

## **Economic, social and gender aspects of the international migration in Moldova**

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### **Abstract**

*International labor migration is one of the most marked phenomenon that characterize the current situation on the Moldovan labor market.*

*Geographical and gender distribution in labor migration is largely determined by the type of work that provide migrant workers. Women migrate to provide domestic and care services abroad, delegating in the same time their responsibilities in this area to other people, leads to the constitution of so-called global care chains.*

*Migration with the purpose of study in Moldova is accompanied by a negative phenomenon, of the departure of highly qualified specialists. International migration of highly skilled labor, known as brain drain clearly evokes a loss of intellectual capital.*

*Moldova continues to be characterized as an origin country of human beings trafficking, being at lesser extent a country of transit of human trafficking victims from NIS countries to Europe.*

*The lack of some measures from the Government on "human capital loss" problem will essentially reduce the chances of exit from the crisis.*

*Keywords:* migration, labor, migrant workers, intellectual capital, gender, social responsibility, brain drain, global care chains

At the present international migration has become a defining feature of modern global economy. The main factors underlying this expansion are the process of globalization, the technical and scientific progress and the new economic order.

International Migration in Moldova, especially the labor migration registers a continued growth. International labor migration is one of the most marked phenomenon that characterize the current situation on the Moldovan labor market. In 2014 the number of people migrated abroad for searching a job was about 341 900 people (332 500 in 2013), or 18% of the inactive population aged 15 and over. Men accounted 64.1%, while women, respectively - 35.9% of all migrants. The share of people left from rural areas was 71.7%<sup>28</sup>

Although the phenomenon of international labor migration is considered new for Moldova, this statement is only partially correct. During the socialist economy period, Moldova, as one of the republics within the Soviet Union, was characterized by pretty intense internal work migration. The high level of migration was explained by the fact that from the 15 Soviet republics Moldova had the highest population density (130

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<sup>28</sup> Labour force in the Republic of Moldova. Employment and unemployment, 2014, www.statistica.md

persons per square km) determined by the demographic specific of this region, whilst economic structure was mainly agrarian. As a result, Moldova was characterized by an excess of labor supply, which often was absorbed by "the great sites of socialist construction" through labor placement services of the Union. Many migrant persons were employed outside the country, especially in the northern regions of the former Soviet Union, in order to get a higher wage or to ensure a more successful career. Labor Migration in the Soviet Union was conditioned by the emigration of young people for study or for military service in the Soviet Army outside the republic, some of whom stayed to live and work there where they have studied or made military service.

When the USSR fall internal migration has become external, also changing the intensity and motivations. The apparition of borders between republics did not restrict migratory workers flows to east. On the contrary, they have become more intense, being mainly driven by higher income and better employment opportunities abroad, that missing home. The difficulties in the early years of transition, the challenges imposed by administrative reforms, economic and social policies have boosted the migration processes, particularly the economic migration.

During this period migration also has changed their character. From permanent, it has become mainly temporary (long-term) or seasonal.

Although in the early years of transition Moldova faced with a pronounced wave of permanent migration (usually Moldovans emigrate to Israel, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Canada etc.), the most observed form of migration was the temporary voluntary migration, based on economic reasons. Driven by socio-economic situation, the phenomenon of migration has also evolved depending of migration policies adopted in different time periods. Thus, according to experts the developments of migration phenomenon in Moldova can be divided into four phases, each with its own specific characteristics.<sup>29</sup>

The first phase (1990-1994). The specific of this stage is determined by some aspects of migration policy characteristic for the previous period (when Moldova was part of the USSR). It be mentioned that at the beginning of that period over 560 000 Moldovans living in former Soviet Union republics. After independence proclaiming a series of migration related issues came to light, including protection of rights of Moldovans working in former Soviet republics, which led to bilateral agreements on labor migration signed with the Russian Federation (May 1993), Ukraine (December 1993), Belarus (1994), as well as other CIS countries.<sup>30</sup>

