

MIGRATION POLICY OUTLOOK IN THE PANDEMIC CONTEXT

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Abstract: *The pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus is strongly felt by migrants, radically changing the present and future migration from all points of view. Since the beginning of the pandemic, a large part of migrants have been forced to find themselves in a difficult situation, dictated by measures to limit entry-exit into / from the country, on the one hand, and unemployment in the country of origin. Migrants are excluded from the labor market because undeclared work has increased, where foreign workers will compete with local workers. The issue of return migration is also addressed, emphasizing that return is not very developed, but has a significant impact through the emergence of the solutions they are thinking of. The article mainly refers to what happened in Romania and to what is to be expected in terms of volume, structure and population dynamics in the short, medium and long term, in the context of the challenges brought by the medical emergency caused by COVID19.*

Keywords: *Romania, crisis, pandemic, mobility, return migration.*

1. Introduction

In the evolution of human development, various economic crises appear regularly, but, at the same time, there are spontaneous crises, which destroy all the forecasts of specialists. The current situation, when the pandemic together with the economic crisis, the closure of borders between countries, lower oil prices, drought, the reduction of international trade, a negative impact on global migration processes is identified. The harmful consequences have an effect not only on working migrants, but also on labor markets, both nationally and globally. The purpose of the material is to investigate external migration trends in the context of the pandemic crisis.

In the spring of 2020, most human mobility stopped because they had travel bans, went into emergencies or even a complete blockage due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. These restrictions have had a dramatic effect on migrant workers around the world (ILO, 2020). While the crisis has led some countries to provide easier access to the labor market for immigrants with skills needed for essential jobs or even to temporarily regularize illegal labor migrants, several countries have decided to create new restrictions on labor immigration. work due to the negative economic effects of the blockade (Abella, 2020). The crisis is expected to have a long-term effect on labor migration (Papademetriou and Hooper, 2020), making the COVID-19 pandemic a potential event of concentration.

The social, economic and political dynamics have known a new scope since the pandemic broke out. From a historical point of view, humanity has experienced several critical periods, in which the consequences have been noted more or less as devastating. History has been told countless times when we mention smallpox, rubella,

cholera, tuberculosis or plague. All produced chaos and fear, the demographic impact of each varied depending on the route of transmission, the degree of contagion, the most affected age group or the previous exposure of the population to a similar pathogen.

2. The pandemic in Romania

At the same time, a number of socio-demographic characteristics played an important role in the spread of pathogens, as well as in the severity of the effects that epidemics had on the population, economy and society, the relationship between population characteristics and effects produced by epidemics. a complex one, of mutual determination. The incidence of epidemics and mortality from these diseases depend on certain demographic and social factors. Epidemiological studies show that both the transmission of certain contagious diseases and the severity of disease depend on the intersection of factors such as the age structure of the population (Jarosz, 2020; Mossong et al., 2008), population density (Rocklöv, Sjödin, 2020), size household (Geard et al, 2015) and its type (multi-generational or multi-family). The role of these factors in the dynamics of epidemics depends to a large extent on their selective nature, for example the large number of multi-generational households can favor the occurrence of serious cases of influenza, due to the coexistence of preschool children who become easily infected at the beginning of the community. and the elderly, who develop severe forms of the disease (Geard et al, 2015). (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/1275.pdf>)

Travel from one place to another has encouraged the transmission of contagious diseases and thus migration and mobility have been considered the main factors in the spread of epidemics. The modern era has brought to the fore new epidemiological challenges, if we analyze the factors that stand out in addition to territorial mobility, in the account of which we place the spread of these diseases we detect the means of transport.

On 27.02.2020, following a contact with a foreign citizen who visited Romania, the first case of SARS-CoV-2 infection was registered. COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new type of coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). It was first identified in China in December 2019. In December 2019, an epidemic of COVID-19 broke out in the Chinese city of Wuhan, which spread rapidly to other regions of China and the world. In January 2020, isolated cases appeared in some EU Member States. At the end of February 2020, Italy reported a significant increase in COVID-19 cases concentrated in the northern regions of the country. Most other EU Member States have started reporting cases of infected people.

