

Who Wants to Leave? Migration Motivations in Moldova

Ludmila BOGDAN

Abstract. Migration motivations have been studied in the context of economic deprivation, focusing mainly on poor people seeking economic advantage abroad. This case study relies on quantitative data and finds that there is a positive correlation between economic wealth and a desire to migrate, meaning that wealthier people are more willing to move and settle abroad permanently compared to poorer people.

Keywords: *migration motivations, economic deprivation, poverty, migration policy, Moldova*

Introduction and Literature Review

The phenomenon of migration has been of major importance in sending and receiving countries, due to social, economic, and political factors. Moldova has provoked an interest amongst researchers of migration because of its enormous proportions of population flows (Pinger 2010). High migration flows make Moldova an interesting case study (Milan Cuc 2005, Trebesch 2008). Moldovan emigrants represent almost a third of the total labor force of the entire country (Lawrence Bouton 2011). In 2004, migrants accounted for about 40% of the economically active population (Milan Cuc 2005). From 2005-2010 Moldova had a consistently high migration outflow, with one quarter to one third of the total working age population made up by migrants (Maria Vremis 2012). In 2004, from an active economic population of 1.6 million, 600,000 workers were working abroad (Trebesch 2008). Moldova is mainly a country of origin of migrants and to a lesser extent a country of transit of irregular migrants (Maria Vremis 2012).

Countries with high migration rates were subjects of the study of the migration motivations. In 2000, about 26% of surveyed Moldovans said they would leave the country permanently and about 30% said that they would leave Moldova for at least a period of time (Gaugas 2004). About 37% of young Moldovans between

the ages of 18-29 stated they would be more willing to move and settle abroad permanently, whilst 50% would move temporarily (IPP.MD 2003). Goerlich and Trebesch looked at what factors might influence Moldovans' decisions to migrate and they found that the choice of migrating seasonally or permanently is influenced by the size of the network abroad. This was an important factor in particular for urban households (Trebesch 2008).

On the one hand, migration brings significant opportunities to Moldova, mainly remittances and exposure to new culture and lifestyles (Robila 2014, Taylor 1999). Migration can fuel technology and knowledge spillovers by Moldovan migrants who use their new skills at home (Kirchkamp 2002, Winters 2004). According to the World Bank study, migration has very positive outcomes for the Moldovan economy in general, especially on national wages¹ (Lawrence Bouton 2011). Parents' migration has a positive impact on access to higher education for their children at home (Maria Vremis 2012).

Moldova is a country with a great number of migrants, so remittances are one of the most substantial sources of income. Moldova is a country with one of the highest shares of remittances to its GDP (in the world) (Chindea 2008). In 2004, Moldova was ranked the second country worldwide to receive the highest remittances share, compared to GDP (Dilip Ratha 2005). The National Bank of Moldova combines the migrant remittances with other foreign currency transfers made by individuals in their data base. According to the National Bank of Moldova and the World Bank, remittances have remained consistently above 20% of the GDP after the global economic downturn. In 2007, the remittances constituted 27% of the GDP and in 2007, remittances reached a peak at 36% of Moldova's GDP (Maria Vremis 2012). About 40% of households in Moldova receive remittances from relatives abroad and 60% of these households finance more than half of their entire expenditures using these remittances (CBS-AXA 2007). Remittances are a tool to alleviate poverty in Moldova (CBS-AXA 2007).

“Transfers from migrants, who accounted for about 40 % of the economically active population at the end of 2004, were primarily used to satisfy basic consumption needs and finance housing and education, with smaller amounts being invested in business activities. Remittances are, moreover, likely to remain a stable and countercyclical source of foreign exchange in the short run. However, as more

¹ Consistent with the literature, the World Bank study finds a positive impact of emigration labor shock on national wages in Moldova.

migrants settle permanently abroad, portfolio choice may become more important.” (Milan Cuc 2005).

On the other hand, migration brings challenges to Moldova, ranging from brain-drain to human trafficking (Pinger 2010). An IOM report warns about the negative effects of migration on the social protection system due to a lack of migrant participation and contribution to the social system mechanisms (Maria Vremis 2012). Migrants are less likely to seek health care abroad, which can be a detriment to their health (Maria Vremis 2012). Emigration from Moldova has high social and emotional costs (Trebesch 2008). In addition to this, the authors highlight the high social and emotional costs of migration and neglect of children (Trebesch 2008). Migration brings challenges at a family level, impacts parental behavior, and influences children’s well-being (Robila, *The Impact of Migration on Children's Psychological and Academic Functioning in the Republic of Moldova*. 2014). Several studies found that parental migration has a negative impact on children’s social, psychological, and academic well-being and functioning (Robila 2011, Robila, 2014, Vollebergh 2008). Children with migrant parents are vulnerable and are subject to an increased risk of behavioral and psychological problems due to a lack of supervision and support (Robila, 2014).

