

# RETURN MIGRATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: FROM THE THEORETICAL APPROACH OF INSTITUTIONAL CONCERN

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**ABSTRACT.** Nowadays, return migration has become a highly publicized and actively researched subject, as an expression of the dimension that this type of migration acquires at the contemporary stage and of the effects that it induces. At the contemporary stage, several states of the world have changed their status from a state of emigration to a state of immigration, and in the current context of the global pandemic a massive return of migrants is expected amid acute economic recessions in countries with large numbers of migrants. This influx of migrants could be an important resource for the economy of some states currently dependent on the volume of remittances sent to the country by emigrants, as is the case of the Republic of Moldova. The number of migrants returning to the Republic of Moldova is currently low, and those returning are facing various reintegration problems. In this sense, the support provided by state institutions for their reintegration is absolutely indispensable. Through this study, the author aims to analyze the tools used by the structures of the state in order to provide logistical support for the socio-economic reintegration of migrants returning to the country. The analysis highlighted the existence of a concern through a legislative framework appropriate to this purpose, which is not yet fully operational. The economic reform that the Republic of Moldova is going through should offer more opportunities to the citizens of this country to work in the country, so that they do not have to leave the country.

**KEYWORDS:** *return migration, programs for migrants.*

## INTRODUCTION

The population of the Republic of Moldova was included in the global migration circuit at the end of the twentieth century, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Economic destabilization caused by the loss of ties with former member states, as well as numerous economic crises and shocks, has stimulated the migration of Moldovan citizens in search of work and competitive wages abroad.

In recent years, especially after the escalation of the economic crisis in the Republic of Moldova, both governmental and international institutions, civil society have in mind the situation of migrants and the possible return. Moreover, the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, with the support of international bodies, aim to provide the necessary assistance to the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, with the support of international bodies providing the necessary assistance to citizens of the Republic who intend to return or have returned to the country. In this regard, it should be noted that the Government is currently in the process of developing policies on incentives for the return of emigrants.

The purpose of this study is to assess the content and relevance of government measures regarding the reintegration support of migrants returning to the country after a migration experience. Several basic objectives are subordinated to this purpose:

- Evaluation of the tools used by certain state institutions regarding return migration (strategies, development plans, etc.);
- Analysis of programs launched to return migrants both through the banking system and through social projects and programs;

- Analysis of the problems faced by returning migrants according to the materials of empirical studies and the written press;

The Republic of Moldova does not have a strict record of returning migrants, their number is estimated indirectly in the national empirical research. In 2012, the National Bureau of Statistics estimated the number of returned migrants at about 2.6% of the total population (NBS 2012). Some statistics are provided by the National Agency for Employment, which records data only on returned migrants who have used the agency's services. Thus, 337 returned migrants were registered in 2017 and 1,144 in 2018 or 3.5 times more than the previous year [13].

The importance of the study topic is to understand the challenges and opportunities related to their integration on the local labor market and the transfer of human, social and financial skills, acquired abroad, for the country's economy. Returned migrants could play an important role, contributing to the development of their homeland, even if their return is temporary or circulatory.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study is based on a qualitative methodology, the study aims to highlight the types of socio-economic and political challenges to which recently returned Moldovans respond differently, depending on the assimilated experience, the country from which they return, but also their socio-demographic profile: gender, age, qualification level, family situation, social, economic and cultural capital.

The paper is based on the analysis of the content of national policies (migrant return strategies, economic strategies, analyzes related to development plans, national, regional and local best practices, see Table 1)

**Table 1 Initiatives analyzed in this study.**

Initiated program	Spatial scale	Aim
PARE 1+1	Regional	Re-attraction
Youth Economic Empowerment (PNAET)	National	Re-attraction Reintegration
Start for young people - a sustainable home business	Regional Local	Retention Reintegration
Credit guarantee fund	Regional Local	Reintegration
Women in business	Regional Local	Re-employment Reintegration
First House	National	Reintegration Re-attraction
Integrating Migration into Local Development (MIDL)	Regional Local	Reintegration