A group of researchers from the University of Bucharest also showed that the virus entered Romania along the corridors of external migration: Italy, followed by other countries of destination of Romanian migrants. For example, the situation of Italy as a source country of the virus has been highly debated, and the Romanian media has often used the socializing pages of Romanian migrants to exemplify the harsh reality of the Peninsula. They initially did not want to return to the country because they did not trust the medical and social system and considered, even if the situation there was worrying, to stay there. Such critical visions and a general lack of trust in Romanian institutions are attitudes often encountered among Romanian migrants not only

regarding the health system. Probably that too weighed a lot in the fact that we do not see more arrivals from Italy. (Europa Liberă, 23 martie 2020)

3. Perspectives of the pandemic

From an *economic* point of view, according to the calculations of the International Monetary Fund, the performance of the global economy will be this year and next year with a total of 12.5 trillion dollars (11 trillion euros) lower. This is the "worst recession" since the global economic crisis of about 90 years ago. (<https://www.dw.com/ro/coronavirusul-va-fi-urmat-de-o-pandemie-a-datoriilor/a-55693505>) All countries will go through this crisis, from an economic point of view. Economic performance will decline this year marked by a worldwide coronavirus pandemic, experts warn in unison. As a consequence of the crisis, the public debt will exceed this year, in terms of economic performance, the maximum level recorded at the end of World War II. On April 16, 2020, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection reported a number of 901,623 suspended employment contracts and 233,798 terminated employment contracts. At the end of February 2020, the unemployment rate was 3.9% in Romania, respectively 352 thousand people (INS, 2020). Compared to the February data, after the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, the number of suspended or terminated contracts increased almost fourfold. At the end of April 2020, the situation reported by MMPS indicates a number of 725,200 suspended employment contracts and 276,459 terminated employment contracts (MMPS, 2020, Press release: Status of individual suspended / terminated employment contracts, as of April 30, 2020). Compared to the situation from April 16, 2020, there is a decrease by 176,423 of the number of suspended employment contracts, but the number of terminated ones increased by 42,661. Compared to the situation on April 1, 2020, the number of terminated contracts increased by 120,784 (MMPS, 2020, press releases on the situation of individual suspended / terminated employment contracts). In the immediate term, it is felt by low-income or registered families job losses due to the closure of some sectors of the economy, families who they have no immediate and adequate social protection alternatives. Loss of benefits or social services that were associated with school participation (attendance at day centers, nutrition programs in schools) means for poor families to take on an additional cost during the crisis. (https://acad.ro/SARS-CoV-2/doc/d14-COVID-19_din_perspectiva_demografica.pdf)

From an *educational* perspective, a pandemic increases the level of stress for everyone, including parents. If you show signs of stress, it is perfectly normal and you are not alone. Many parents may find it stressful to find a balance between work, childcare and housekeeping, especially when they do not have the support they are used to. While isolation can be an opportunity to spend time together and develop a relationship with your children, many parents may face conflicting feelings and priorities, as well as practical challenges. The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) causes emotions, such as anxiety, stress and uncertainties, felt even more strongly by children of all ages. Although they have their own mechanisms for dealing with these emotions, given that schools are closed, events have been canceled and they need to stay away from friends, children need to feel loved and supported now more than ever. For children of migrants and refugees, access to care and services will become even more difficult due to quarantine and closure of social services, they may even be arrested or detained. Migrant and refugee children may be prevented from accessing

basic services due to legal, linguistic, act and safety barriers. It can be estimated that the number of children at risk of being separated from their families and those in need of alternative care will increase, both in times of crisis, when measures to limit the spread of the epidemic could lead to the separation of children from families and following the long-term socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis on families' ability to care for children.

