TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE YOUNG HUMAN FACTOR IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OF THE WORKFORCE

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Abstract

International migration of the workforce has become a global challenge and is constantly in the spotlight of the world community. Since ancient times, humanity has been on the move. Some people move in search of jobs or economic opportunities, others to join family or to study. Others migrate in response to the negative effects of climate change, natural disasters or environmental factors. Among migration phenomena, an essential role is held by the migration of the young human factor. Today, it is estimated that the number of young people, i.e. people aged between 15 and 24, is around 1.3 billion and account for 15.5 per cent of the global population. (UN, 2020). Migration in general, and that of young people in particular, is one of the current challenges for the developing countries, including the Republic of Moldova. The increasing migration of young people concerns the authorities and civil society, given its effects on the country's human potential and socio-economic development. In this article we aim to study the current trends of the migration process, in particular to address the motivation of young people in Moldova to migrate in order to study abroad.

Keywords: migration patterns, youth mobility, migratory corridors, young people and artificial intelligence

Introduction

The analysis of long-term data on international migration shows the increasing degree of non-uniformity of this phenomenon worldwide, with the causes being shaped by economic, geographical, demographic factors, resulting in *distinct migration patterns*, or the amplification of the heterogeneity of global *migratory "corridors"*. The largest corridors tend to be from developing countries to larger

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economies, such as the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Germany. For 20 years now, the biggest corridor has been between the US and Mexico. The same trends persist in Europe, although regional events such as BREXIT and the special operation in Ukraine have led to some changes in European migratory corridors. For example, the *Poland-UK* corridor has changed to *Poland-Germany*. Taking specific countries as examples, the same trends have continued over the years for immigrant and emigrant states. In these corridors, in addition to people migrating for the reasons mentioned above, there are also young people migrating for various purposes, the main one being to achieve higher education. At the present stage the experience of learning abroad has become a trend and is promoted by the policies of developed countries. Students' mobility is stimulated through various national and regional programmes, and several countries have bilateral and multilateral agreements in this field. Overall, the number of young people who have migrated over the years has increased significantly, from 37.7 million in 1990 to around 60 million in 2021 (ILO), (2021). *The 2030 Agenda and Youth Migration* (UN, 2020) extensively address the opportunities and challenges of the migration process through its impact on young people and sustainable economic development. Population growth trends worldwide, aging migrant populations, and youth growth in most developing countries reflect the relevance of youth migration in supporting and promoting inclusion and sustainable economic development in the upcoming years. The positive contribution of young migrants to sustainable development is recognized by the UN in its *2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals* (UN, 2020). Several actions are proposed:

- Optimizing the overall business environment for youth, creating jobs and youth developement;
- Entrepreneurial education and training for young people to obtaine education, skills and competencies they need to thrive in this modern era and contribute to the development of their communities and society;
- Ensuring access to financial services and products;
- Tailoring support networks to the needs of young social entrepreneurs.
- Through this strategy, member states have agreed to "ensure safe, orderly, and regular migration that fully respects the human rights and humane treatment of migrants regardless of their migration status." (UN, 2016, p. 2)

1. General trends of the international migration process contemporary stage

Once the phenomenon of migration appeared, several models were outlined in the specialized literature that determined the factors stimulating this process. The main theories encountered are: *Ravenstein's Laws of Migration*, that was proposed in 1885; *Gravity Model* based on the relationship between distance and migration; *Stouffer's Theory of Mobility*, who is considering that the number of migrants from an origin to a destination is directly proportional to the number of opportunities at

that destination, and inversely proportional to the number of intervening opportunities between the origin and the destination; *Lee's Theory:* based on ideea which lead to spatial mobility of population in any area (ENC, 2023).

If we refer to migration patterns, which have emerged over the years under the influence of several factors, the most general but also acrelevant is the model developed by the Norwegian researcher in the field, Jorgen Carling (2021).

