

## THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON DEVELOPMENT AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL: THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the impact that migration has on local communities in the Republic of Moldova. Although it represents a natural process of development of human societies, migration continues to be one of the greatest challenges facing modern societies. The cumulative impact of migration effects on societies in general and their economies has the role of either balancing or unbalancing them. The negative effects of migration are most often attributed to countries of origin and refer to: depopulation of communities from which people emigrated, the exodus of the qualitative workforce, population aging, etc. These effects set up a study subject for multiple scientific researches.

On the other hand, the positive effects are attributed to the host countries and consider reducing the labor shortage, reducing vacancies for unskilled jobs, increasing the economic level, attracting the young population, increasing technical and scientific progress and innovation, etc.

Migration, especially labor migration, represents an important factor generating growth and development, including for the country of origin of the labor force. Moreover, the cumulative effects and development impact of migration tend to be more evident for the country of origin than for the country of destination. Labor migration significantly contributes to raising the standard of living and improving the quality of life in communities of origin, the impact being not only economic and social, but also cultural, political, and demographic.

The study used scientific research methods such as the analytical method, logical and dialectical modeling, comparative and synthesis methods, etc.

In closing, we note that the development impact of migration in the Republic of Moldova has occurred on the entire national economy. The GDP growth in the last two decades has been largely due to remittances, the standard of living of citizens has increased considerably. However, the greatest impact was achieved at the local community level, the benefits being multiple.

**Keywords:** migration, development, impact, community.

**JEL Classification:** J61; O0; R1.

### **Introduction.**

Migration from the Republic of Moldova had, in particular, two basic destinations: the European Union and Russia. Towards the end of the 1990s, the main destination of Moldovan migrants was Russia. The main reasons for choosing this destination were that people could move

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around freely, it was cheap to move there, and many people spoke the language. More and more people are interested in moving to the European Union. People were interested in the European Union because the countries there had a much higher standard of living, safety and social guarantees. Migration had serious consequences for our society, but it has also had a series of beneficial effects and has substantially influenced the lives of Moldovans.

Migration is a very complicated thing. It affects many areas of society. This has affected most countries in the world. The process of globalization in the 21st century has led to a significant increase in this phenomenon, resulting in new types of migration such as migration for studies, migration for business, security migration due to serious conflicts, etc. But the most common type of migration is still labor migration. The Republic of Moldova is no exception here. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2024, over 908 thousand Moldovans aged 15-64 were living abroad. This group made up almost 40 percent of the working-age population. The number of people leaving Moldova has been increasing steadily, but since 2000, there has been a big rise in the number of people moving abroad. At the moment, it is thought that there are over 1 million people living outside the Republic of Moldova (National bureau of statistics of RM, 2023). Economic constraints and opportunities were the main reason for the spread and structuring of this phenomenon, the intention of migrants, for the most part, being the accumulation of capital. Consequently, in the last ten years the working-age population has decreased by about 5.5%, from 70.5% of the total population in 2015 to 65% in 2025. Obviously, the state in question seriously affects all social and economic processes in the country. As a consequence, there is a decrease in the pace of economic growth or even a decline in economic activity. Among the most worrying are the considerable decrease in the population of Moldova, depopulation, especially in rural communities and the accelerated aging of the population, the exodus of qualified specialists. Some areas of activity of the economy of the Republic of Moldova have been particularly affected, among these being the fields of education, health, but also public administration.

#### **Literature review**

The negative influences of migration have been the subject of study for multiple research conducted by scientists. Beyond the negative effects, the phenomenon in question also has a series of beneficial effects. It is clear that most of the benefits came from the countries that received the workers: they were able to fill the jobs that were needed, and the economy grew. But moving people, and moving workers especially, is an important part of why countries grow and develop. It helps the country the workers are from too. The well-known neoclassical theory shows this connection. The theory says that differences in how much people develop in one place compared to another leads to migration. This migration then helps to balance the pace of development between the countries the migrants are leaving and the countries they are going to.

