

# **MIGRATION OF CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA FOR WORK PURPOSES - RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND FORCED LABOUR**

Conclusions and observations post-national information  
campaign

2019



## Summary

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## Social context of campaign

This report has been developed as a result of [a national information campaign](#) aimed at promoting safe migration of Moldovan citizens and prevention of trafficking in human beings, implemented by the International Centre La Strada between March 2 and May 31, 2019. Special attention was paid to the **analysis of information about labor exploitation of moldovan citizens abroad and forced labor**.

We believe that the quantitative and qualitative data gained from the hot-line for safe migration and anti-trafficking 0 800 77777 (HLA) for the duration of the campaign is relevant for a better understanding of the phenomenon of migration for work purposes for citizens of our country, the risks they are taking, the problems they are facing and which are "driving them away" from home, and, last but not least, the state's response to this complex issue. We should mention that this summary report is a complementary exercise to the awareness campaign, an effort that we could not afford not to make in view of two important facts.

**First of all**, in the Republic of Moldova there is no updated national study or research that would measure the phenomenon of human trafficking, which could inform us about its specific forms and how it affects the citizens of our country; and how the state mechanisms for preventing and combating human trafficking should be adapted. Whilst it is reasonably certain that this phenomenon could not be subject to change at the global level and yet remain intact in the Republic of Moldova only, as it was the case some 15-20 years ago.

**Secondly**, we must acknowledge that the results of campaign entitled " Before accepting a job offer abroad, inform yourself!" exceeded our expectations before it started. From the daily calls we had to the hotline, we suspected that Moldovan citizens lacked qualitative information about the legal migration procedures for work purposes. However, just a few weeks after the launch of the campaign, we realized that the level of misinformation Moldovans are subject to is worse than we thought. The state mechanisms - supervising the activity of intermediaries that facilitate specifically finding employment abroad - seem to be dysfunctional. Equally, state efforts to facilitate our citizen's access to labour markets abroad are insufficient or dysfunctional, when it comes to fair and safe conditions, as part of a well thought out migration policy, from which both the citizen and the state would benefit.

**In this context**, we see this report as a barometer test of some of the disturbing trends that are shaping today at the social level, and which need to be studied more widely in order to prevent and combat not only human trafficking, but also other phenomena of social and economic life, which are particularly alarming for the Republic of Moldova.

## Demographic profile of moldovan migrant workers

During the campaign (3 months), the hotline for safe migration and anti-trafficking 0 800 77777 had a total of **5402 calls** regarding safe migration of citizens. For the purposes of this report, we will make use of the following data):

- **Prevention calls - 5048** (calls from potential migrants about going to work abroad, with or without an offer; requests for information about going abroad for purposes other than work).

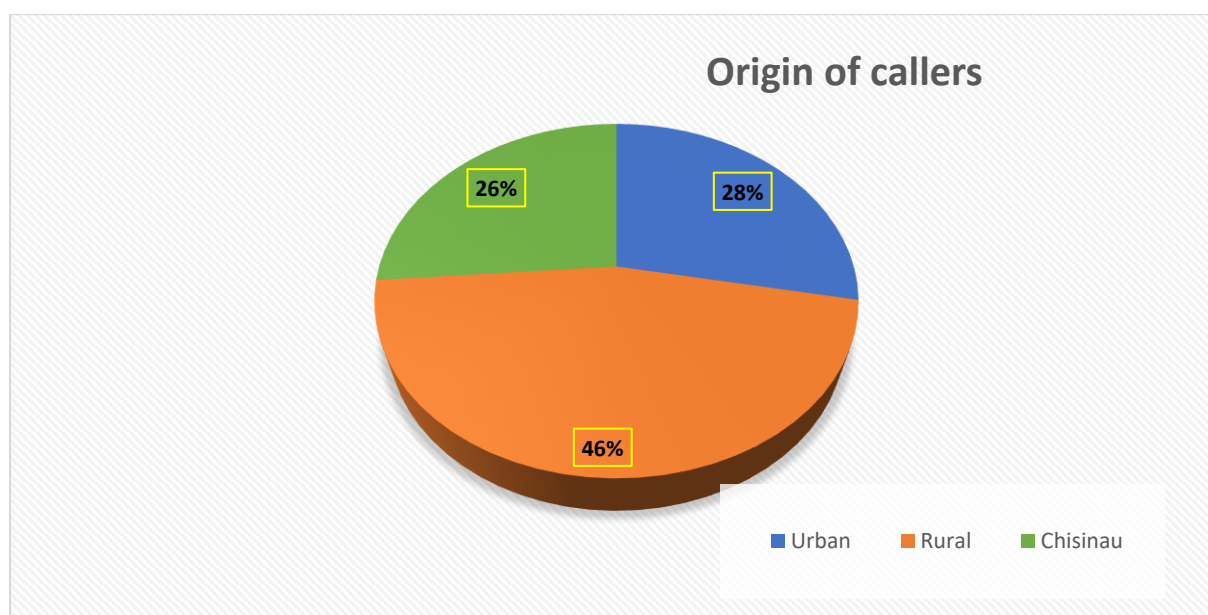
- **Calls regarding the status of the migrant abroad** – a difficult situation in connection with loss of identity documents, violation of residence regime, legalization of diplomas, etc.) - **14**

- **Calls regarding false promises made before hiring - 18**

- **SOS calls** – (exploitation of migrant worker, alleged trafficking cases, disappearance of persons presumed to be exploited) - **17**, which refers to 5 SOS cases.