Figure 1. The migration model, according to Carling
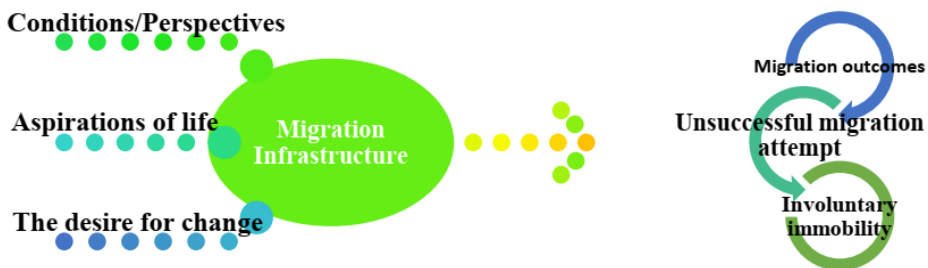
Source*:* Carling, 2021.

Importantly, this model recognizes that the desire to change does not necessarily result in the desire to migrate, and vice-versa, where there is a desire to migrate, it does not necessarily result in desire to change. The migration process is, therefore, broad, complex, and determined by several objective and subjective factors that change from one period to another.

Talking about general trends in the movement of people, today, more people than ever live in a country other than the one they were born in. According to the IOM World Migration Report 2022 (IOM, 2022) in December 2020, the number of international migrants was estimated at almost 281 million globally, 60 million more than in 2010 (Table 1.). International migrants represented 3.6% of the global population in 2020, compared to 2.8% in 2000 and 2.3% in 1980 (IOM, 2022).

While many individuals migrate out of choice, out of the desire to change something in their lives, a majority migrate out of necessity. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2021), the number of forcibly displaced people globally was 79.5 million at the end of 2019. Of these, 26 million were refugees, 45.7 million were internally displaced, 4.2 million were asylum seekers, and 3.6 million were Venezuelans displaced abroad. It is worth mentioning here the sudden increase in the number of Afghan and Ukrainian migrants, as a consequence of the military conflicts between 2021 and 2022, over 6.3 million Ukrainians and 2.3 million Afghans (IOM, 2022).

Table 1. Evolution of the number of migrants by category during 2019-2020

Indicators	2020	2019
Total number of migrants	281 million - 3.6% of the population (10% young migrants)	272 million - 3.5% of the population
Women	135 million - 3.5% of the global female population	130 million - 3.4% of the global female population
Men	146 million - 3.7% of the global male population	141 million - 3.6% of the global male population
Workforce	169 million	164 million
Missing migrants	3900 missing	5400 missing
Remittances	702 billion dollars	719 billion dollars

Source: authors' representation based on IOM data, 2022

We are now in an unprecedented era of mobility, and the need to facilitate orderly, safe, regulated, and responsible migration and mobility is becoming increasingly relevant and mandatory. The need to address the challenges and maximize the opportunities that this mobility brings has been recognized by the inclusion of migration in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, which highlights the positive contribution of migrants to inclusive growth and development. Migration is integrated into a number of *Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)* targets, such as ending modern slavery and addressing the vulnerability of migrant workers. However, the central reference to *migration in the SDGs is target 10.7 on facilitating "orderly, safe, regulated, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of well-planned and managed migration policies."* As it is a vast process among young people, current trends in international migration are determined by: Policy drafting on migration, partnerships between countries and governments, the welfare of migrants and respecting their rights, safe and orderly mobility during crises, regulated migration. (IOM, 2018)

Looking at everything that is happening in the world at the present stage, international migration trends are shaped by several global changes:
1. Young people's desire to study abroad. There are several reasons: lack of opportunities in the home country or the desire to experience something new in the host country;
2. Russian - Ukrainian military conflict and tensions in the region (lack of access to education and jobs for the young human factor);
3. The impact of COVID-19 on the global economy and the evolution of virus mutations;
4. The economic integration process in South America allows easier access for migrants from Venezuela;

5. The New Global Economic Crisis generated by the pandemic and the Russian - Ukrainian war is changing the migratory corridors and the conditions of asylum policy;
6. Changing the migration order in the U.S. with Biden's attempt to modify Trump's imposed migration policies;
7. The fall of the government in Afghanistan and its invasion by the Taliban generates massive movements of the local population out of the country, especially young people;
8. Geopolitical movements in South-East Europe.

Hence, we can say that the workforce migration process will never be static or tedious. Any global change generates strategic changes in the movement of individuals. In each period, everything is different, depending on the local, regional, or global conjuncture.