This means that the impact of migration on a country is usually more obvious for the country it leaves than the country it goes to. Migration is a key factor in improving living standards and quality of life in people's home communities. The impact of labor migration is reflected in the economy, society, demographics, culture and politics.

The economic impact of people moving for work is the main factor. It is very important for helping the economy to grow. Migration can help the economy grow, reduce unemployment, and increase the transfer of financial assets such as wages, savings, remittances, investments, etc., which are some of the most important benefits. For the Republic of Moldova, money sent home by Moldovan citizens living abroad has been very important for the national economy. In fact, the country's economic growth over the last twenty years has been largely due to these remittances. For people who live in the countryside, they often depend on money sent to them by family members working in other countries. This money is often very important for their daily lives, and can help them have a better life. In this way, we can say that migration provides resources for economic and social progress, brings economic well-being, by increasing government revenues,

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but also by increasing the consumption that immigrants generate and reduces the degree of poverty in communities.

Calculations provided by the International Organization for Migration show that approximately 25 percent of Moldovan families benefit from financial support from relatives working abroad, and about half of them depend entirely on remittances, being deprived of other income. (International Organization for Migration, 2020) Over time, migrants have sent considerable amounts of money to their families and relatives back home. Unfortunately, however, starting in 2022, money transfers to residents of the Republic of Moldova are showing a downward trend. According to data provided by the World Bank, in 2008 remittances from Moldovan migrant workers constituted 33% of the GDP of the Republic of Moldova, in 2023 they decreased to 11.8%, and in 2024 - to 10.5% of GDP, which considerably affects the country's economy and the level of well-being of the population and may lead to an increase in poverty, especially in rural communities. (World Bank Group, 2024) However, the Republic of Moldova remains in the top ten countries in Europe and Central Asia that benefit from remittances, holding sixth place in this ranking, according to the World Bank Report for 2024 “Remittances Slowed in 2023, Expected to Grow Faster in 2024”. (World Bank Group, 2024)

The calculations of the National Bank of Moldova reflect that in 2024, transfers exceeded just over 1.6 billion US dollars, in 2023 the amount transferred was approximately 1.63 billion dollars, and in 2022, it amounted to 1.74 billion dollars (an increase of 133.91 billion dollars compared to 2021). (NBSRM, 2024) Despite the fact that remittances have decreased considerably in the last three years, Moldovans continue to financially support their families and relatives back home.

However, the migration phenomenon should not be analyzed only through the quantitative approach (number of emigrants, amount of remittances transferred to the country). Migration as a mass phenomenon must be studied from the perspective of its impact on “changing consciousness and developing individual and collective human potential”, which in turn substantially influences people's livelihoods, especially in rural areas. Therefore, migration contributes to the development of communities in various ways. A special role belongs to innovative social behavior, which allows migrants to create significant changes in their communities of origin, combining their unique talents, knowledge and resources to address complex problems in innovative ways. In contact with the outside world, our countrymen bring with them a new civilization, a new approach to living together in their community of origin. The import of a new attitude towards everything that means living together is manifested in various forms: from the desire to get involved in solving collective problems and participating in the decision-making process, the protection of public goods (parks, monuments, holy places, etc.), the attitude towards the accuracy and planning of the community's territory (there are fewer and fewer communities where garbage is thrown into open spaces, the population showing increased interest in the development of services), to the preservation and promotion of local values, traditions and customs, etc. Our fellow citizens understood that progress must start from within, from changing their mentality and attitude towards what belongs to them. The transfer of know-how and knowledge, the emergence and spread of new skills have significantly influenced the increase in the standard of living of the population, especially in rural communities. This “knowledge capital” circulates between migrants' destination and origin countries, including through social networks.

The impact of migration on community development also occurs through the contribution of migrants to the modernization of local communities, with the change in the appearance of communities becoming increasingly visible over time. Moldovan communities have essentially changed their appearance by building new houses, reforming traditional houses, renovating households, fences, cultural institutions, etc. There is a direct relationship between labor migration and building a house in the community of origin. Most of the time, the home built by migrants in

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the community of origin becomes a materialization of the family's cumulative financial efforts, an expression of social success, which acquires a special significance, despite the short period in which it is inhabited.