Moldova is a sending country of migrants which understands that creating a fertile environment for migration can contribute to the country’s income growth and promote economic development (Chindea 2008, Lawrence Bouton 2011, Taylor 1999). The most beneficial migration is temporary migration (see Abella 2006, Mattoo 2005, Mesnard 2004) because it translates to higher remittances, technology and skills spillovers for the sending countries (Taylor 1999) and cheap imported short-term labor for receiving countries (Pinger 2010, Trebesch 2008).

Research on the remittances focusing on migrant sending countries ignores the causes of migration, which is problematic, considering that the factors of migration motivations also influence the migration and remittances outcomes (Taylor 1999). Motivations can be seen as a push factor for migration, so the distinction between motivations and factors of migration is not clear. The motivations influence people’s decisions to take one action over another. This paper relies on original, empirical data to uncover some of the determinants of migration of Moldovans. The findings show that wealthier people are more willing to migrate permanently (abroad) as opposed to poorer people. On an academic level, these findings enrich the body of literature on migration motivations in one of the

countries with some of the highest rates of migration in the region. On a policy level, these findings might even help policy-makers tailor their migration policies more efficiently.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

As well as enriching the existing literature on migration motivations by adding the sub-layers of migration motivations, this paper tries to test two hypotheses that arise from the pull-push theory of migration, stating that some of the main push factors of migration are poverty and unemployment.

Economic deprivation is conceptualized as inadequate resources to cover minimum living expenses or lack of basic material benefits that are a necessity in society. In this paper, economic deprivation has been measured based on monthly salary and ability to cover minimum living expenses with the salary (earned at the moment of the data collection). In order to answer the questions: ‘Who is more willing to migrate and settle abroad?’ and ‘what are the factors predicting someone’s willingness to migrate abroad permanently?’, the following hypotheses will be tested:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a negative correlation between monthly salary and desire to move and settle abroad.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a negative correlation between salary to cover minimum expenses and desire to move and settle abroad.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a negative correlation between social class and desire to move and settle abroad.

Hypothesis 4: People from rural areas will be more willing to migrate and people from capital cities will be less likely to migrate.

Methods

This study is based on quantitative data. The quantitative method generates data that can be statistically analyzed and consequently, enables one to draw conclusions based on a representative sample of the Moldovan population. The data was collected through face-to-face interviews of a national sample of people aged 14 and above, living in Moldova between June 2013 and September 2014. The sample size includes 250 respondents. To get a

representative sample of the Moldovan population, the multistage randomization was applied considering groups of regions, households and respondents. To avoid response bias, respondents were told that they would be asked personal opinion-type questions, emphasizing that there were no wrong or right answers, but that the researcher was interested in their views on some social issues. The first step in sampling was combining some of the regions in groups, then the randomization of units was done within each group.

Table 1: Socio-demographic composition of the sample (N=250)

Residency		
	Rural	50.8 %
	Urban	27.1 %
	Capital city	21.7 %
	Abroad	00.4 %
Gender		
	Female	54.9 %
	Male	45.1 %
Region of the country		
	North	22.2 %
	South	15.2 %
	Center	62.6 %
Social Class		
	Lower	25.7 %
	Middle	67.1 %
	Upper	07.1 %
Salary		
	Less than 300 USD/month	57.6 %
	300 – 600 USD/month	25.0 %
	More than 600 USD/month	17.4 %
Education		
	Middle School	15.7 %
	High School	47.1 %
	Bachelor or equivalent	34.7 %
	Master or higher	02.5 %

Note: Cell entries are descriptive statistics (frequencies).

Survey Variables

Age (1%, >15 years; 32%, 16-25; 17%, 26-35; 17%, 36-45; 14%, 46-55; 16%, 56-65; 4%, <66 years), gender (55%, female; 45%, male), residential area (51%, rural; 27%, urban; 22%, capital city), regions of Moldova (63%, Center; 22%, North; 15%, South), social class (67%, middle class; 26%, lower class; 7%, upper class).