The unprecedented rate of change in recent years in the geopolitical, environmental and technological fields has led some analysts and commentators to create or use expressions such as "*The Age of Acceleration", "The Fourth Industrial Revolution" and "The Age of Change",* as a consequence of the hyperglobalisation phenomenon, which has taken on an exorbitant acceleration in all fields.

Recently, another global phenomenon, COVID-19 has been forcing its way into all global and regional processes, amplifying the feeling of uncertainty in all fields, while also providing an opportunity to reflect on future changes and mutations. For exemple, OECD policy brief published after the biggest waves of COVID-19, provides new evidence on the impact of the pandemic on immigrant integration in terms of health, labour market outcomes and training. Immigrants are disproportionately affected by COVID-19, because they were much more likely than their native-born peers to catch the disease, to develop severe symptoms, and to face higher mortality risks. This is due to a range of factors such as poorer housing conditions with higher incidences of overcrowding; a higher dependency on public transport; overconcentration in areas with higher population density; fewer possibilities for teleworking and a higher incidence of frontline jobs; as well as language barriers and other structural obstacles to access health services and communications regarding prevention measures (OECD, 2022).

Similar to other international phenomena, migration has also been historically affected by resounding geopolitical events, such as the two world wars, the Cold War, major terrorist attacks (such as the September 2001 attack), the expansion of globalisation through the emergence of transnational corporations and territorial integration through the creation or enlargement of regional integrationist groups. Each time, these processes have had a direct impact on the movement of the workforce.

Under the influence of the phenomena mentioned above, other systemic change processes are taking shape that directly influence the migration process, namely the policies of the governments of national economies, civil society, industry

and citizens. In a society dominated by internationalisation, globalisation and economic integration, several factors set the tone for a new era in the movement of the workforce (especially young people, as they are the promoters of change and have greater capacity for movement than other categories of migrants), mobility in general:

- *Technological transformations and Artificial Intelligence (AI)* - Technological innovations since 2005 led to the so-called "Fourth Industrial Revolution", Big Data and Big Tech dramatically changing how social, political, and economic systems operate globally*. Also, the sudden launch of the AI concept has brought tremendous changes in the business and government branches, along with the population/workforce migration process, because there is no lifestyle without Google, Youtube, mobile apps, or social networks. Digital technology is becoming increasingly crucial in the migration journey. People are able to get real-time information about all the details regarding the emigration process, accommodation, employment, obtaining residence papers, financial support, and connection with the diaspora. This also allows them to avoid risky situations such as human trafficking, illegal migration, and exploitation at work. At the same time, all mobile applications make it easier for them to access an informative, movable, adaptable infrastructure, in other words, a better insight into how to function and integrate into a host country. On the other hand, all the latest technological innovations can be successfully adopted and implemented in the countries of origin, especially since there are various online communication platforms that allow people to be in touch wherever they are. Technology also plays a pivotal role in remittance transfers, thus adding value to national economies (figure 2). Technological changes were occurring before COVID-19 but have intensified significantly during the pandemic, meaning that the deep digitization of an already digitized world will be one of the most significant long-term effects. Shaping migration and mobility systems to reduce the impact of inequality in a world suffering from multiple 'digital gaps' will be particularly important in ensuring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (McAuliffe, 2021)

- *Geopolitical transformations* - Increased competition between states results in increased geopolitical tension and risks eroding multilateral cooperation. Economic, political, and military power has shifted radically over the past two decades as a result of increased geopolitical competition and the heated rivalry between major centers of power. These movements have a direct impact on the migration process. On the one hand, we see how the values of fairness, accountability, impartiality, equity, and justice are being actively undermined as some political leaders ignore the common interest in favour of the personal, defying laws, the system of law, and international institutions. This leads to an exodus of refugees to certain countries, as people migrate to a safe place where their rights are respected. In contrast, other countries are making constant efforts

to provide support and assistance to those in need, actively promoting a series of key initiatives to ensure improved conditions for communities globally, especially those most in need. For example, some progress has been made towards achieving the SDGs and on specific migration like: *Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages - For migrants:* Specific public health measures on epidemics and communicable diseases to reach, provide preventative services and treatment for migrants and refugees; Ensure inclusion of attention to migrants and refugees in national sexual, reproductive and family planning health care strategies and programmes. *Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all - For migrants:* Ensure access to and enrollment of all migrant/immigrant/refugee girls and boys in primary and secondary schooling in destination and transit countries, regardless of migration status; Ensure equitable access by migrants/immigrants/refugees to all such training (to improve employability and integration of migrants both in destination countries and if/when return to origin countries). *Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls - For migrants:* to combat human trafficking (while protecting victims) (Taran, 2016, pp. 3-4).