Drastic worsening of economic and social situation, mass layoffs of workers as a result of privatization processes, increasing poverty etc. - led to migration intensification that occurred during this period, mainly as a commercial economic migration. Migrants go abroad (usually in Turkey, Romania, Russian Federation and Poland) where they sell autochthonous goods and with earned money buy goods from the land, which sell at home for a higher price. Along the way, this form of economic migration decreased their intensity and disappeared, becoming unprofitable due to the introduction of visa regime, strengthen customs control, balancing prices in post-communist countries, the active involvement of large and medium business in import-export operations with European countries.

<sup>29</sup> Tendințele și politicile migraționale in regiunea Mării Negre: cazurile Moldovei, României și Ucrainei, Institutul pentru Politici Publice (Kiev, 2008)

The second phase (1995-2000). This stage is characterized by intensification of migration processes, especially labor migration. By 1997 social and economic reforms promoted by the government, have led to an economic recovery began. However, despite these positive results, the economic situation worsened in 1998 following the regional financial crisis and the default in Russia, main trading partner of the Republic of Moldova, followed by block of the imports of Moldovan agricultural and industrial production in the Russian Federation and the collapse of the national currency and inflation increase. The years 1998-1999 were marked by acute economic crisis, which led to the closure of businesses, job losses, rising of unemployment, increased poverty. All these taken together led to compromising of labor market functionality in the country. As a result, grew spontaneous labor migration, mostly illegal. Grew the business connected with illegal migration of people to other countries, human trafficking increase. At the same time, began to take shape and the positive effects of labor migration. Foreign currency inflows into the country increased. The interest in this phenomenon increased too, both for general public and for decision-makers.

The third stage (2001-2006). This stage is characterized by the maturation of measures taken by the Government regarding regulation of flows of labor migration, protection of migrant rights, fighting with illegal migration, including human trafficking etc. Thus, in 2001 was created the State Migration Service, which has the function of development and promotion of more efficient and fair migration policies. During this period the illegal migration and employment was at its peak and was determined, first, by the difficulty of obtaining visa to European countries, the lack of possibility to be employed abroad legally, and high taxes, which were to be paid for obtain the legalization of stay in destination countries. Multiple attempts were undertaken to regulate the labor migration flows both in Moldova and in European countries. During this period more dialogues were initiated with 19 countries, signed bilateral agreements on labor migration, and were opened consulates of the main destination countries of illegal labor migrants (Portugal, Greece and Italy) in Moldova. Around this time grows seasonal work migration towards the Russian Federation and Ukraine (mainly feature for men working in construction field) and to Italy (mainly feature for women who are engaged in household work).

Stage Four (May 2006-present). This stage is characterized by increased activism in promotion of policies relating to international labor migration. After the reorganization of the State Migration Service appeared several institutions, including the Service of Migration and Asylum, Agency for Combating Human Trafficking, Migration Policy Department near the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and the National Employment Agency and so on, that took over its competences. With the launch of the European integration vector occurs the closer cooperation with the European Union. Moldova made essential efforts for regulate the migration processes, and illegal migration of labor is gradually attenuated. The main destination countries remain Russia and Italy. Remittances from abroad have reached significant proportions amounting to about one third of GDP in 2006, remaining until now at high level.

The evolution of migration in this period was strongly determined the nature, the extent and types of international labor migration in Moldova, including the female one.

