development strategy of Moldova that should be drafted by the end of 2011.

On the macro-level the Strategy covers 3 major areas¹: (1) regular migration (including, emigration, immigration, and social integration); (2) asylum; (3) policies of prevention of irregular migration and smuggling of migrants. The Strategy rests on the following principles: (1) priority role of state in management of migration processes; (2) coordination of central and local public authorities; (3) taking into account the macro-economic benefits of migration; (4) reduction of all forms of irregular migration; (5) supremacy of law and human rights; (6) active cooperation with the EU; (7) flexibility (periodical review and adjustment of policy framework); (8) transparency.

The Strategy has an extensive set of objectives for each of 3 major areas. In what follows, this explanatory note will highlight the most important of those in order to provide the reader with the sense of direction Moldova's migration policy framework takes.

Area 1. Regular migration.

Recognizing that emigration will remain an important phenomenon, the Strategy emphasizes the need to promote circular migration (as opposed to permanent one) and to counter 'brain drain' from the country. Furthermore, skills and knowledge via returning migrants as well as connections with diasporas should be strengthened. These objectives point to the understanding by the Government of the 'permanent' nature of migration phenomenon and the development benefits the country may enjoy in the process. Furthermore, the Strategy tackles the issue of returning migrants, an important white spot in the previous policy framework.

With respect to immigration, the Strategy outlines the need to formulate the immigration policy that would be correlated with the development goals of the country while the legal framework adjusted to international norms has already been put in place. It also states the need for better practices for integration of foreigners in Moldova.

¹ It should be noted, however, that Strategy does not follow these direction in this exact order.

Area 2. Asylum

Under this area the Strategy seeks to simply streamline existent procedures (such as criteria, minimal standards for acceptance, etc.) adjusted to European requirements. It also seeks legal improvements to the framework on stateless persons.

Area 3. Fighting irregular migration and smuggling of migrants

The Strategy seeks to enable Moldova to withstand these challenges that are increasingly of regional or international nature. Somewhat newer, Moldova has become transit state for the persons from the third states on their road to the EU. Therefore, the document puts emphasis on stronger cooperation with the relevant EU authorities and the source countries with high migration potential. Interestingly enough, under this area the Strategy focuses solely on Moldova as a transit state, and not as an eventually host country of illegal migrants.

The Strategy also outlines main tool to achieve the set objectives:

- 1) Visa policies (adjustment to the EU acquis and better information exchange between different relevant institutions);
- 2) Security of documents and protection of personal data (standards for issuance and examination of travel documents adjusted to the EU acquis and information management of personal data according to international standards);
- 3) Integrated border management (reorganization and demilitarization of Border service, introduction of European standards for professional training of civil personnel of the service, and improvement of inter-institutional cooperation on the issues related to fighting illegal migration, border management, and visa issuance);
- 4) Return and Readmission (increasing efficiency of readmission measures, promotion of voluntary return and facilitation of foreigners' return to the source countries in accordance with the readmission agreements);
- 5) Informational support (information support for policy-making and migration management at national and local level, enhancement of the national system for collection, procession and use of the migration data, and establishment of the mechanism for efficient data exchange between relevant institutions).

The implementation of the Strategy should be supported by yearly elaboration Action plans. The first one should be drafted in the second half of 2011. The implementation process should be supervised by the special Committee to be established under the auspices of the Government of Moldova.

To sum up, the newly drafted Strategy marks a new stage in development of the migration management in Moldova and should address the migration-driven challenges in a comprehensive manner and in full compliance with the European commitments of the country.

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