**Figure 2. The impact of Artificial Intelligence on the migration process.**
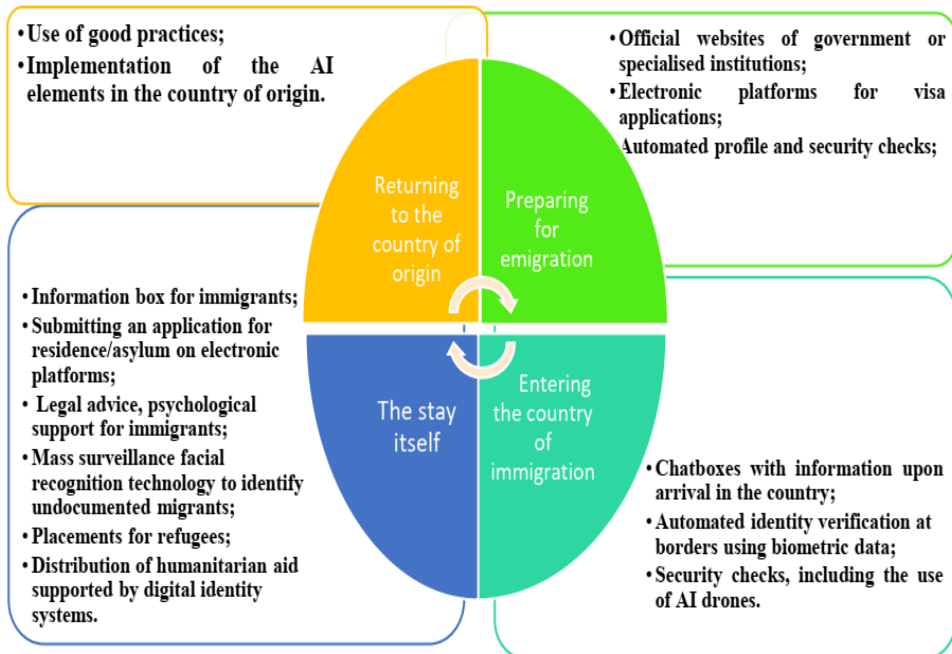
Source: adapted after McAuliffe et al., 2021

- *Environmental transformations -* The intensification of environmentally negative human activity results in overconsumption and overproduction linked to unsustainable economic development, the depletion of resources, the collapse of biodiversity, and ongoing climate change. The implications for migration and displacement are significant, as people increasingly choose internal and international migration as a form of adaptation to environmental impacts. The constant displacement from their homes and communities due to the slow rate of climate change or acute natural disasters is critical, for example people from Kiribati, United States (Hurricaine Katrina).

2. Case study: migration of young people from the Republic of Moldova aiming to study abroad

The migration process of young people is very active in the Republic of Moldova. Young people represent over a quarter of the country's population, and this represents a serious problem for the country's economy, if they decide to migrate. The number of the population with usual residence on January 1, 2021 constituted 2597.1 thousand people, of which 680.3 thousand or 26.2% were young people aged 14-34. The distribution of young people by gender is as follows: 49.4% - women and 50.6% - men. The generation of young people is continuously decreasing in the Republic of Moldova. In the period 2017-2021, the population aged 14-19 decreased by 18.5 thousand people (or by 10.1%), and the share of this category in the total number of young people aged 14-34 increased from 22.0% on 01.01.2017, up to 24.1% on 01.01.2021. The number of people aged 20-24 decreased by 61.5 thousand people (or by 31.6%), their share decreasing in the analyzed period by 3.9 %, and that of those aged 25-29 with 53.3 thousand (respectively by 23.6% and by 1.9%). The number of young people aged 30-34 decreased by 15.0 thousand (or by 6.7%), their share increasing during the analyzed period by 3.7%.