Although reasons for migration may be multiples (better employment and earning opportunities, poor quality of public services, environmental matters, family reunification, education, conflicts, etc.), however, the main cause of it, is economic or employment one. People migrate to improve their quality of life, to cultivate certain

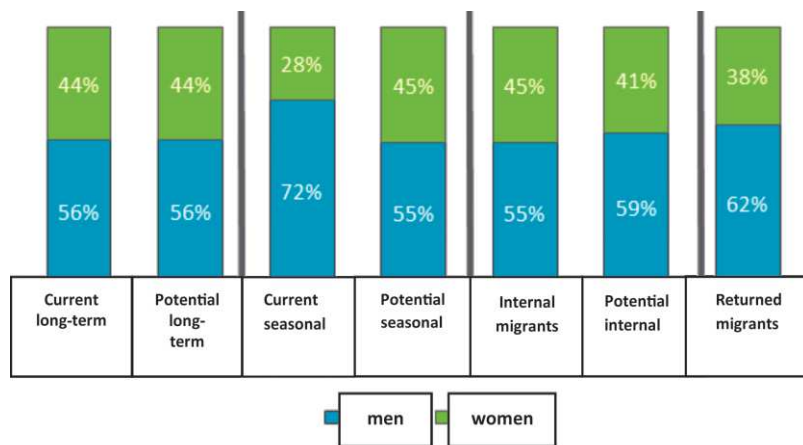
skills, attitudes, values, for general grow, while remittances sent home serve for assurance of their family members decent living.

On the background of intensifying labor migration there is also an increasing percentage of female migrants which leads to a "feminization of migration". If previously it was considered that migration of men pursued mainly economic goals and enhance family welfare, while the women migration has, respectively, a social character (family reunification, education, escape from domestic violence, etc.) now this approach changes. Today the female migration takes more pronounced economic character that contribute to increasing of the household welfare and to the development of the communities they belong to.

The feminization of international labor migration is determined by several factors, including: the change of labor content (reorientation from manufacturing to service economies), crisis of care systems driven by the mass ingress of women in the labor market of destination countries, the formation of such called global care chains etc. All this has led to an increasing demand for female migrant labor and to sexual division of labor.

Analyzing the distribution of Moldovan migration by sex, field studies indicate a prevalence of male versus the female migration. The study "Nexus" shows the prevalence of men over women migrant for all types of migration. However, it is noted that if for the long-term migration, both current and potential, this prevalence is not significant - 56% men compared with 44% women from total migrant persons, for current seasonal migration this discrepancy is more pronounced - 28 % women versus 72% men. At the same time, the study shows an increase in the percentage of women for seasonal potential migration compared to the current one - 45% versus 28%. (figure 1)

**Figure 1. Trends in the Moldovan migration by sex, 2013,%**



Source: Nicolaas de Zwager, Ruslan Sintov, "Market Research: Innovation in circular migration - Migration and Development in Moldova", Chisinau, 2014 IASCI.

The prevalence of migrant men on migrant women is determined primarily by prevailing stereotypes in the Moldovan society, men are involved in the main function of ensuring the welfare of households in which they live, while women respectively

insure the function of domestic work, education and childcare etc., or those activities that are not yet considered value added work. Although mostly of women are present on the labor market, this does not exempt them of their responsibility for housework.

On the other hand, because the specific of employment and cultural traditions, the republic's population has sedentary nature and labor migration is seen only as a last way of solving the economic problems that could arise. For this reason, a high level of migration is not characteristic for Moldova, and the intensification of this phenomenon in the years of transition to the market economy is determined primarily by economic difficulties the population facing. In the same context, although female labor migration is not pleasant, sometimes even condemned, the number of migrant women workers is steadily growing.

The increasing number of female migrant workers is determined primarily by increased demand for female labor, particularly in European countries. Is envisaged the increase of the demand for domestic work and care that are usually provided by female migrant workers.<sup>31</sup>

The growing number of migrant women workers from Moldova is determined by costs and risks reduction related to migration, large disparities between incomes at home compared to those in destination countries, lack of opportunities to find attractive well-paid job in the country of origin, overcoming language and cultural barriers etc. All this led to labor migration abroad of a significant number of women from Moldova, especially from rural areas, with intention to provide the types of work mentioned above. Usually migrant female workers from Moldova go to work in such countries as Italy, Turkey and Israel. According to the Labor Force Survey in 2013 in these countries went respectively 38 600 or 33.4%, 5700 or 4.9% of all female migrant workers (Table 1). Migrant male workers go mainly in the Russian Federation - 170 700 persons or 76.3% of male migrant workers.