*Source: Made by the author, based on data from the ODIM study*

Main methods used:

- 1) **analysis**: allowed the author to analyze the available documents, using a qualitative approach in the given research. Identifying the objectives and tools in each policy of an initiated program;
- 2) **systemic analysis**: in assessing and analyzing the relationships between economic and social components, establishing cause-effect relationships;

During the classification of policies, the author relied on Lowell's (2002) "Six R" model. The starting point was the data provided by the Labor Force Survey on migration,

especially the number of migrants in 2012. Statistical data provided by the National Agency for Employment, which records data only on returned migrants who have used the agency's services. Therefore, the paper identifies the most common directions, objectives and tools of national remigration policies.

Analyzing remigration policies, we use the following definition: returning migrants are people who return to their country of citizenship after being international migrants (either short-term or long-term) in another country and who intend to remain in their own country. at least one year (UN Statistics Division 1998). Policies aimed at voluntary return to study will generally be outlined, and no policies / programs on forced remigration modalities (involving the return of refugees or asylum seekers to their countries of origin) will be examined.

According to the literature, political responses to migration could be divided into six categories, called "Six R" (Lowell 2002):

1. *Return of migrants to their country of origin* - focusing on the permanent return of workers. There are different objectives of these policies: the benefit of the new skills acquired by migrants during emigration, the reversal of negative demographic trends, the management of labor shortages in certain sectors or regions. The social reintegration of returnees is a crucial element of these policies, because without a successful reintegration, the return can only become temporary and workers can emigrate again.
2. *Restricting international mobility* - this policy option is used mainly in less developed countries to protect their internal labor market and to maintain a skilled workforce at home.
3. *Recruitment of international migrants* - attracting, in most cases, highly skilled workers from abroad. Such policies make immigration easier for skilled workers and often do not provide incentives to attract them.
4. *Reparation for loss of human capital (compensation)* - this is just a theoretical migration policy. The idea was developed in the 1970s, arguing that more developed countries should compensate financially (or in other ways) for less developed countries severely affected by brain drain.
5. *Expatriate resources (diaspora options)* - this policy is mainly used for skilled migrants; can be attracted to initiatives initiated by the government or the business sector to help networking, knowledge transfer and so on.
6. *Retention* - through education policies and economic development, skilled workers voluntarily decide to stay in the country. Re-employing workers to prevent their emigration is a crucial tool in these policies, especially in crisis-affected regions.

Among the policy classifications mentioned above, it is important to emphasize that the link between migration and development is a much debated issue. In public opinion or political discussions, it is quite frequently pointed out that immigration impedes economic development in the countries concerned and contributes to increasing social tensions (ILO 2010b; United Nations 2013). However, as the findings of an OECD study (OECD 2013) show, immigrants can make a significant contribution to economic growth and, in some cases, even contribute to reducing wage inequality and can be a significant driving force for innovation and entrepreneurship. (Ottaviano and Peri 2012).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Returning migrants represent an invaluable demographic and economic potential that contributes to the country's development. They can act as catalysts, as they often return with innovative human, financial and social capital. Successful reintegration of migrants in their countries of origin is a key element in contributing to the sustainability of return. In some cases, policies have interconnected objectives - for example, encouraging return migration and maintaining internal labor in the country (retention).

In recent years, the Government has created an institutional framework by launching a series of mechanisms to support migrants and attract remittances to the economy of the Republic of Moldova. There is currently an institutional framework that supports migrants, including government authorities such as the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family, the Office of Migration and Asylum, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, supported by the country's development partners and Diaspora Associations.

On May 20, 2014, a new Action Plan was adopted to support the reintegration of returned citizens abroad for the years 2014–2016 instead of the previous one (Action Plan to stimulate the return of Moldovan migrants abroad, Government Decision No. 1133 of 09.10.2008). The Action Plan includes nine detailed objectives and actions, which aim at developing the legislative, institutional, informative framework to facilitate the integration of returnees; facilitating integration into the labor market; developing the entrepreneurial skills of migrants; supporting the reintegration of returned migrants into the education system, and into the healthcare system, etc.