For Eastern European countries, including the Republic of Moldova, migration for education becomes a problem of "brain drain" as a result of the dominance of expensive studies, low correlation of education policies with employment policies, limited employment opportunities for graduates, and low wages. At the same time, migration for studies is becoming a way for young people to leave their home country and an opportunity to settle down and live in countries with higher living standards (IOM, 2018). Young people in the Republic of Moldova have started to migrate abroad for studies since the late 1990s (Grigoras, 2014). Since then, their numbers have been steadily increasing, but with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic they have not decreased significantly (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Young people's intention to migrate (18-29 years)
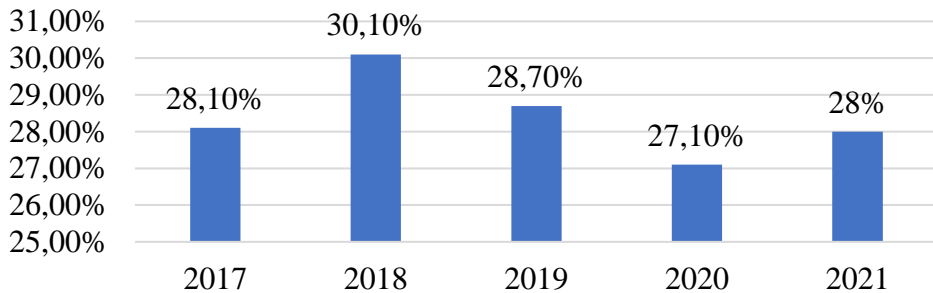
Source: Ionita, 2021

Analyzing Figure 3, it appears that in 2018 the intention of young people to migrate had the highest percentage - 30.10%, but since 2019 it is declining (28.70% - 2019, 27.10% - 2020, and 28% - 2021), due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the education system and the migration of young students, being an important catalyst for the economy and development of a state (Ionita, 2021).

Of course, national academic exchange programs offer real, unique opportunities for study, undergraduate and postgraduate research in Western countries, supporting the intellectual potential of the country, but along with it, leave a significant number of students with outstanding results who could contribute to the socio-economic development of the country. It appears that the main reasons for the migration of young people are the following:

- Low degree of satisfaction with studies in the country;
- Opportunities for international students (grants, merit scholarships);
- Involvement in different projects, where students would find jobs, a decent salary, and career growth opportunities for young professionals;
- Achieving a successful professional career after graduation with greater financial possibilities;
- The desire to change the lifestyle. It is, therefore, necessary to implement national policies to stimulate the return of young people who have left.

The state needs public policies that encourage young people with a degree to pursue their profession at home in exchange for real social and economic benefits. In this context, the state must be oriented toward the preferences of young people. It must invest in them and create favorable working conditions and decent wages so that when they obtain a degree abroad, it will motivate them to return home and put into practice the experience acquired outside the country. Therefore, to limit the exodus of young people abroad, the following solutions have been proposed:

- Combating corruption in various fields that directly affect young people; Expanding political and economic reforms;

- Providing opportunities for qualified workers;
- Attracting foreign investment and capital to create jobs for young people;
- Supporting small and medium businesses;
- Improving the mechanism of the law;
- Attracting those already outside the country with higher wage incentives and an efficient business environment.

For a more detailed understanding of the migration process among young people in the Republic of Moldova, the case study *Migration of Students and Children Abroad* was conducted by the authors, in may 2022. The research methodology was based on a questionnaire that interviewed 157 students from Mihail Sadoveanu High School/Chisinau, Stefan ce Mare High School/Chisinau and 125 students from the Academy of Economic Studies from Moldova, between 17-20 years old about their attitudes toward leaving the country.

The study includes the analysis of youth migration in general, youth migration for studies, but also the impact of parents' migration on the well-being of children left without parental care.

The objectives of this Case Study were: compiling a list of the main reasons why young people go to study abroad; determining the probability of their return after at the end of their studies; analysis of the psychological picture of pupils who have parents abroad; monitoring psychological and behavioral changes in pupils left without the supervision of one or both parents.

The questions from the interviews were the following:
- Why would you choose to study abroad instead of your home country;
- What motivates you in choosing a study abroad experience; in which country do you want to study;
- Can you mention some benefits of migration;
- What disadvantages can you associate with studies abroad?