Operationalization of Variables

Motivation to migrate. Respondents were asked if they would be willing to move and settle abroad, should they be given the opportunity. Their responses ranged from “not willing”, “do not know”, “maybe”, to “willing” to move and settle abroad. Participants in qualitative interviews were asked to reason why they wanted to, did not want to, or were hesitant to move and settle abroad.

Area of residence. Respondents were asked if they would be willing to move and settle abroad, should they be given the opportunity controlling for area of residence. The results showed that 50% of rural, 41% of capital city and 27% of urban respondents wanted to move and live abroad ($p < 0.000$).

Social class. Respondents were asked with which social class they identified themselves. Responses were coded as “lower social class”, “middle social class”, and “upper social class”.

Monthly Salary. Respondents were asked about their monthly salary. Responses were coded 1 for a salary lower than 300 USD per what? – lower salary, 2 for a salary ranging from 300 USD to 600 USD – average salary, and 3 for a salary higher than 600 USD – high salary. About 58% of respondents have a lower salary, 25% have an average salary, and 17% have a high salary.

Salary to cover min expenses. Respondents were asked if their monthly salary covered minimum living expenses. Responses were coded as “yes” or “no”. About 56% of respondents said that they could not cover their living expenses using salary alone.

Analysis

Hypotheses were tested using descriptive statistics. The dependent variable was the will to move and live abroad tested by four independent variables; social class, monthly salary, ability to cover minimum living expenses with salary and residence.

Results and Discussion

Table 2: Moldovans' experience and attitudes towards labor migration

Variables	Percent	N
Have you worked abroad?		
Yes	44 %	86
No	56 %	110
How long have you worked abroad? ²		
More than 1yr	48 %	32
Less than 1yr	22 %	15
Seasonally (3 months)	30%	20
When was the last time you worked abroad?		
Recently (<1 yr)	38 %	27
Few years ago (>1yr)	38 %	27
More than 5yrs ago	24 %	17
Do you have any relatives abroad?		
Yes	95%	222
No	5%	11
Do you receive any financial Help from relatives abroad?		
Yes	37 %	80
No	63 %	134
Would you like to move and live abroad, given the opportunity?		
Yes	40 %	88
Maybe	7 %	16
No	53 %	115

Note: Sample size =196. Cell entries are results of descriptive statistics (frequencies)

Descriptive statistics show that almost half of the respondents have previous work experience abroad (44%) and from these, about 48% worked abroad for a long period of time (one year or longer). This indicates that Moldovans are heavily

² This question was asked people who said that they have worked abroad previously or currently work abroad.

exposed to labor migration and have extensive experience working abroad. The fact that such a large percentage has worked abroad for a long period of time indicates that people have created connections and thus, familiarized themselves with the working environment abroad. This also points to the fact that the economic situation is not improving and still fails to attract labor migrants back home. Wage discrepancies play a crucial role in this. The wages abroad are much higher compared to those in Moldova, which may be a reason for people working abroad for lengthy periods of time. In addition to this, another factor which might explain why migrants spend longer periods abroad, is the investment already made in their training and integration; an issue which has been widely researched.

Amongst those who have worked abroad, roughly 38% returned home recently, which suggests that many of them are so-called “permanent labor migrants” as opposed to “seasonal migrants”. Most seasonal migrants seek employment abroad during the summer, while permanent migrants, who spend more than one year working abroad, usually come home once a year or less, usually during the summer. People working in the European Union (EU) usually come home to Moldova during the summer, while people working in the Commonwealth Independent States (CIS) usually work abroad (In CIS countries, summer is the most popular season for temporary workers).

About 95% of Moldovans said that they have relatives or close friends abroad. From this number, about 37% of respondents received financial help from their relatives abroad. This is not surprising, considering that remittances make up more than 22% of the national Moldovan GDP. In addition to this, about 40% of people said that they would be willing to move and settle abroad, given the opportunity.

This information shows that most Moldovans have extensive experience working abroad and many have relatives or close friends working abroad. The fact that many people have worked abroad recently, but were home during the public opinion surveying suggests that many people continue to work abroad and return to Moldova seasonally or for a short period of time. About 37% of respondents said that they received some financial help from their relatives abroad, which shows that one of the main reasons Moldovans seek job opportunities abroad, is not only to cover living expenses for themselves, but also their relatives at home. It has become very common for Moldovan households to send a family member abroad to support their entire family. In many cases, this is the only solution to cover living expenses and

costs for higher education (Robila, The Impact of Migration on Children's Psychological and Academic Functioning in the Republic of Moldova. 2014).