Moreover, on the occasion of the temporary or permanent returns of migrants to the country, as a result of the somewhat ostentatious display of the wealth accumulated abroad, as well as the homes they have built, a true culture of migration spread among the community of origin, which over the years has incited more and more locals to emigrate, in order to reduce the relative deprivation in relation to the migrant group. The house built in the community by the migrant becomes an expression of family and individual success, being one of the visible effects of migration abroad, because “it is not enough to earn, this money must become visible in the eyes of others”. In this regard, an eloquent example is the village of Corjeuți, Briceni, whose fame spread throughout the country after the press called it “Little Paris”. In the Corjeuți community, the house is linked to the family's honor, which has led young people to make great efforts to build a home. For many people, the built house has more of a symbolic value than a utilitarian one, being a sign of the new status accessed through migration. This phenomenon is all the more visible in communities around large cities, where, thanks to labor migration, the local real estate sector has experienced unprecedented development. Even in the case of countrymen who have chosen to settle abroad, the phenomenon is not improper. Many of them invested in their parents' homes to provide them with a decent living and conditions that they would not have had if the children had not worked abroad. Obviously, for this category of population the utilitarian value is much higher, and pride in the success of their children represents a feeling of special value.

Thanks to migrants, preferences for living comfort and municipal utilities have increased considerably. Although living conditions have improved significantly over time, people's general life aspirations have not stopped growing. Labor migration has had a significant impact on increasing the quality and comfort of life, also developing the locality's infrastructure. At the same time, it has been found that migrants act for the benefit of others and get involved in various projects to develop things like social infrastructure or public services. Modern practices have inspired migrants to be more critical and to come back with higher hopes. These hopes include social criticism and pressure on local governments to create better conditions for people to live in. The process of modernizing infrastructure and utilities is becoming a key part of people's lives. Governments understand that if they don't create good living conditions and provide access to public services, they won't be successful in today's world.

Another impact of migration is that migrants are more interested in community life and help to strengthen the bonds within rural communities. People in the Republic of Moldova are becoming more united and involved in society, politics and their local community. Politically speaking, the diaspora has protected fragile democracy on several occasions, but its most significant contribution has been in ensuring our country maintains its European path. The government could not have achieved its goal of recognizing the European identity of the people of Moldova and confirming our country's European path through the Constitution without the help of the diaspora.

The different ways people get involved show that we need to find ways to encourage migrants to play a part in local development plans. This means we should encourage migrants to get involved in their home communities and be part of the decision-making process. In this regard, national public authorities, as well as local ones, with the support of international organizations and the European Union, have piloted various initiatives to attract migrants to local development processes, but also to encourage return migration to the country. The creation of Native Associations, which were intended to contribute to the development of localities, by implementing joint projects, together with local authorities and community members, was a very important step in the context of these initiatives. It is nothing more than a way to implement a new approach to

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the development of Moldovan communities, by involving and mobilizing natives who have left their localities of origin. Local public authorities tend to capitalize on migration and transform this phenomenon from a challenge into an opportunity for the development of localities.

At the national level, the efforts of public authorities have focused on creating the necessary regulatory and institutional framework: developing public policies, adopting regulatory acts, identifying institutions responsible for communicating with migrants, etc. The establishment, in 2012, of the Office of Diaspora Relations represented an important step in achieving this objective. The National Strategies: “Moldova 2020”, “in the field of migration and asylum” (2011-2020; 2021-2030); “Diaspora-2025”, as well as the Action Plans regarding the implementation of these Strategies constituted the first normative acts aimed at involving migrants in the processes of development and modernization of our country. A series of Government decisions, such as: Decision No. 200/2016 on the approval of the National Strategy “Diaspora-2025”, Decision No. 735/2016 on the organization of Diaspora Days, Decision No. 725/2017 on the Mechanism for coordinating state policy in the field of diaspora, migration and development, Decision No. 801/2018 on the approval and implementation of the Diaspora Home Succeeds “DAR 1+3”, Decision No. 107/2022 on the approval of the Program, Government Activity Program for 2021-2025 “Moldova of Good Times”, Decision No. 674/2023 on the approval of the National Program for stimulating returns and facilitating the (re)integration of citizens of the Republic of Moldova involved in the migration process for the years 2023-2027, Decision No. 1032/2023 on the approval of the National Program “Diaspora” for the years 2024-2028, aimed to complete and implement the measures in question. At the same time, an important objective of these programs was to facilitate the process of effective and sustainable return and (re)integration of migrants by shifting from an “individual reintegration” approach to a cross-cutting, integrated approach adapted to gender issues.