To the question *what motivates you in choosing a study abroad experience*, the answers were different, for example some said about the international experience, the quality of studies, by the way teachers teach, opportunities to work and learn, achieving a successful professional career after graduation, discover new places, new culture, meet new people, diversified curriculum, others said that there are relatives, parents or their friends.

To the question *what disadvantages can you associate with studies abroad*, the answers were: the high cost of living, language barriers, maybe cultural shock, the risk of not finding a well-paid job after graduation.

According to the data presented in Figure 4, collected from the questioning 125 students of first and second-year from the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, regarding the Migration of Young People from the country, it was established that 70% of the young people who gave a response have a positive opinion on the migration in favor of studying in a university abroad, 27% are against this idea and 3% refrained from answering.

Figure 4. Attitude toward studying abroad (17-20 years)

Attitude toward studying abroad

■ Positive ■ Negative ■ Neutral
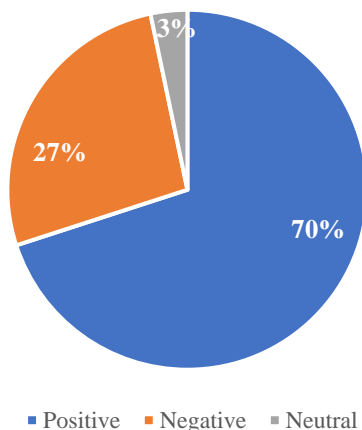
Source: authors' representation

The majority of young people who want to leave the country in preference to study outside the country believe that they will return to Moldova after graduation.

The return of young people from abroad after finishing their studies is an important step in development of the country. This is characterized not only by employing them but by refreshing the country's development policies with newly formed and globalized visions.

Simultaneously, the list of the most preferred countries for emigration was determined, namely:

- EU countries: Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Finland, Netherlands, Ireland, Belgium, Greece - the reasons: there are their parents, who have already emigrated; Scholarships easy to access; Accessible transport being on the same continent;
- Non-EU European countries: Switzerland, Norway, United Kingdom;
- Other countries: USA, Japan - the scholarships offered by these states through the programs proposed by the Japanese and American embassies in the Republic of Moldova.

In general, the most common causes that catalyze the decision to emigrate are: studies, exchange of experience; more opportunities; a brighter future; motivating salary; family reunification; discovering new tourist spots.

According to the data in Figure 5, based on the statistic information provided by the principals of the 2 aforementioned high schools in Chisinau, from 2000 to 2022, 167 students emigrated. In the period from 2010 to 2022, the emigration flows of Moldovan students were more frequent in the period after the signing of the Visa

Free Regime in 2014. In the years 2017-2018, these flows reached the highest levels, after which they rapidly decreased due to restrictions during the COVID-19 crisis. Beginning with 2020 their trend starts to recover being in permanent increase up to the present time.

Figure 5. The number of children from "Ştefan cel Mare"and "Mihai Viteazu" high school migrated in the 2010-2022 period
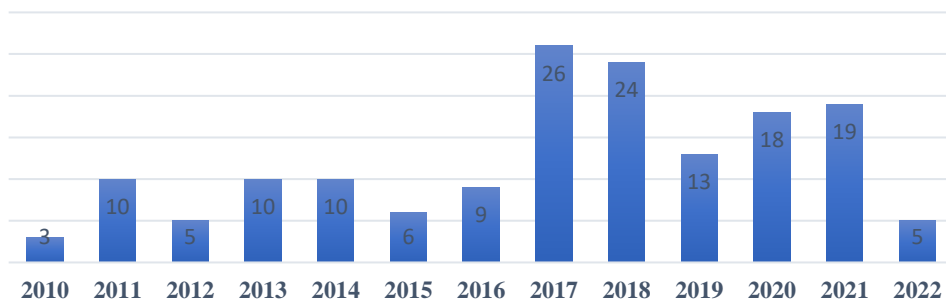
Source*:* authors' representation

In the figure 6, we mentioned top 5 destination countries of the children from "Ştefan cel Mare" and "Mihai Viteazu" high school migrated in the 2010-2022 period: Italy, Great Britain, Romania, Germany, and France, all on the European continent.