This geographical and gender distribution in labor migration is largely determined by the type of work that provide migrant workers

Studies in the field have shown that most of male migrant workers activate in construction 51%, transport or telecommunications -16% or industry -10% of male migrant workers, areas where labor demand is high, mainly in the Russian Federation. However, most of the female migrant workers work in domestic services- 43%, hotel services - 12%, commercial services - 13% and health care - 4% of the total of migrant female workers, areas characterized with high demand in European countries.

Increasing demand for care services in European countries stems from the fact that these countries are facing with their own crisis that presented serious challenges for the welfare and traditional care model based on family. Walkout of women to the labor market and the aging of population have led to a "crisis of care for children, elderly, sick and/or disabled people". Many states do not adequately manage this crisis, leaving households them-itself to take further the care responsibility. The most accessible solution for middle-class households was to employ a domestic worker to provide care, which often is a migrant woman.

As such, care work is the name given to all everyday activities aimed to maintaining our health and life, such as housework (meal preparation, housekeeping, laundry) and personal care (children, the elderly, the sick or the disabled). In the private

<sup>31</sup> Labour force in the Republic of Moldova. Employment and unemployment, 2014, [www.statistica.md](http://www.statistica.md)

household, these activities are carried out mostly by women that do not get any remuneration. Therefore, at the moment, care work is considered the activity that don't generates added value. This situation derives from the traditional division of labor by sex, where the woman has role of unpaid caregiver and the men - paid worker.

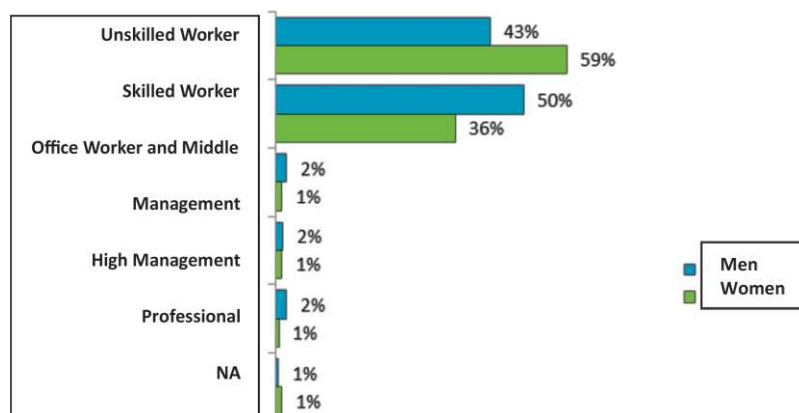
There are, of course, paid care services too.

In turn, in the countries of origin like Moldova, when men are not able to assure family welfare (because of unemployment, low wages, economic crisis, etc.), this function is delegated to women, which led to a "feminization of poverty". In this situation the family can take a joint decision that a female member too will leave to work abroad for the purpose of ensuring the welfare of the family. There are cases when women migrate so, to escape the violence or unhappy marriages, to find new relationships or knowledge.

The structural changes in the countries of destination and origin led to the feminization of migration. The transition to the market economy, economic restructuring, reorientation from manufacturing to service economies, led on the one hand to increasing the demand for flexible and cheap labor, on the other hand to the intensification of female migration. In this context, gender is a key principle in organization of labor markets, leading to an international sexual division of labor. This was manifested by the increase of demand for migrant female work, which is usually poorly paid, is provided in unfavorable working conditions, unprotected, and sometimes even economically unrecognized.

These trends are confirmed by the same study "Nexus" showing that the employment situation of migrant female workers in Moldova is mostly as unskilled workers - 59% versus skilled worker 36% of all migrant female workers and only one extremely small part of them are employed with the status of official, high-level manager or professional worker. Although men migrant workers have mostly the same employment status, the share of men in total unskilled male migrant workers is lower than that of female - 43% versus 59% (figure 2).