Romania was among the countries that applied rapid measures to stop the spread of the virus, so on March 11, 2020 it closed its schools. The solution for continuing school in normal conditions was to move to a rapid digitization, on different e-learning platforms, using different packages, OFFICE 365 or G-suite, and for students in final years, grades VIII - XII and XII - to, optionally, return to school on 2 June 2020 for 2 weeks. During this period, special procedures for access to the school were implemented, both among students and among teaching, auxiliary and non-teaching staff. As for the children of migrants, they have been and remain particularly affected when the courses take place online. Parents have, on average, less resources, for example, they do not have a computer, they have less living space and, in the absence of language skills, they cannot help their children with homework. Home-schooling puts migrants' children at a greater disadvantage. Courses in all educational institutions and institutions have been suspended, as of March 11, 2020, as a first step in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. After the decree of the state of emergency, the suspension of school courses was continued. In the context of the suspension of courses and the limitation of the movement of persons (especially elderly people caring for grandchildren), Law no. 19/2020, which regulated the general framework regarding the granting of days off to parents / guardians / legal relatives in the situation of temporary closure of educational units and Government Emergency Ordinance no. 30/2020 of March 18, 2020, which amends art. 1, para. (1) of the Government Decision no. 217/2020 for the application of the provisions of Law no. 19/2020, which provides for granting days off to parents during the school holidays. According to this law, parents who supervise their children up to the age of 12 at home will benefit from days off, including during school holidays in case of emergency. (<https://www.edu.ro/ministerul-educa%C8%9Biei-%C8%99i-cercet%C4%83rii-face-apel-c%C4%83tre-cadrede-didactice-s%C4%83-contribuie-cu-resurse>)

On 10.03.2020, the Ministry of Education and Research made a public call to teachers in primary and secondary education to contribute open educational resources, which can be accessed on the CRED project page and to make video lessons with the technical support of Television Romanian. (<http://www.red.educred.ro/>)

Ministerial Order no. 4135 / 21.04.2020 approving the Instruction on ensuring the continuity of the learning process at the level of the pre-university education system establishes a series of measures to ensure the development of the online learning process. (https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2020/inv.preuniversitar/ordine%20ministru%20inv.preuniversitar/Ordin%204135_2020.pdf)

From a *social* perspective, the media used various nicknames to personalize the portrait of the Romanian migrant: „society's pariah”, „strawberry”, „black worker”, but omitted the fact that 94ei is a Romanian and must be seen and treated in terms of rights,

duties and obligations that a citizen has. Important to analyze is the legal status, as well as the degree of vulnerability.

The portrait of the Romanian migrant is the mirror of the Romanian society and must be seen as such. It should not be analyzed from an educational point of view - lower or higher power of higher education, distribution of rural-urban environment, etc. In addition to all these aspects, the reduction of social contacts has an impact on maintaining the mental health of older people (especially the elderly) and on how they perceive their quality of life (subjective well-being). The current context has led to the restriction of the activity of some of the social service providers needed by the elderly, such as home care. It is welcome that both the representatives of the central and local public administration, as well as the civil society and the local communities have mobilized to help the elderly, the continuing need of these people involves identifying the necessary human and financial resources. Last but not least, the use of technology both in monitoring these people and in their support (eg paying utility bills) is welcome.

As the phenomenon of Coronavirus has spread significantly globally at an almost uncontrollable rate, social authorities have adopted a series of measures to restrict the spread of this virus among the population as much as possible.

In this context, in order to ensure the safety and health of workers, but also to support employers in carrying out current activities, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection has recommended 3 measures to make labor relations more flexible:

1. establishing individualized work programs, with the consent or at the request of the employee concerned;
2. temporary change of workplace at the employee's home;
3. carrying out the activity through telework. Thus was introduced the phenomenon of teleworking. (Dumitrescu and Căpuș, 2020)