On August 23, 2017, the Government approved the Action Plan for 2017-2020 on the reintegration of Moldovan citizens returning from abroad. The document aims to develop programs and services for Moldovans returned from abroad, by providing the necessary support for reintegration. Among the actions envisaged in this regard are: diversification of measures and improvement of school (re) integration services, programs for young people and the elderly, as well as employment measures.

The Inter-Ministerial Committee in the field of diaspora, migration and development was also set up and the mechanism for coordinating and implementing state policy in the field by the central and local public authorities was approved. Thus, the responsible institutions will apply the integrated approach of the field of diaspora, migration and development in the activity programs and will evaluate the migration impact. The purpose of the approved documents is to ensure the effective implementation of the policy in the field, to contribute to the increase of the positive effects and to the reduction of the negative effects of migration [9].

At the same time, it is worrying that the number of emigrants does not know well enough the institutions or organizations that provide information or support on migration. We can attest to actions aimed at providing comprehensive information on legal migration to the European Union and existing opportunities on the Moldovan labor market. Thus, in the projects within the Mobility Partnership, all mass communication channels were used extensively, both at national and international level. The communication process also included networks and communities of Moldovans abroad, national and local authorities. Along with the online information tools ([www.anofm.md](http://www.anofm.md); [www.Jobmarket.gov.md](http://www.Jobmarket.gov.md); [www.legal-in.eu](http://www.legal-in.eu); [www.migratie.md](http://www.migratie.md), [www.diaspora.md](http://www.diaspora.md) etc), within the project "Consolidation Moldova's capacity to manage the labor market and return migrants", implemented by the Swedish Employment Agency in collaboration with the National Employment Agency of the Republic

of Moldova (ANOFM), there was continuous information on legal employment opportunities. employment through the Labor Market Call Center (created on March 26, 2010), where every Moldovan, both from Moldova and abroad, can find out information about the possibilities of the labor market in Moldova.

The assistance provided to people who wanted to return from abroad was provided through programs and policies to correlate the knowledge and experience gained abroad with the demand on the local labor market. In this regard, in several European Union countries (for example: Italy (Rome, Padua), Germany (Nuremberg)) during the years 2010-2011, job fairs were organized for those who wanted to return home and work. work in Moldova.

The results of labor market information fairs in the Republic of Moldova remain an enigma, as there are no official data. If we operate with the data provided by the media, for example in the Labor Market Information Fair in the city of Padua, Italy organized on May 8, 2011, more than 150 Moldovan citizens participated [3]. According to the organizers, "the purpose of the Fair was to prepare Moldovan citizens, temporarily in Italy, to communicate with the authorities present at the information fair, as well as to inform about the current situation on the labor market in the country, about some real possibilities for reintegration. on the domestic market". Thus, we can conclude that the result of the labor fairs was not high.

The Government of the Republic of Moldova, with the support of the country's development partners, has launched a series of programs to stimulate the return of emigrants, their reintegration into society and attract remittances to the economy. Two of the important economic programs that visit to attract remittances in the economy are PARE 1 + 1 and PNAET.

*The PARE 1 + 1* program [1], being successfully launched, in the period 2010-2012, being concluded 124 non-reimbursable financed contracts with entrepreneurs. At the same time, the investments attracted in the respective projects exceeded the amount of 76 million lei, the amount of transferred grants amounting to 19.60 million lei. In 2013, 170 non-reimbursable contracts were signed with emigrants or their relatives. Investments were made in agriculture, industry and services. The administrative impact of this option is quite small. The entity responsible for implementation-ODIMM, exists at the moment and has already accumulated the necessary good practices. Moreover, the continuation and expansion of the implementation of the PARE 1 + 1 program increases the credibility of the Government, which would become damaged if the program disappears. Although, the social impact of the option is positive. Investments typically result in job creation. It is difficult to calculate the exact number of jobs created, because the businesses in which it invests are very different in terms of labor intensity.