**Figure 2 Distribution of migrant workers according to occupational categories and gender, 2013, %**



Source: Nicolaas de Zwager, Ruslan Sintov, "Market Research: Innovation in circular migration - Migration and Development in Moldova", Chisinau, 2014 IASCI.

Various statistical data analysis (study of "Nexus" NBS) reveal a rather negative aspect of female labor migration specific for Moldova, and namely the qualification of labor force. Usually, most of the women who go to work abroad, have quite high professional level, but engages unskilled work. These persons, activating more time at this work, lose their qualification. Such cases are found among teachers, doctors, engineers, researchers and other professionals who require large investments for their education. Labor Force Survey data show that in 2013 approximately 14.2% from total of migrant women had high education.<sup>32</sup> However, only 1-2% of them worked in areas that require a higher qualification. The ignorance of this phenomenon by decision makers can lead to an intellectual crisis, which will require much longer period than economic recovery of the country.

Intensification of female labor migration generates a number of social problems at the level of the households they belong so as at Moldovan society level, among which children without parental care, or old people helpless by their children. If the social protection system in the country is not able to give to these people adequate social assistance and the provision of private care services don't have an appropriate legislative and institutional support, this problem remains unresolved.

In general, care should be seen as a key dimension of human development, which involves the ability to live a dignified life for all. However, the most important necessity for people, daily throughout all life is the care. Besides the fact that care provide material needs (cleaning, food, physical assistance) and emotional needs (achievement, accompanying), care contribute essentially to the reproduction of labor force. On this basis ignoring this social problems or their inefficient management can generate unforeseen social consequences, such as accelerated population aging, social security systems compromising, diminishing social cohesion, degradation of human capital in the country.

Despite its importance, the care continues to be invisible in society. Mostly, this type of work activity is conditioned by the fact that the care activities was traditionally supplied free by women within the family and thus was never considered a work.

In order to solve the problem in some extent, migrant women workers delegate its care responsibilities to female relatives: mothers, sisters, etc. In the situation when women migrates to provide domestic and care services abroad, delegating in the same time their responsibilities in this area to other people, leads to the constitution of so-called global care chains. Delegation of care work from one house to another is based on the hierarchy of power, depending on gender, ethnicity, social class and place of origin.

Global care chains are a fairly common phenomenon in the world, being a product of the globalization processes, of the feminization of migration and of the reorganization of collective welfare systems. Global chains of care exist at transnational level.

Although men can provide care services too, however, in the care chains men and women fulfill different roles. Typically, men are the beneficiaries of care, while women are the care providers or managers. Women undertake this kind of activities either for salary either because of affection or responsibility towards people who require care but, most often, because households in destination countries for this type of

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<sup>32</sup> Labour force in the Republic of Moldova. Employment and unemployment, 2014, [www.statistica.md](http://www.statistica.md)

services require especially female migrant workers. Large demand for female migrant workers to provide these types of services are determined primarily by low costs bear by households employed migrant female workers. However, those workers are usually employed without labor contracts, informal, thus avoiding payment of taxes or other mandatory social payments.

Thus, care chains tend to generate an inequality between women too. Formation of care chains either not help society to progress towards a more equitable distribution of care responsibilities, nor raise the social value attributed to this work. However, care chains can be a temporary solution, but, unfortunately, unsustainable for solving the crisis in care sector. Although they contribute to expanding of labor markets, they perpetuate the same conditions of invisibility of the domestic work, lack of social responsibility and burden sharing under the same hierarchy as in the previous traditional model (unpaid work / paid women in the households).

Or, care work is not necessarily visible when some tasks are transformed into paid domestic work. Invisibility simply acquires another form. Currently, the invisible working woman is not the wife who has no longer access to its own income or is not entitled to retire or to have a holiday, but a migrant domestic worker without a contract and illegal migrant worker status.