Moldovan migrants usually take up jobs that citizens of EU countries would never take due to the low pay. Usually, migrants are paid substantially lower than the minimum salary in (the) destination countries. In addition to this, the working conditions are very often poor. While the salary is lower than the required national minimum, it is still greater compared to salaries in Moldova (Milan Cuc 2005).

Table 3: Factors predicting Moldovan’s motivations to migrate

Variables		Percent
DV: Respondents who want to migrate abroad permanently		
Monthly Salary	Low	31 %
	Medium	41 %
	High	55 %
Can you cover minimum expenses with your monthly salary?	Yes	39 %
	No	38 %
Residence	Rural	50 %
	Urban	27 %
	Capital City	40 %
Social Class	Lower	38 %
	Middle	38 %
	Higher	20 %

Note: Sample size =219. Cell entries are results of descriptive statistics (crosstabs).

This paper found a positive correlation between salary and the willingness to migrate permanently abroad, which means that people with higher salaries are more willing to move abroad and people with lower salaries are more willing to stay in Moldova. Surprisingly, these findings are the exact opposite of what has been originally hypothesized. Richer people are more motivated to move abroad because they tend to think that their financial situation might deteriorate with Moldova’s lack

of prosperity. They also have more savings to facilitate the transition abroad, which can be very costly. Poorer people, on the other hand, are more risk-averse and less willing to risk the little they have, to move abroad.

The second hypothesis finds that people who are satisfied with their monthly salaries and those who are dissatisfied with their salaries are equally willing to migrate abroad. The salary satisfaction was measured by asking if the monthly salary is enough to cover minimum living expenses. Respondents who said that the salary is adequate to cover minimum expenses were considered satisfied, while respondents who said that the monthly salary is not adequate to cover minimum living expenses were considered dissatisfied with their salaries. Those who do not want to migrate while not being able to cover minimum living expenses does not mean they do not go abroad. In fact, many of them do. Working abroad helps them not only to cover their own living expenses, but also to support their whole family back at home. The working conditions are also very poor compared to safety and working regulations in the country of destination, but again these conditions are still much better compared to the working conditions Moldovans get back home. I think you mean that the working conditions in the destination country are much better than those of Moldova?

Residence is an important factor when predicting whether people are less or more willing to migrate abroad permanently. About 50% of rural people, 40% of capital city residents, and only 27% of urban residents said that they would be willing to migrate abroad. While it is not surprising that the rural residents were more willing to migrate abroad compared to the other two groups, it is surprising that the capital city residents were significantly more willing to move abroad compared to the residents of other urban areas. This might be due to the fact that people in the capital city are more dissatisfied with their lives, but this paper does not provide enough evidence for the reason of such a big difference between the capital city and other urban areas.

There is limited support for the original hypothesis of correlation between the social class and the desire to migrate abroad. Findings show that people from the lower and middle class are equally willing to move and settle abroad and people from higher social class are less willing to do so. However, there is one limitation when it comes to the variable of social class and this is because the respondents self-identified their own social class. Hence, social class was assigned to the respondent in the way s/he perceived it to be.

Conclusion

There are several reasons why people are motivated or even forced to migrate. Some seek better living opportunities and others want to escape poverty and starvation. It is well known that economic deprivation and high unemployment rate are some of the main reasons people seek job opportunities abroad. This paper analyzed the migration motivations of people residing in Moldova by posing several questions: (1) who is more willing to migrate and settle abroad? and (2) what are the factors predicting someone's willingness to migrate abroad? Moldova is an interesting case study because it is a country with one of the highest rates of migration in the world.

This paper found several important predictors of the Moldovans' desire to move and settle abroad permanently. Firstly, higher salary is a predictor of a strong will to migrate; people with higher salaries are more willing to move abroad compared to those with lower salaries. Secondly, there was no correlation between salary satisfaction and the will to migrate; in fact, both those satisfied and dissatisfied with their salaries were equally willing to migrate. Thirdly, residence is a strong predictor whether someone is more or less willing to migrate. Rural residents were the most willing to migrate, followed by the capital city residents, and the urban residents were the least willing to migrate. Finally, social class is not a reliable indicator of someone's motivations to migrate; people from lower and middle classes were equally motivated to migrate, while people from a higher social class were the least motivated. While this paper is limited in its conclusions by the quantitative data, it still states that poorer people are less willing to migrate. This suggests that people who are less willing to migrate are at risk of not informing themselves properly on the aspects of safe migration.

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