During the years 2011-2014, the "PARE 1 + 1" Program was financially supported by the European Commission, through the Policy Matrix for the sectoral support program "Economic Stimulation in Rural Areas" (ESRA) funded by the European Union. Following the completion in 2014 of the ESRA Program, as a continuation, its actions, including supporting the implementation of the PARE 1 + 1 Program, were taken over by the Policy Matrix on budget support provided by the European Union for the establishment of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area in the Republic Moldova, which provides for the financing of the program until 2018 inclusive, being extended until 2021. [1]

But slowly, as the plan expanded, creating jobs and new businesses to fill the economic gap left by the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became a role model. As such, known as PARE 1 + 1, a similar scheme is already being piloted in Tajikistan, where

remittances account for almost 30 percent of the country's GDP. Moreover, for the United Nations Migration Agency, such schemes are the best results for people to go home and invest enough hope, money and opportunities so that people do not leave. [4] As stated by Viorel Gutu, former Deputy Minister of Agriculture of Moldova. "We probably don't end all migration issues with it, but it contributes to the use of a population that could develop agriculture or other businesses in rural areas." [5] For her part, Pirkka Tapiola, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova, said that the EU is impressed by the results achieved by our country in this program, the European Union being firmly determined to continue supporting this project in all its dimensions. [6] Currently, the PARE 1 + 1 Program has recorded the following results (see Fig.1).

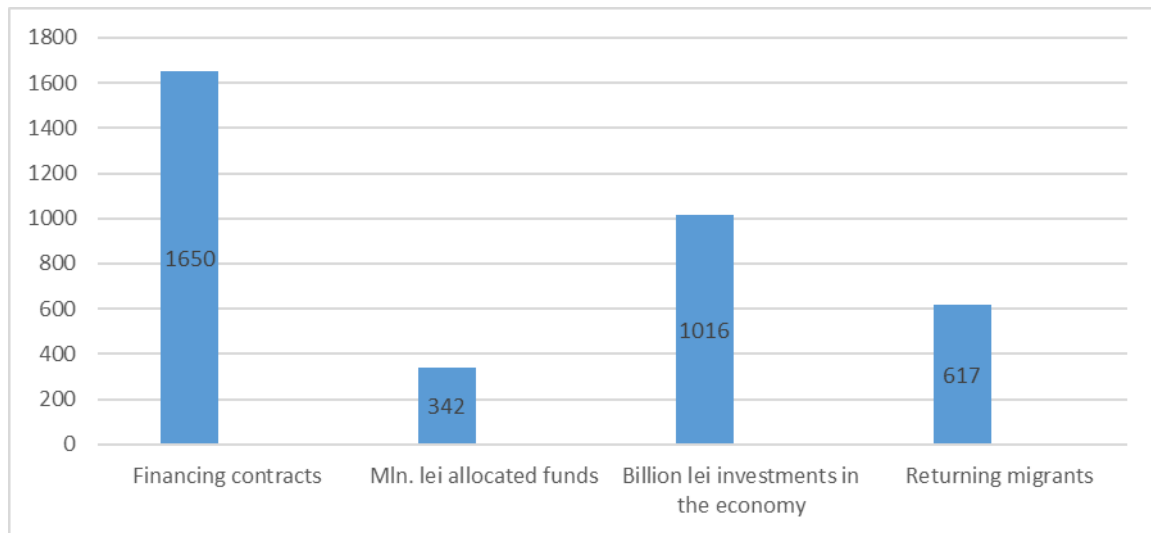


Fig. 1 Estimating the economic impact of the "PARE 1 + 1" option

Source: <https://odimm.md/ro>

Another option is to issue and sell bonds for migrants by transferring the funds obtained from their sale to the Regional Development Agencies for infrastructure investments. This option relates to the introduction by the Government and the placement by banks in the countries of destination of bonds issued for the diaspora that can be procured in the countries where migrants work, with the transfer of resources from Regional Development Agencies for investments in local infrastructure projects and business support, inclusive in agriculture.