Thus, we find that through global chains of care female migrant workers often face double discrimination - on the one hand, because they are women, and on the other hand they are migrant, working at poorly paid jobs.

Often, migrant female workers suffer from isolation, exploitation and sexual harassment. May take years before they will be able to see their children and beloved ones, they left at home country while confronting stigmatization and guilt to those "abandoned".

However, labor migration can offer women the opportunity to become free and independent, inclusive economically and socially, strengthening their social position and self-esteem, respect from the family and from the community and society. Through labor migration women can provide themselves the necessary conditions to return and set up their own business, to develop new experiences of living and working, to discover new opportunities, to learn new habits, to cultivate new values and skills.

Generalizing can be affirmed that female labor migration in Moldova is an objective phenomenon that can have both a positive and negative impact. For this reason, any policy for female labor migration should focus both to attenuate its negative aspects and to extend its positive aspects.

Thus, taking into account the specific of female labor migration from Moldova, for mitigate its negative aspects must be find, first, a way of enhancing care activities (remove the care work from invisibility). For this purpose it is necessary:

- To develop a system of indicators able to monitor these types of activities;
- To create a legal and institutional framework regulating the working conditions and qualifications necessary for care work (its institutionalization in countries of both origin and destination countries);
- Acceptance by the public institutions of care work as social responsibility;
- Ensuring the rights of people who provide care work

Although most long-term migrants from Moldova go in order to find more attractive job - about 89.5% of total long-term migrants, cannot be overlooked and other types of long term migration, i.e., those for studies or family reunification.



According to the study "Nexus" other relevant female long-term migration can be considered for purposes of family reunification and studies migration. Migration for family reunification purpose is an interesting category of long-term migrants, which constitute approximately 18,700 persons or 4.5% of long-term migrants. The dynamics of family reunification migrants largely correlates with the dynamics of migration in general. For purpose of family reunification usually migrates children aged up to 18 years - 54.3%. Also, a quite important category in this type of long-term migration are youth aged 18-29 years - 20%, and those aged 30-44 years - about 10.3%,<sup>33</sup> where are included migrant women. Although there are cases when young women migrant go abroad in order to marry citizens of destination countries, forming thus international families, this phenomenon is not widespread in Moldova.

Speaking about the distribution of migrant persons with purposes of family reunification by gender, it can be asserted that this distribution is quite balanced. Migrant women in this category easily prevail men - 53% women versus 47% men from all migrants with purpose of family reunification. Not only young people leave for family reunification purposes but older people leave too. The study "Nexus" make the finding that approximately 1 from 10 Moldovan migrants who went abroad for the purpose of family reunification is aged 45 years or more, that could indicate an intergenerational reunification of families, i.e. parents who join their children working abroad. This phenomenon fully corresponds to all traditions of Moldova, which implies that grandparents take care of their grandchildren who are abroad with their parents, when the parents are at work.

Depending on the country of destination, the trend of family reunification reflects the migration geography characterized for Moldova, except the USA. It finds that 11% of all cases of family reunification till 2012 occurred in this country, compared with only 1.1% of total long-term migrants who went to the USA. This could be due to the lower level of returning intention of Moldovan migrants residing in the USA.

Besides migrants purpose of family reunification, another 18 400 Moldovans migrate to make their education abroad. A big part of students come from rural areas - 66% of total migrants for studies purposes. Most migrant students are young. Thus, 2/3 of migrants in this category are aged between 18-29 years and the other 31% are under 18. These data confirm that most Moldovans who leave to study abroad are enrolled in higher education system. Usually, Moldovan migrants for studies choose, traditional, three destination countries: Russia (31%), Romania (22%) and Italy (21%).

Migration with the purpose of study in Moldova is accompanied by another negative phenomenon, namely, the departure of highly qualified specialists, including a significant number of women.

