

MIGRATION OF CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA FOR WORK - RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND FORCED LABOUR



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs

Conclusions and Comments after the National Information Campaign stage II (August 2019 - March 2020)

Social context of the campaign

This paper is a continuation of International Center La Strada Moldova's effort to investigate, through the lens of quantitative-qualitative analysis, the phenomenon of migration of citizens of the Republic of Moldova and the risks that are related to trafficking in human beings. More specifically, **the specialists of the telephone service „The Safe Migration and Anti-Trafficking Hotline 0 800 77777” (HL) paid special attention to the analysis of information on labour exploitation of Moldovan citizens abroad and forced labour.**

[The statistics](#) of the Hotline for Safe Migration and Anti-Trafficking for 2018 showed alarming trends regarding the level of information, vigilance and behavior of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova looking for jobs abroad.

The first phase of the national information campaign (March - May 2019) reconfirmed the concerns mentioned above. The qualitative analysis of the calls taken by the LFA specialists showed that the actions of informing and sensitizing our fellow citizens must be continued.

The premises with which we entered the [second phase of the campaign](#) were derived from a [quantitative-qualitative analysis of the calls to the Hotline](#) taken over by the service advisers during March-May 2019. The actions and messages we were preparing were to be designed with alarming truths confirmed by callers in mind, namely:

- ❖ We continue to address the whole country, from North to South. Basically, we need to talk to all social categories in Moldova, men and women able to work (between 18 and 50+), from all cities and villages of Moldova.
- ❖ The main challenge (the most dangerous misinformation, constantly generated and fueled by private employment agencies) we face remains in force: to fight the belief that visa liberalization would guarantee the right to work in the European Union based on an exclusive biometric passport, without a work visa or other additional documents.
- ❖ For the most part, we address citizens who take consciously financial and social security risks associated with trafficking in human beings. Moldovans are looking for short-term jobs, with greater mobility, opting for short-term jobs in European Union member countries, given the financial vulnerability of the population of Moldova.

At the same time, we had to take into account the new changes in the behaviour of our fellow citizens and their way of making decisions that were becoming increasingly clear:

- ❖ After the launch of the first spot, we are talking about a certain level of information overload related to the general disappointment in most of employment agencies. The

aspect to be developed during the upcoming campaigns the is the description of the forms of manipulation used by private agencies.

- ❖ We are going to assume more and more the role of guide for the citizens who are trying to orientate themselves in the online information space in order to be informed about the legal job offers abroad. Thus, for example, after several public calls of La Strada Moldova to state institutions, on November 6 2019, the complete list of legally operating intermediary companies was placed on the official website of the Public Services Agency, specifying the types of license they own, the field and the country in which they have the right to employ our citizens at work. However, callers continued to need guidance from LFA advisers, as the section of the site remained difficult to access.
- ❖ The second phase of the campaign is to be capitalized including for the collection of qualitative data on the approach of the new SOS call profile. Since March 2019, a new form of SOS calls is becoming more and more clear, the content of which has changed a lot compared to the content of the calls of victims of fraud and labour exploitation registered 5-7 years ago.

Demographic profile of Moldovan migrant workers

Between 1 August 2019 and 30 March 2020, the LFA registered a total of 1051 calls as to the safe migration of citizens. In the interest of this report, we will divide in the following analysis the calls into these categories listed as follows:

- a) *Employment abroad* (516 calls) – from potential migrants about going to work abroad, with or without an work offer
- b) *Going abroad for a purpose other than work* (tourism, studies, emigration) – 89 calls
- c) *Status of the migrant abroad* (a difficult situation related to the loss of identity documents, violation of the residence regime, legalization of study diplomas, etc.) – 161 calls
- d) *Requests for general information* on safe migration or trafficking in human beings, proposals for collaboration – 46 calls
- e) *SOS calls* (exploitation of the migrant worker, alleged cases of trafficking, disappearance of persons alleged to be exploited) – 27 calls. These relate to 21 SOS cases registered as a result of the information campaign, of which 6 are suspected trafficking cases, as well as the recovery of 11 victims of sexual exploitation in Greece.
- f) *Other* (requests not related to the direct mandate of the LFA) - 212 calls.