The Moldovan diaspora, according to the National Strategy “Diaspora-2025”, is structured in about 250 associations in over 30 countries, including various initiative and professional excellence groups. (Government of RM, 2016) The most numerous associations are registered in Italy, Romania, Ukraine, Portugal, France, the USA, Canada and the Russian Federation. The typology of diaspora associations is complex and diverse, depending on the legal status, the model of management of activities and the field of activity. Their main task is to maintain cultural ties with their homeland, participate in the decision-making process, and support the state’s efforts in the process of democratizing society. Migrants and their associations, local authorities, civil society, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, the academic environment, etc. become key actors in development cooperation.

Migration also has a direct impact on the skills market, also bringing about structural changes in the national labor market. The realities of national experience attest that as early as the late 1990s, the most visible changes in the qualifications market occurred in the construction field. Most Moldovans who have left the country have invested in housing. This has included building new houses and renovating old ones in rural areas, as well as buying a lot of property in big cities, especially in the capital, Chisinau. Because of this, there is now a lot more demand for people with qualifications in construction. There is now a lot more demand for these qualifications, and this has led to more people wanting to study for these professions. A growing number of young people are choosing to study construction. This has also meant that people working in construction now earn more. They are among the highest-paid people in the country. In this situation, there is a high demand for people with building and construction qualifications in local communities. These qualifications will make sure you have a secure life.

The transportation market is another area where communities are exploring new opportunities and making economic progress. The transport of construction materials, migrant passengers and parcels has seen a big increase in business. This field has become more and more

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varied, with lots of different activities and jobs. This is good for citizens, businesses and the public budget.

There has also been a noticeable increase in the number of qualifications related to local customs and traditions. When people move from one country to another, they often take with them the customs and traditions of their home country. These traditions can also be based on experiences from other countries. When migrants return home, they often encourage other people to take up popular activities again. These activities can include handicrafts, carpet weaving, woodworking, pottery and artistic trades. Sometimes, migrants even start small businesses based on these activities.

The impact of migration at the community level was also produced through the considerable expansion and development of the entrepreneurial spirit. The new entrepreneurial knowledge and skills acquired through migration by our conational are increasingly being applied in local communities. Returning home, migrants initiated and developed numerous businesses in various fields. Among those that have given new life to local communities are businesses in the fields of agriculture, beekeeping, animal husbandry, rural tourism, traditional cuisine, etc. In this context, migrants have invested not only their own savings, but also resources obtained from government and European projects supporting businesses started by returning migrants. Applications for funding for these businesses have been increasing, especially in the last ten years. Additional funding, modern practices learned abroad, and accumulated experience have enabled migrants to develop businesses based on a new culture and a newly discovered philosophy. Against the backdrop of numerous new businesses, those in the agricultural field recorded the highest performances. The new models that returned migrants developed were radically different from those previously used in our country, the technology, digitalization, and sustainable solutions being the key factors in the development of a modern agricultural business. Currently, an increasing number of farmers are adopting these practices, thereby contributing to the modernization of Moldovan agriculture. Several other benefits result from these practices: increased competitiveness, exports to the European market, increased turnover, and improved living standards in the community.