Theoretically, the Republic of Moldova could introduce this tool because it has numerous diasporas in some cases and well organized, such as the one in Italy, the Russian Federation. This public policy has been successful in Israel, Ethiopia and India and could be implemented in the Republic of Moldova, if it is well thought out. The funds obtained could significantly increase the national public budget, which could be channeled for investment purposes. One possibility would be the transfer of these means to the Regional Development Agencies, which would allow the realization of infrastructure projects, such as the extension of aqueduct and sewerage networks in rural localities, the development of alternative energy sources, etc.

The Government of the Republic of Moldova will have to guarantee the risks of the emigrants who will invest in the respective obligations. The Government is also to establish cooperation agreements with several banks in Italy and Russia, as local partners. The Ministry of Finance will manage the entire process of issuing and repaying the bonds and transferring the funds obtained in the Regional Development Fund. The Diaspora Relations Office will

ensure communication between the NBM, the Government and Moldovan organizations abroad, facilitating the information and popularization of this financial instrument among emigrants. Although, the social impact cannot be quantified, but the elements of this option suggest that the social benefits will be indirect. By offering the emigrant the opportunity to contribute directly to the country's development, jobs will be created, involving some of the potential emigrants in the labor force from the Republic of Moldova, the income of the population will increase and the level of poverty will be reduced.

*National Youth Economic Empowerment Program (PNAET)*, funded by the Government of the Republic of Moldova based on Government Decision no. 364 of June 3, 2008, with subsequent amendments to extend the action of the Program until 2017. Beneficiaries of the Program are individuals and legal entities young people working as entrepreneurs in all areas of rural areas aged 18-35. providing training in the field of entrepreneurial skills development, as well as financial assistance for starting a business. The sources of financing of the program being the funds of loans and external state grants of Investment Projects for development, re-accredited by the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Moldova. During the implementation of the program, about 5,000 young people from all districts of the country, including 2223 women, received training; [2.p.44]

*The START FOR YOUTH program - A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS AT HOME*, aims to stimulate entrepreneurship and encourage business initiatives in a modern economy where creative young people can increase their competitiveness, keep up with technology, and are motivated to bring a plus financial security. Eligible are young people aged between 18 and 35, citizens of the Republic of Moldova, who want to start a business or who already run a new business - registered in rural and urban areas. Currently, the Program has recorded the following results (see Fig.2).

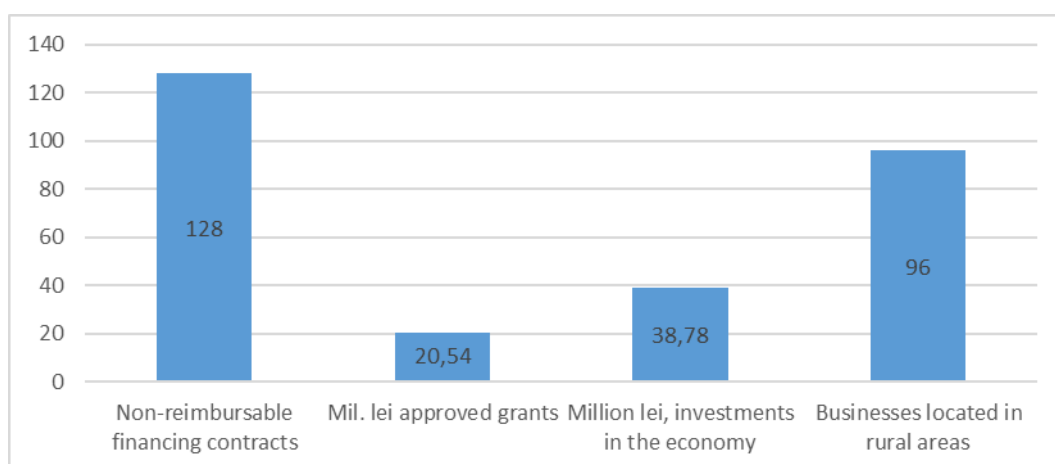


Fig. 2 Estimating the economic impact of the "START FOR YOUNG PEOPLE - A SUSTAINABLE HOME BUSINESS" option

