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The impact of European population dynamics on migration policies

Addendum to the report[1]
Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons
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1. Introduction

1. On 26 and 27 September 2016, I visited Chisinau (Republic of Moldova) on a fact-finding mission to complete my report. During its meeting in Paris on 22 September 2016, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons approved the report and as the mission took place subsequently, agreed that during the October part-session I would present an addendum containing my findings. Taking this opportunity, I would like to express my thanks to the Moldovan delegation and its secretariat, as well as to the secretariat of the Council of Europe office in the Republic of Moldova for their assistance in the preparation of this mission.

2. Demographic challenges in the Republic of Moldova

2. As is reflected in my report, the demographic situation in the Republic of Moldova is characterised by a very low fertility rate (1.3 children per woman) and one of the lowest life expectancy rates in Europe (65 years for men and 73.4 years for women), resulting in a negative natural growth of the population.

3. Moreover, the population of the Republic of Moldova is rapidly ageing, with 16.7% of the population older than 60 years old.[2] The share of the active population in relation to the inactive population of both young and old (the "dependency ratio") is 55.2% (2014). The projections indicate that by 2035 the dependency ratio will increase to 65%.[3]

4. In addition, due to the long-lasting economic crisis, the instability created by the foreign military presence in Moldovan territory and the lack of employment opportunities, a large number of the working age population has left the country in search of better living conditions. It is difficult to give a precise number for Moldovans working abroad, but as I was told by representatives of international organisations in the Republic, around 850 000 people have left the country to the Russian Federation and to European Union countries, which represents around 25% of the Moldovan population. The most alarming tendency is the emigration of young people, the country's main population potential.

5. Emigration for employment purposes, especially from rural areas, has created a worrying social problem of children being left behind (children whose parents have emigrated, leaving them with grandparents or other relatives). More than 100 000 children have been left behind by migrant parents.[4] The absence of one or both parents has adverse effects on children, especially in relation to their psychological condition and health and on their performance at school. There are serious problems of drug addiction, an increase in

1. Addendum approved by the committee on 11 October 2016.
2. Data provided during the meeting with the representative of the National Statistics Bureau.
3. Demographic barometer, Impact of economic crises on demographic processes, No. 1, 2016.
4. www.migrationpolicy.org/article/children-left-behind-impact-labor-migration-moldova-and-ukraine.

teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and even suicides amongst this group of minors. They are also vulnerable to human trafficking and labour exploitation. Migrant parents' lives are apparently also affected by these difficult situations, as there is also a trend of increased divorce rates among them.

6. All of these factors have led to a significant decline in the Moldovan population. Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain official data of the population of the Republic, as until now the results of the 2014 census have not yet been announced. However, experts from the Centre of Demographic Research informed me that their estimation of the population of the Republic of Moldova is around 2.9 million[5], which means that during the last 10 years the Moldovan population has dropped drastically by 400 000 people.

3. Governmental response

7. The current demographic trends in the Republic of Moldova have created important challenges for the Government of the Republic of Moldova, which should be addressed without delay.

8. The government has adopted several national strategies and action plans aimed at combating negative population tendencies, such as the National Strategic Programme on Demographic Security 2011-2025, the National Strategy in the Field of Migration and Asylum 2011-2020 and a national "Diaspora-25" strategy.

9. A governmental body, the National Commission on Population and Development, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, co-ordinates the implementation of a cross-sectorial action plan on demographic security. The Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and the Family is a leading agency on demographic policy. The National Bureau for Diaspora Relations has developed and implemented a number of programmes aimed at engaging diaspora potential in the economic development of the country. The National Bureau for Migration and Asylum has prepared several decisions adopted by the government facilitating the reintegration of labour migrants in the country. The government has also introduced paternity leave.

10. However, during my mission both international organisations and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) stressed that the measures taken by the government were insufficient to reverse the negative dynamic of the population development. The assessment of national policies concluded that, even if well-financed and fully implemented, the National Strategy on Demographic Security would not lead to the positive changes required for the population dynamics.[6] Moreover, the current education system, in particular vocational training, does not meet the needs of the labour market and should be drastically reformed. The reproductive rights services are very limited in rural areas, which leads to high levels of infertility, health problems and early pregnancies. The problem of the ageing of the Moldovan population also requires an adequate response. The present retirement age of 57 for women and 62 for men greatly limits the potential of the older population's contribution to the workforce.

11. Another important problem pointed out by international organisations and civil society is a lack of continuity of policies between different governments, which significantly impedes the necessary reform process in the country.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

12. The only remedy to the alarming tendency towards the decline of the Moldovan population would be a governmental strategy of economic improvement accompanied by measures to reverse the fall in population.

13. This would imply structural changes in the economy, with an emphasis on the development of the agricultural sector and rural areas, where 60% of the population lives.

14. The concrete measures for improving the demographic situation in the Republic of Moldova should include an increase in accessibility to reproductive health services, especially in rural areas; improvement of primary health-care services; revision of the maternity leave system; revision of the pension age and promoting life-long learning; reduction of the mortality rate by improving health services for the elderly. The National Programme on Demographic Security needs to be revised to address the key demographic challenges: low fertility, demographic ageing, relative low life expectancy and significant migration.

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5. Demographic Barometer, What is the real population number of the Republic of Moldova?, Olga Penina, Centre for demographic Research, NIER, 2015.
6. Are we up to the task?, Assessment report on the implementation of the National Programme on Demographic Security 2011-2025, Alex Buzu, Victor Lutenco, October 2016.

15. To reduce emigration and the ageing of the workforce, the Republic of Moldova should invest in the younger generations by reforming the vocational training system, supporting youth initiatives and promoting small businesses and creating jobs for young people. Special support should be provided to vulnerable families, including children who have been left behind.

16. Territorial reform is also needed to optimise local governance structures and reduce unnecessary expenses. The government should also provide adequate financial resources for the implementation of the above-mentioned action plans and support the work of NGOs.

17. Finally, I completely agree with the conclusions of the donors and NGOs interviewed that bad governance, corruption and the lack of a fair justice system are the main factors which hamper economic development, prevent international investments in the country and lead to a huge exodus of the population. The Government of the Republic of Moldova has a difficult task before it to link the social development of the country to economic growth, while at the same time trying to restrain security threats posed by the foreign presence in its territory.