International migration of highly skilled labor, known as "brain drain" clearly evokes a loss of intellectual capital. Most young migrant persons from Moldova are at the beginning of their professional careers. These people unfulfilling itself into the country, because of the lack of attractive workplace, leave permanently or temporarily abroad. Labor Force Survey data indicates a level of youth unemployment (people aged 18-24) twice higher than the general - 9.8% compared with 3.9% in 2014.<sup>34</sup> Usually leave the best. Much of the young people from republic who study abroad, remain to

<sup>33</sup> Nicolaas de Zwager, Ruslan Sintov, „Market Analysis. Driving innovation in circular migration. Migration and Development in Moldova”, Chişinău, IASCI 2014.

live in these countries. Thus, Moldova is gradually turning into a supplier of skilled labor force for other countries in her own detriment.

Since the skilled workforce cannot fully be realized at home and Moldova's economy can't find it an appropriate use and respective remuneration, this "human capital loss" may be justified. If labor is not used, it loses its qualification anyway. Therefore, emigration of skilled labor force can be while considered as its potential storage.

The phenomenon of "brain drain" is becoming widespread in the country, driven also with mood of young people who no longer link their future with Moldova. This "lack of patriotism" of youth is conditioned not only by the economic crisis in the country, but also by frequent political crises, the indifferent attitude of politicians towards the problem, of those who come to power to solve their personal problems first and not thus of the society.

Other types of migration, that may be characteristic for Moldova are related to international youth programs "Au pair" or "Work & Travel", but the level of these types of migrations is insignificant.

One of the most negative phenomena that accompany international migration from Moldova is human trafficking. In the late 90s, when illegal labor migration in the republic was at its peak, was intensified and human trafficking too. Women were trafficked into sexual slavery, male - for forced work, children - for begging. Although there are no exact data on the extent of this phenomenon, but women constituted the majority among trafficked persons. At that time human trafficking started to spread high enough so prevention and combating of this phenomenon was declared as a national priority. In these conditions it is ratified a number of international acts and adopted a set of normative and legislative acts and strategies aimed to improve the situation in this area.

Although that in the present the scale of human trafficking is decreasing, specialist officers continue to identify new people trafficked, including traffickers. Statistics show that in 2010, through multidisciplinary teams of the National Referral System, was identified 132 victims of human trafficking, as compared to 2006 their number has increased 5 times, that can be explained by improving their identification. The structure of identified victims is represented in proportion of 75.8 % of adults (73% women and 27% men), children make up 26.5 % (65.7% girls and 34.3% boys) in the total numbers of victims.<sup>35</sup>

The analyzes in the field tells about the fact that, despite the measures applied, Moldova continues to be characterized as an origin country of human beings trafficking, being at lesser extent a country of transit of human trafficking victims from NIS countries to Europe. According to the International Organization for Migration, the main destination countries for human trafficking victims over the past years remain the same: UAE (27%), Russian Federation (17%), Turkey (14%). But others were included first time in the list of destination countries: 11 cases in Egypt (except one case in 2003), Malaysia - 2 cases and Indonesia - 1 case.<sup>36</sup>

Although the number of women not prevail men in the total number of migrant workers, the process of "feminization of international labor migration" in Moldova is increasing. In this context, the differences between the experiences and problems of

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.statistica.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=3722>

<sup>35</sup> Extended Migration Profile of the Republic of Moldova 2007-2012, IOM, Chisinau, 2013;

<sup>36</sup> Extended Migration Profile of the Republic of Moldova 2007-2012, IOM, Chisinau, 2013;

women and men must be integrated into migration and development policies.

Without gender equality can be no development. In other words, gender equality must be a central objective in any migration model that aspires to development. Here is envisaged the overcoming of the stereotype that only male migration has an economic character and can be integrated into development.

The degradation of human potential conditions particularly serious imbalances and damages for the current transition, economic recovery and the future of the country, so the problem of migration should not be ignored by the authorities. The lack of some measures from the Government on “human capital loss” problem will essentially reduce the chances of exit from the crisis.

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