Women remain as before the most loyal category of callers, who call the Hotline for safe and anti-trafficking migration both for themselves and for their family members (husband, children, as potential migrants).

Moldovan citizens of different ages, genders or social status are involved in international labour migration. If until 4-5 years ago, the tendency to emigrate for work was observed especially in the rural areas, whereas during the reference period the number of people living in Chisinau or others cities who intended to go to work abroad increases. This trend speaks about the serious general situation in all economic areas of the Republic of Moldova. The active, able-bodied population migrates en masse. Over 64% are people aged between 27 and 40 years. Every fourth citizen interested in a job abroad is over 41 years old, and young people (18-26) have 10% of this category (see *Diagram 1: Who are Moldovan migrant workers*).

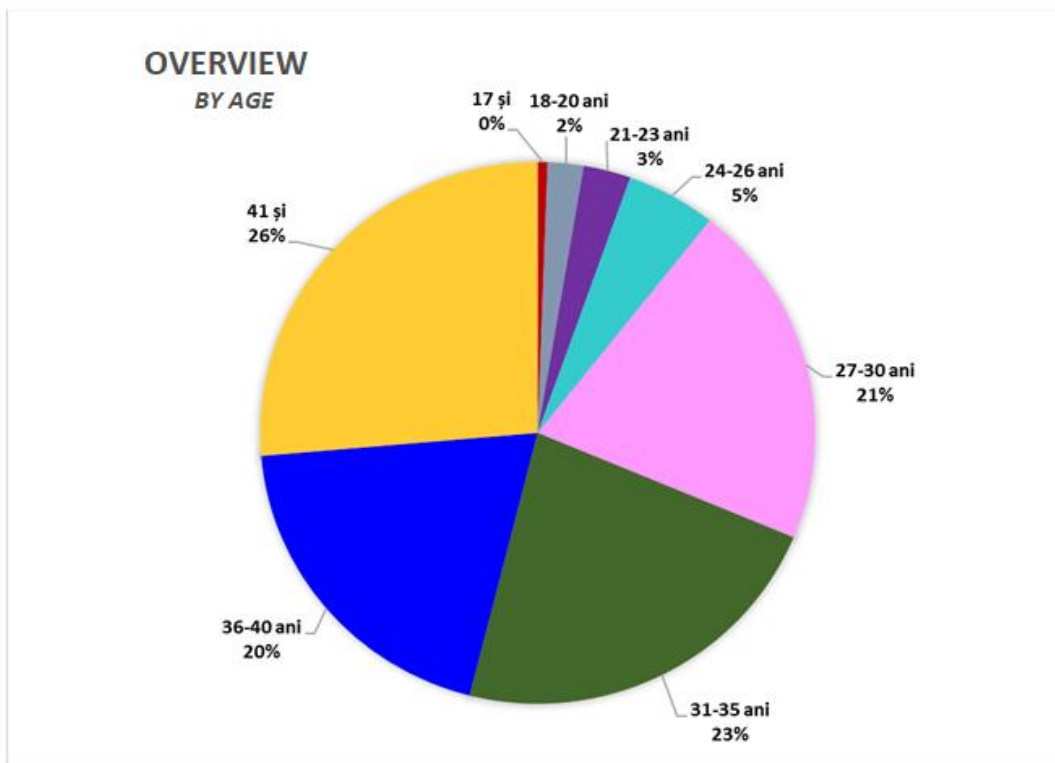


Diagram 1: Who are the Moldovan migrant workers

The needs and perspectives of migrant workers

Over 70% of the calls of the LFA during the reference period refer to the **promotion of a safe migration of citizens**. Most are *general counselors on going abroad to work* and *specific employment counselors abroad, when there is a concrete job offer* (see [Chart 2](#)).