If we discuss from the three temporary perspectives, in the short term there is the return migration, the migrants who have already returned to Romania, it is not known for how long, but they can stay at least during the coming crisis. Certainly, it is not known what the dynamics of this phenomenon are because in agriculture or care, migrants are also identified, not the local population. Hard work is and will be done by migrants. In the medium term it is known that the only thing that can be said is that the European context in general will change. Nobody knows what the effects of migration will be from an economic point of view, but it will be an extremely strong crisis. The economic situation in general has profound effects on all types of migration. In the long run, history is still written today. Migrants sent several billion euros to the country, which will probably not enter or come in less for a while. What is interesting to follow in migrants is not only the diverse effect from an economic point of view, but also from an attitudinal point of view. Many of them will have a vulnerable attitude towards returning migrants and will want to open businesses and think that it would not be bad to maintain relations or property in Romania, even to return at some point.

Studies reported by Unicef reported that crisis situations based on domestic violence have increased in pandemics among couples. Existing statistics worldwide confirm the hypothesis that the COVID19 pandemic has negative effects on the couple's relationship, family life and favors the occurrence of episodes of domestic violence.

4. Conclusions:

There will certainly be fluctuations among families, many migrants have lost their jobs, no sources of income and will consume everything they have collected. Romania is an extremely unequal country and in general we need to look at how migrants return to the country in depopulated areas, but also in developed areas. The perspective is different as in the case of social situations. Efforts to preventively increase the capacity of family-type care and social protection systems are essential to increase family resilience and prevent the use of residential care.

Conclusions on the cross-border mobility of the mobility diaspora and its degree of vulnerability in the context of the COVID pandemic are some aspects without much evidence. Although it is not possible to give a sharp answer regarding the return to the country of the members of the mobility diaspora, as a result of the medical and economic crisis, some ideas related to their situation can be reported. It is difficult to estimate whether the diaspora will decide to return to the country, to migrate or to remain in the current state of residence. This aspect depends on when and how each country of residence will overcome the medical and economic crisis and how attractive Romania could become as an offer for members of the diaspora facing economic and health risks. With regard to prevention measures for the diaspora and seasonal migrants, so far, no state response or public policy response has been formulated as to what regards the Romanians from the mobility diaspora, who returned to the country in the context of the pandemic. What was done in these cases was quarantine or isolation, once entering Romania, measure to prevent the spread of the virus taken in the case of all those who arrived in Romania from certain destinations, regardless of the purpose or duration of their departure from Romania.

As stated in the ICCV 2020 Social Report, through these aspects we begin to understand the immediate social effects of the crisis: changes major issues of human relations, way of life and quality of life their. Globally, an impoverished and more polarized society, but also a visible growth of national self-awareness. The economy contracts: they close businesses and over a million people are sent in various forms of unemployment: unpaid leave, technical unemployment or even actual unemployment, job loss. Western economy, which offered attractive occupational opportunities for Romanians, she also entered restriction. A large part of the Romanians who worked abroad return to country and want to find job opportunities. As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, the opportunities in the West are also reduced for immigrants.

Above all, there are opportunities for seasonal work in agriculture which offers modest incomes and poor working conditions. Statistically, there is no report showing the exact figures of the size of the population that has returned the country and will remain here. An approximation made on incomplete and insufficient data estimates the number of those who returned and who want to find job opportunities at about half a million. The depletion of families' accumulated financial resources is a fact anxious. The level of accumulation of financial resources was low even before the crisis due to low income. They now risk being quickly depleted. The shrinking economy also has an immediate effect on declining incomes. Poverty will inevitably increase: people are already struggling to make ends meet provide the minimum necessary food, a new phenomenon in Romania. Inevitably it happens an accentuation of social inequality, of social polarization. Chronic lack employment severely accentuates the process of social exclusion.

(<http://www.iccv.ro/wpcontent/uploads/2020/04/Raport-social-ICCV-27-aprilie-2020.pdf>)

The end of the pandemic is conditioned by the natural immunization of a sufficiently large number of people so that the virus can no longer find hosts to infect, and as for migrants, the Government must find as a long-term investment their integration so that the danger that through the pandemic and its consequences, the progress made in the field of migration and integration will be partially annihilated.

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