Source: <https://odimm.md/ro>

Based on the experience gained so far, of the emigrants - *THE CREDIT GUARANTEE FUND*, it expands its quality of support for entrepreneurs, by participating in programs for the implementation of economic policy in the Republic of Moldova. Pursuant to art.13 par. (5) of Law no. 179/2016 on small and medium enterprises (Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova, 2016, no. 306-313, art. 651), the Government tests the Regulation on the organization, operation and use of the Credit Guarantee Fund for small and medium-sized

enterprises medium sized. [7] Currently, the Program has recorded the following results, (see Fig.3).

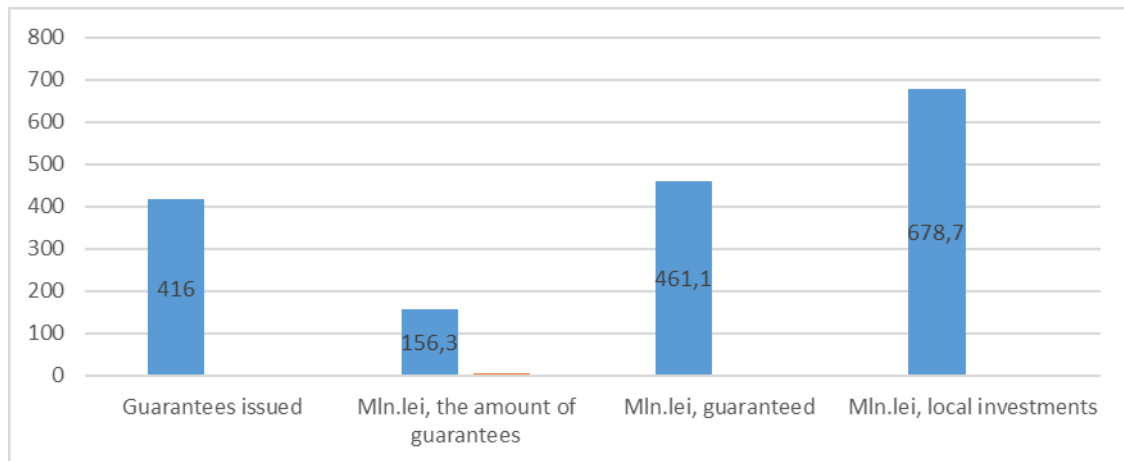


Fig. 3 Estimation of the economic impact of the "LOAN GUARANTEE FUND" option

Source: <https://odimm.md/ro>

Moldova's economy can also be led by women - with emotional intelligence, attitude and total involvement. *The WOMEN IN BUSINESS* program has the ability to reduce gender inequality, can help women gain managerial skills through business development, mainly in rural areas, can increase their access to modern resources, services and technologies. Currently, the Program has recorded the following results, (see Fig.4).