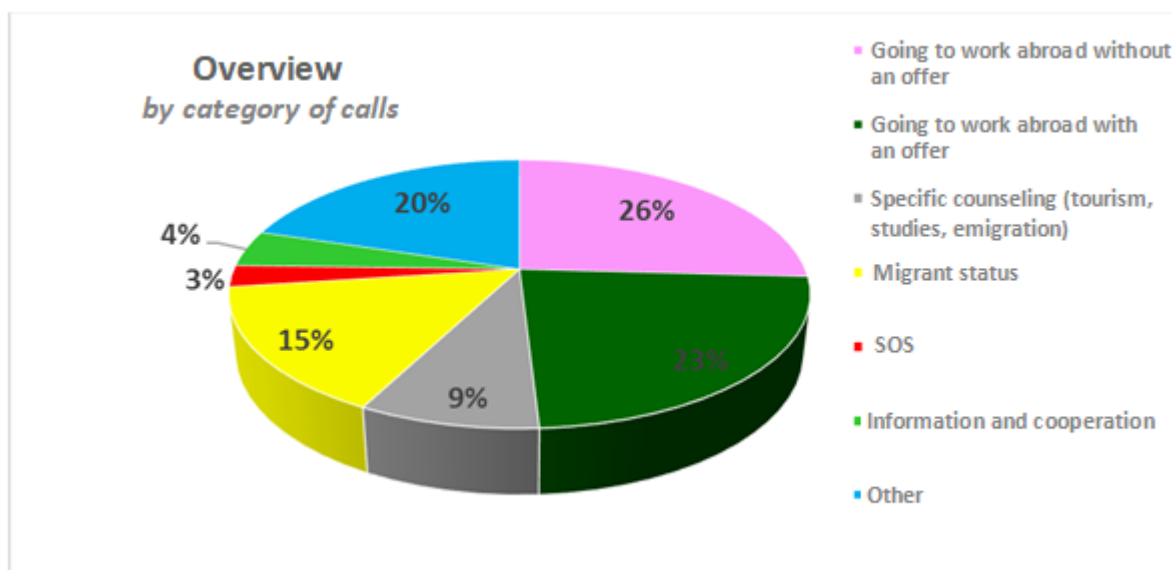


Diagram 2

Analyzing the destination countries where Moldovan citizens intend to work, we can highlight the following situation:



Poland, Germany and the United Kingdom remained in the top of the countries preferred by the citizens of the Republic of Moldova to work. There is a growing interest in the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic is no longer in the top preferences of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova.

As for the fields of activity in which Moldovan citizens are trained abroad, they are as varied as the countries of destination (Diagram 3: Fields of activity).

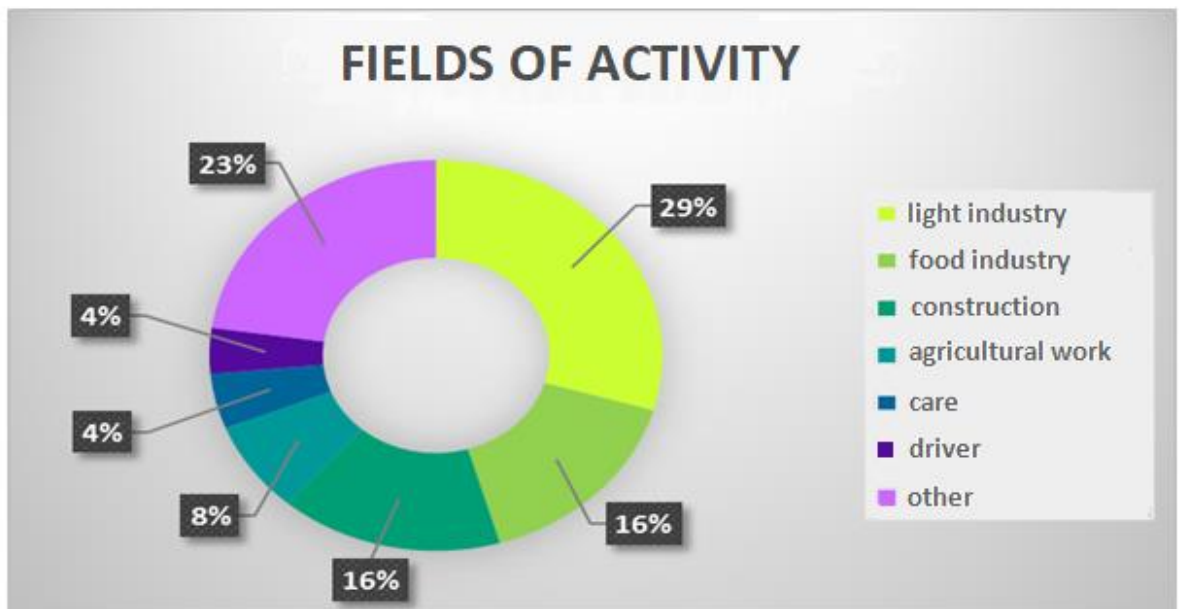


Diagram 3: Fields of Activity

The Internet (specialized sites, such as 999.md and social networks) remain stable in the top sources of job search abroad (80% of LFA calls);

- Every tenth caller tells us that he received the job offer from individuals, both known and unknown, with whom they met live to send money and documents.