Favorable changes have also occurred in the zootechnical sector, with the emphasis on quality, new technological processes, digitalization, high-performance equipment, etc. This sector has benefited from increased attention from the state, the farmers benefiting from consistent financial support for the development and modernization of the livestock sector for milk and meat production. A relevant case is the business started by a young family who returned to the country fifteen years ago. The Dutchman and the Moldovan woman established a cattle farm in the Goleni community, Edineț, based on the Dutch model, using state-of-the-art technology and digitizing the entire technological process, which enabled them to achieve the best performance in this field, with the highest milk production. The investment behavior of the owners has also influenced, to a certain extent, the behavior of the community's population. Moreover, the business has attracted considerable interest from local producers eager to learn about new practices for modernizing and digitizing their farms. As a result, the couple is launching a new project – providing training and capacity-building services on farm modernization and digitization for local entrepreneurs. In this way, migrants' experience of working abroad also contributes to the formation and shaping of a new work ethic and business management, awareness of the need to identify alternative solutions the activities carried out, and a better understanding of the value of free time and discipline.

Another impact of migration on community development is achieved through the contribution that migrants make to promoting and developing tourism in local communities. Thanks to migrants, the country's visibility is increasing, with the number of tourists interested in visiting our country continuously increasing. Tourism plays a major role in community development, providing opportunities for social interaction among locals who sometimes lead

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isolated lives in rural communities. Tourism contributes to promoting a new image of rural communities, their values, and cultural events, while also constituting an important source of income. At the same time, tourism contributes to the development of new related businesses, stemming, including from local traditions and customs. Migrants have also played a decisive role in creating tourist complexes based on the crafts of our ancestors, passed down from generation to generation. Activities like pottery, woodworking and weaving are a big part of the country's cultural heritage and are a key part of life in rural communities. Visitors can learn about the complex process of crafts and try traditional food.

Migration has also had a positive impact on the development of local communities. This has been achieved through the creation, development and maintenance of social projects. Examples of these projects include social canteens, supporting the elderly in their communities of origin and supporting vulnerable families. Migration has allowed migrants to share their skills and knowledge with charities. This has helped them start new projects in their home towns and cities. Some projects were done with local public authorities, while others were only done by people who had left the country.

The projects promoted the idea of helping vulnerable people and elderly people who don't have anyone to look after them, especially in rural communities. One example is a project called “Adopt an Elderly Person” that was started by a woman from Moldova who lives in Germany. The project received real support from people living in Moldova outside of the country, and it quickly became part of a larger project – the Mcharity charitable foundation. Thanks to crowdfunding platforms, the project will take more than eight years.

### **Conclusions**

The movement of people from one country to another has increased a lot in the last twenty years and has affected almost all countries in the world. Migration has a big effect on the economy, society, population, culture and politics.

Migration as a mass phenomenon produces both negative and positive effects. It is equally important that studies carried out on this phenomenon focus not only on the negative impact that migration produces, but also on its positive effects.

The impact of migration on the level of development of communities in the Republic of Moldova is undeniable, with visible effects in all areas of social life. Economically, migration has provided resources for economic progress, achieving multiples of the transfer of financial assets.

As a result, in recent years, our country has been among the top 10 countries receiving remittances, according to their share in GDP. Moldovan migrants, especially those who return to the country, invest part of the savings accumulated abroad in the development of their own businesses, contributing to increasing economic performance. In the social field, the benefits of migration have been manifested in many areas of social life, contributing essentially to increasing the standard of living of the population in local communities. Moldovan migrants have brought with them a new approach to common living, contributing to increasing social cohesion, to the modernization of communities, and increasing preference for comfortable living. Of particular value are the social programs that migrants have encouraged or initiated. They have been developed in areas of major importance for society that the authorities fail to fully encompass, are costly, require constant attention, and call for a new approach based on modern practices. Culturally, migration has contributed to increasing Moldova's visibility abroad, promoting and developing tourism in local communities. Politically, migration has favored the acquisition of the European identity of the people of the Republic of Moldova and the irreversibility of the European path of the Republic of Moldova.

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