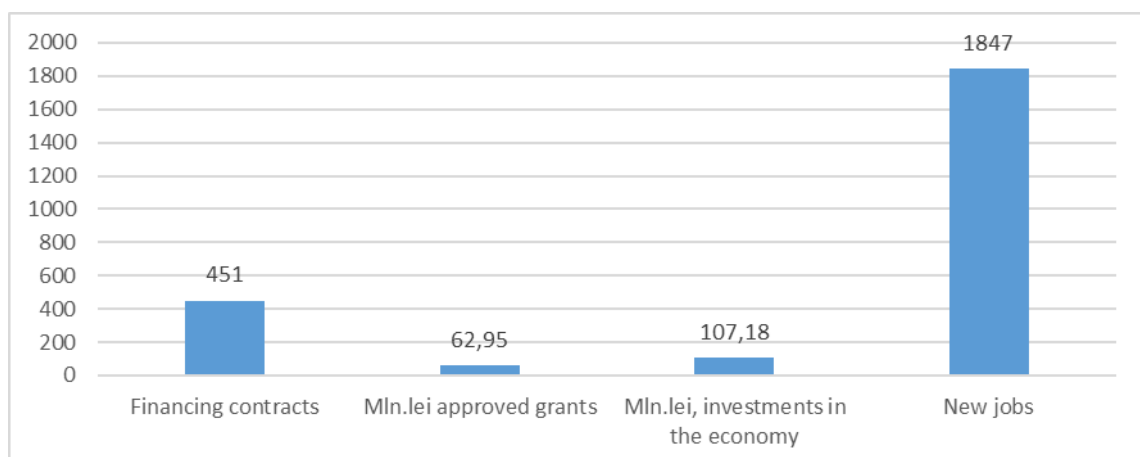


Fig.4 Estimating the economic impact of the option "WOMEN IN BUSINESS" program.

Source: <https://odimm.md/ro>

The Organization for the Development of the Small and Medium Enterprises Sector (ODIMM) is delegated by the Government, through the Ministry of Finance, to issue guarantees in the name and on behalf of the state, in favor of creditors (financing banks), which grant mortgages to individuals for the purchase of a home. accepted under the State Program "FIRST HOUSE". [8] However, the Program has a social character, represented by the state intervention in the process of guaranteeing loans to individuals when purchasing a home. List of Financing Banks:

1. BC „MOLDINDCONBANK” SA
2. BC „MOLDOVA-AGROINDBANK” SA
3. BC „VICTORIABANK” SA
4. “MOBIASBANCA – OTP GROUP” S.A.



## 5. BC „EXIMBANK” SA

In the 2 years of the Program, 4296 individuals have already benefited from partially state-guaranteed mortgages, including young families. The total amount of loans granted by banks is over 2.1 billion. lei, and the value of active guarantees is 1.1 billion lei. [12].

A project with a major impact is the project launched by UNDP "Integrating Migration into Local Development" (MIDL), which involves empowering and mobilizing migrants for sustainable local development. This project is part of a multi-annual intervention of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in the field of migration and development (M&D) and is implemented in partnership with two other projects by the Mission in Moldova of the International Organization for Migration and Agency International Organization for Country of Origin Information (IASCI / NEXUS). The project "Migration and local development" has as main objective the assistance of communities affected by migration in order to improve local services (water supply and sanitation, social services, education and health), as well as access to income-generating opportunities (re-employment, supporting business development), is implemented between 2015 and 2018 in partnership with the Government of the Republic of Moldova, local public authorities, local non-governmental organizations, the private sector, the population, including migrants from target communities. In total, 40 villages and towns from the entire territory of the Republic of Moldova are part of the project (25 in stage I and 15 in stage II) [10].

Actions aimed at strengthening ties with diaspora representatives have also been taken by the Moldovan authorities, which have so far established links with 60 Moldovan Diaspora public associations in 21 countries. Most public associations are registered in Italy (20), Ukraine (14), the Russian Federation (11), the French Republic (6), the Portuguese Republic (4), Canada (3) and the USA (3).

Within the Mobility Partnership European Union - Moldova, associations from the Moldovan Diaspora around the world had the opportunity to successfully initiate and implement various initiatives and projects aimed at helping to strengthen communication and good relations between Moldova and its citizens. abroad. Among them we mention the creation of the Center for Moldovans in Paris, opened in October 2011 and intended to offer migrants a series of services in information, training, consultancy and vocational guidance and cultural integration. Thus, more than 30 types of magazines, newsletters and newspapers with a circulation of about 50,000 children were produced, published and distributed among Moldovan migrants in Italy, Ukraine, Portugal, France and England. A special edition of the "Pro Diaspora Kids" newsletter was produced by the Portuguese Diaspora Association, and was launched on June 1, 2011 to mark International Children's Day.