- Only 6% found their job offer directly to the employer abroad.
- 8 out of 10 LFA callers are ready to accept a job offer from an intermediary agency about which I do not know too many details. I usually talk on the phone or on Viber, and more details are provided only if I go to their office.

Looking for a job abroad on the Internet, during the reporting period alone, on the LFA online platform there were 13374 visitors, of which 13165 unique visitors. These are young people up to 24 years old (16%), those aged 25 - 44 years (67%), but also men and women over 45 years old (15%).

A The number of the counselors on the platform migratiesigura.md increased almost 4 times (190 counselors in total) compared to the same period (August 2018 – March 2019). Among the most popular topics on which Moldovans have requested the consultation of specialists are:

- 1) Information on the emigration procedure
- 2) Information on the employment contract
- 3) Counseling based on a job offer
- 4) Counseling without a job offer
- 5) Information on completing the documents (including documents for foreign citizens located on the territory of the Republic of Moldova)

In the top 5 of the most popular articles on the platform migratiesigura.md are:

- 1) Employment contract abroad, only with biometric passport?! It's illegal and dangerous. Don't get pulled over!
- 2) If you want to emigrate to Canada
- 3) If you want to emigrate to Australia
- 4) Work in the UK: what is the legal employment procedure
- 5) Legal procedure for employment abroad for the citizens of the Republic of Moldova

• **The job market abroad and the conditions of intermediaries**

Unfortunately, the situation on the local market intermediary companies offering jobs abroad has not changed a lot. Most of the time, during counseling, we find that intermediary companies do not provide accurate information about the place as well as working conditions they propose. In the first stage, it is communicated only on Viber or by phone, with the promise to provide more information ex officio. And when the citizen arrives at the intermediaries' office, in a hurry and without having time to study all the details, because he/she „burns the offer”, signs under pressure a mediation contract with the company.

At the same time, by signing these contracts, our citizens are often already burdened with certain debts that will be deducted from their salary later, as well as without being specified specifically for what, what is the amount, etc., and the acute need to be able to offer at least a minimum existential to their families, our citizens do not ask questions about the employment contract, they are told they will be signed there, nor about the work visa or other important details.

Here are the worrying trends that the specialists from the Hotline managed to identify during the reference period in connection with the operation of the activity of the companies and intermediaries involved in employment abroad:

- The vast majority (77%) of callers go to work abroad without having signed an employment contract

More than half of the callers know that this is necessary, only they choose to go to the company that promises to sign the contract in the destination country. The worst thing is that the appellants, in most cases, are not even fully aware of the risks to which they are subject. They believe that once they turn to the services of a specialized agency in the field, they have nothing to worry about. People only know superficially what the process of legal employment at work consists of and they do not know what the underlying of this process is, ending up being exploited or deceived by people in bad faith or traffickers.

- Over 65% of callers said they go to work based on the Moldovan passport (biometric). Only 23% of them were informed about the need to have a work visa, 8% were expressly informed that they do not need a visa, as they go to work for a period of 3 months, and "for this period they do not open aim".
- 64 % of the callers, in general, knew nothing about the need for a work visa at the time of the call, as the information received from the intermediary was incomplete.
- 4% of the callers told us about a very dubious clue: the intermediary company would have promised them that their work visa will open in 3 months if they want to stay in the destination country. Or, the work visa is the confirmatory act of the declared purpose. It is required upon entry into the country of destination and cannot be opened in the territory of the host country. Moreover, some of these callers informed us that a Polish visa will be opened for them, based on which they will be able to arrive later in France, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands to work legally.
- every fourth appellant informs us that they are required to hold dual citizenship, especially Romanian citizenship, in order to avoid the need to open a work visa.