Figure 6. Top 5 destination countries of the children from "Ştefan cel Mare" and "Mihai Viteazu" high school migrated in the 2010-2022 period
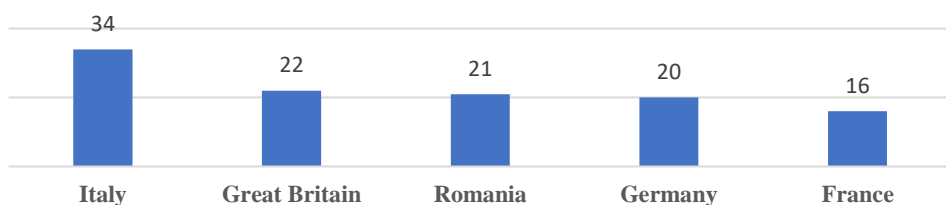
Source: authors' representation based

The specific reason for going to these countries was to reunite the family and less to go for studies.

Another topic analyzed in our research was on the emigration of parents abroad of students from the same two high schools in Chisinau. The children's relations with their parents are, in most cases, very close, although there are still cases of strained relations, which are more characteristic of young people whose parents have already been abroad for 12 to 15 years. It has also been established that around 68% of emigrant parents have higher education, and 32% have a high school

education, which is unfavorable for Moldova's economy. The majority of parents have left for EU countries due to the privileges for foreign workers granted by the EU. Thus the most common advantages for students whose parents are abroad are: financial support and more possibilities for young people such as studying or receiving citizenship of their parents' host country.

The major disadvantage of the departure of parents was chsen the insufficiency of communication, based on the lack of a mature model for training, increasing affection, and estrangement from parents. About 21% of the students interviewed said that they do not find any disadvantage in their parents' leave, most frequently they belong to the category of young people whose parents have been gone for about 12-15 years.

Following a dialogue with teachers of pupils (the authors of the article had several meetings with the teachers of these 2 high schools regarding the subject of students with parents who have migrated) whose parents are emigrants, were drawn some conclusions:

- In general, no differences were observed in the behavior of students who live with their parents and those whose parents are away. To a large extent, these children mature more quickly, putting financial benefits above family relationships;
- A disadvantage mentioned by the teachers was the students' lateness or absence from class, as they feel freer without parental supervision;
- If necessary, pupils can receive psychological assistance at school to help them adapt to the new conditions following the emigration of their parents;
- These young people are more emotionally sensitive.

Conclusions

Over the last years, the number of international migrants has increased significantly, and following the current trends under the impact of pandemics, economic inequality, or escalating military conflicts, population movement will continue to intensify. The nature of international migration is determined by the global environment, and the determinants are changing rapidly and sometimes suddenly and unexpectedly. Today, artificial intelligence, globalization, digitization, geopolitical and environmental changes represent great challenges and opportunities in the international migration process. In today's society, we are facing a growing imbalance in the generation gap, as younger generations are more adaptable and free because of the environment in which they have grown up, and because of this they have higher and more demanding expectations and needs than adult generations. Young people are eager to emigrate because they have seen the advantages they can find elsewhere that their country does not offer, whether it is money, better education, curiosity, or a higher chance of getting a job. Young people want to emigrate because they want to do more with their lives.

The migration of educated youth, which is the most important catalyst for a country's economy and development, affects the education system and economic growth by reducing the number of skilled workers. The migration of a very high number of young people brings a significant loss of human capital and causes long-term consequences for society's age structure. Therefore, the state must be oriented towards the preferences of young people. It must invest in them and create favorable working conditions and decent wages for them here so that when they obtain a qualification abroad, they will be motivated to return home and put into practice the experience gained abroad.

The main tendency of young people to emigrate for their studies points out the need to revise national strategies in the field of education, attracting more specialists and investments for its development. What remains encouraging is that most young people are willing to return after graduation. This happens because in the Republic of Moldova there are different programs that motivate the return of young people who studied abroad to work in their country of origin like the *Program for the temporary / permanent return of young graduates of universities abroad and migrants* (NEA, 2015), or *The national program to stimulate returns and facilitating the (re)integration of citizens of the Republic of Moldova involved in the migration process for the years 2022-2026* (GOV, 2022).

Anoter problem that has arisen is the emigration of adults, which is reflected not only in the lack of a workforce in the country but also in the emotional state of children left without parental supervision. This impacts not only their psychological state but influences the departure abroad to be reunited with their families, or the need to create investment funds for organizations providing psychological assistance to children left without parents.

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