Launched in October 2010, the Diaspora Small Grants Mechanism has aroused the interest of more than 35 Diaspora Associations from different countries, such as: Czech Republic, Canada, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, United Kingdom, Moldova, Russian Federation, USA, Ukraine and Sweden. Out of a total number of 35 applications, the 10 most successful projects were selected by the Selection Commission, composed of representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, the Bureau of Inter-Ethnic Relations and IOM.

The range of problems facing this group of returnees is a new challenge for the social services system. In addition, we point out that the return of migrants in a state of vulnerability is an issue that highlights the need for development and cooperation between the migrants' country of origin and destination countries. The governmental authorities of the Republic of

Moldova have developed a draft Repatriation Agreement for migrants in difficulty, victims of trafficking in human beings and unaccompanied children abroad, which they have sent to the authorities of the countries from which most migrants are repatriated. difficulty - Russian Federation, Ukraine. The Moldovan authorities have reported that the current mechanisms in the field of repatriation with ex-Soviet countries are outdated and make the repatriation procedure difficult. In Moldova, we are currently witnessing the reform of the social protection system, in terms of deinstitutionalization. Repatriated migrants in difficulty who have received assistance in residential institutions, for a maximum of 6 months, must be integrated in the community, society. Currently, in the Republic of Moldova there are social services that meet the needs of adults in difficulty. However, the reform of financial and administrative decentralization raises the issue of maintaining the services created. A major risk for social services is their closure by the local public administration, due to lack of financial resources. This causes impediments in the social inclusion of repatriated migrants in difficulty, because some of them have lost relations with the family of origin, with relatives.

Currently, there are few institutions in the Republic of Moldova that provide services for migrants in difficulty: the Center for Assistance and Protection of Victims and Potential Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (CAP) (Chisinau Municipality), Homeless Service, Chisinau Municipality, Center "SOTIS" family crisis center, Balti, "Return" Accommodation and Adaptation Center for the Homeless, Balti municipality and the Emergency Placement Service for returned migrants in difficulty and people in crisis. Only the last service targets repatriated migrants in difficulty and returning from abroad.

Successful management of migration depends on labor market policies, social policies, measures to ensure the integration of migrants and quality public administration. Public policy can influence the nature and demand-attract and supply-push interaction to achieve the country's migration goals. The Government of the Republic of Moldova has started to develop actions for the return of migrant workers and to optimize their reintegration in the country of origin. Also, a priority for migration policies remains the direction of investing remittances towards a balanced development in the interest of the migrant, the community and for the development of the whole economy.

In order to facilitate legal migration, including circular and temporary migration, a Joint Declaration on the Mobility Partnership between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova was signed in June 2008. One of the most important priorities addressed by the Mobility Partnership is to strengthen the capacity of national institutions to manage the programs for the reintegration and return of migrants.

## CONCLUSIONS

According to our analysis, relatively few national policies have been developed to deal with attraction and return migration so far. The relative lack of national measures seems obvious. Although, national policies and initiatives seem more appropriate to address the re-attraction of the workforce. Due to effective return initiatives, a competent institutional framework with a decentralized decision-making system is needed. Due to the relatively short time in which the analyzed policies exist, it is difficult to measure their success, but - based on the results of the policy responses already implemented - some conclusions can be drawn. Well-defined goals and target groups also seem to be important factors for success - without them there is a risk that the programs will become too general, without focus or real results.

However, so far there is little cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the countries receiving migrants, which could be a useful tool to encourage return migration.

Brain drainage is and will continue to be one of the most important social problems of the Republic of Moldova. Therefore, we expect the number of policy measures to increase in the near future, and the experiences of existing measures will contribute to the formulation of more effective policy actions. However, analyzing recent policies, it seems that most actors neglect the heterogeneous nature of the connections between migration / remigration and development using a simplified and naive approach.

Due to the practically non-existent statistics for the Republic of Moldova, it is difficult to measure the extent of return migration. Despite the information services provided to potential returning migrants, information appears to be a weak policy element.

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