The number of people who called LFA continues to increase, not to check a job offer over the hut, but to try to find out from us what opportunities to leave there are in general. These are people who do not ask concrete questions about working conditions, salary, rights, facilities, but are desperately looking for any opportunity to earn a source of income, completely neglecting the risks to which they may be subjected.

The analysis of the calls referring to citizens of the Republic of Moldova who found themselves in situations of vulnerability abroad are often related to the job offers accepted „with their eyes closed“. The fact of labour exploitation becomes difficult to prove, as Moldovans consciously agreed to go to work abroad without having an employment contract signed with the employer, when they crossed the border with the Moldovan biometric passport, trusting the verbal promises of intermediaries that everything is „legal and safe“.

Here are the difficulties and dangers they faced when they reached their destination:

- They were paid only partially, sometimes working on the basis of false Romanian documents
- They have worked or lived in worse conditions than promised, but do not have any legal act to claim their rights. Some of them had only the job offer, without a stamp and without a signature.
- They were not employed. The beneficiaries were in a foreign country without knowing the language or where they could ask for help. Some of them did not even have the money to go home.
- They were deceived – they paid 5,000 Euros each to an intermediary from Romania to get to Israel, which later disappeared and could not be found.

For these citizens, the only real possibility to claim their rights is by contacting the police. But, as the victims of scams have acknowledged, this is not a solution. On the one hand, when addressing the law enforcement agencies, they did not always know how to proceed in such

situations, and on the other hand, resolving these cases often takes years. And people simply give up, while intermediaries feel free to exploit the vulnerability of other desperate Moldovans.

Migrant workers in vulnerable situations. SOS cases

Towards the end of March, the number of appeals regarding the status of Moldovan migrants abroad increased. This was conditioned by the spread of the Covid 19 pandemic and the various difficult situations in which the citizens of the Republic of Moldova found themselves abroad (Moldovans who lost their jobs asked us how they could return home).

During the reporting period, LFA specialists recorded 27 SOS calls. These refer to 21 SOS cases involving 116 people, of which:

- 6 cases are suspected of trafficking in human beings (THB)
- 4 cases of disappearance, with a clear outline of some operating elements
- 11 notifications regarding crimes and related phenomena of THB

In 67% of cases it was women victims, in 33% - men.

The coercive methods used by traffickers in these cases were debt burdens, false promises and psychological manipulation.

The alleged cases of THB identified during this period are as follows:

- 1 case of sexual exploitation- the case resulted in the recovery of 11 victims from Greece;
- 2 cases of labour exploitation – (one in Poland, involving about 80 Moldovan citizens, and another in Italy)
- 2 cases of forced marriage/ cohabitation – (Turkey and Italy)
- 1 case of involvement in criminal activities (Russia).

Conclusions

In the Republic of Moldova, the migration of citizens for work is a large and high-impact phenomenon, given that a significant share of able-bodied people are involved in this process, and remittances are often an important part of the country's GDP. However, the state of the Republic of Moldova has serious gaps in the field of ensuring safe migration, our citizen being often exposed to high risk situations.

In addition, the phenomenon of human trafficking in Moldova, as well as worldwide, is undergoing a series of metamorphoses and adaptations to new social and technological realities. Analyzing these changes and identifying the new rules of the game for traffickers is perhaps one of the most difficult challenges and pressing needs facing specialists in the field.

In such circumstances, the need for information campaigns to inform vulnerable citizens about the risks of trafficking and labour exploitation cases remains acute, as they have not diminished. Abuse manipulation techniques have become more latent, more „refined” and thus more difficult to identify and to avoid for the population. From a certain point of view, information campaigns allow us to keep our hands on the pulse, following new trends and adjusting strategies to prevent trafficking in human beings and labour exploitation abroad.

***The Campaign** was carried out in partnership with the General Inspectorate of Border Police of the Republic of Moldova, the International Organization for Migration, Mission to Moldova within the project “Increasing the accessibility of the risk group to information on safe migration and the danger of trafficking in persons” with the financial support of the US Embassy in Chisinau.*

***The Safe Migration and Anti-Trafficking Hotline 0 800 77777** is supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs within the project „Supporting national authorities to advance policy response to THB with full respect to HR and rights of trafficked persons”.*

Nota Bene: This is an unofficial translation. Please find [here](#) the original version of the report.