- **Requests for information, collaboration, etc.a. - 305 calls.**

If until recently the tendency to emigrate for work purposes was specific to rural areas, today the interest for a job abroad among the residents of Chisinau is growing steadily. As shown in the diagram below, 54% of HLA callers come from cities, while 26% of them are from Chisinau. The fact that more than half of this category of callers are not satisfied with employment opportunities offered by the most developed economic area of the country confirms the general worsening demographic trends at the national level.



Even more serious is the fact that we are talking about a massive exodus of labor among the active population (27-41 years old), which represents over 54%: 15% of callers are between 27 – 30 years old; 16%, between 31 and 35 years old; 23% - between 36 and 41 years old. Almost every third caller (32 % is over 41, with 18 to 26-year-olds accounting for a 14 per cent share of calls to the LFA.

## Needs and expectations of migrant workers

The most sought after in the category of calls regarding safe migration, is general advice on going to work abroad and specific advice on employment abroad, when they have identified a concrete offer. This is followed by counseling on the migrant's status abroad (calls received from citizens of the Republic of Moldova who have emigrated and are faced with various difficulties overseas), counseling on going abroad for purposes other than work (tourism, information about the possibilities of studying abroad, etc.a.).

Moldovans seek and find job offers via internet (84%). If until half a year ago, the absolute majority of prevention calls were about requests for information regarding a particular job abroad (a concrete offer), now they are simply "looking for some work". In fact, our fellow citizens don't ask anymore about a specific offer, they are not interested in working conditions and wages, and less so about social security and any other guarantees that the intermediary should be taking care of. Nine out of ten HLA callers are ready to accept an offer of employment from an intermediary agency they do not know much about. Usually, they communicate with their representatives by phone or Viber, and more details are only provided if they come to the office, because that's where "they will certainly find something for him/her."

At the same time, there is a widespread belief that once a job offer is coming from a company or agency, this would a priori be a legal one. Our citizens call the HLA to ask directly whether the offer offered by X or Y is legal or not, many of whom call only after they have already signed a mediation contract and made the advance payments. They call to ask "whether everything is going to be all right?" We're talking about dozens of cases in which even if they are described key points that point to illegal activities of the firm, they insist on going abroad and seek assurance from the advisers that everything would be all right. **These behaviors prove the desperation of people, confirm their firm decision to leave the country, although they are fully aware that they are at risk.**

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*If I go with this company, is everything going to be all right?*

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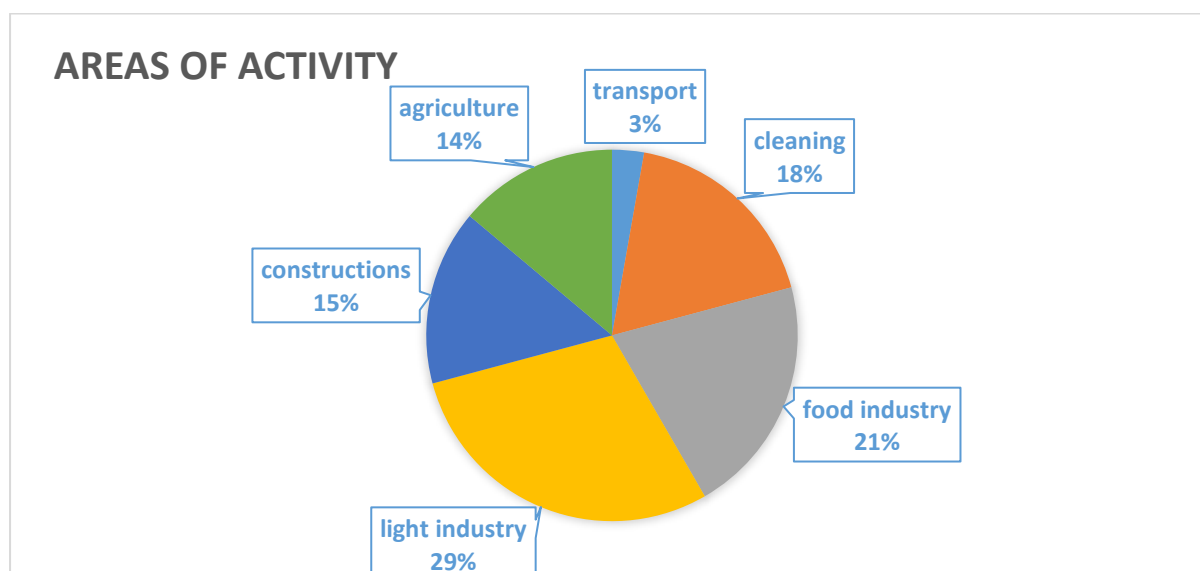
In the Republic of Moldova there is no resource, information platform where every citizen can freely access up-to-date information about companies in our country that offer employment services abroad. Callers of the HLA have been complaining for the better part of a year, that it is virtually impossible to access the official website of the Chamber of Licensing with a full list of intermediary companies that are operating legally, and specifying the type of license held, the scope, and the country in which they have the right to send our citizens, and other important details.

The most popular questions of HLA callers and at the same time the most popular articles on the platform migratiesigura.md are the following:

- ✚ concrete list of intermediate agencies in the Republic of Moldova that are legally active
- ✚ specific job offers
- ✚ emigration offers to Canada, USA and Australia
- ✚ procedure for removing prohibitions to enter a country
- ✚ procedure for obtaining documents for a foreign country (visa, residence permit, etc.
- ✚ the term of legal stay on the territory of a foreign country on the basis of the Moldovan passport.

## Job offers abroad and conditions of intermediaries

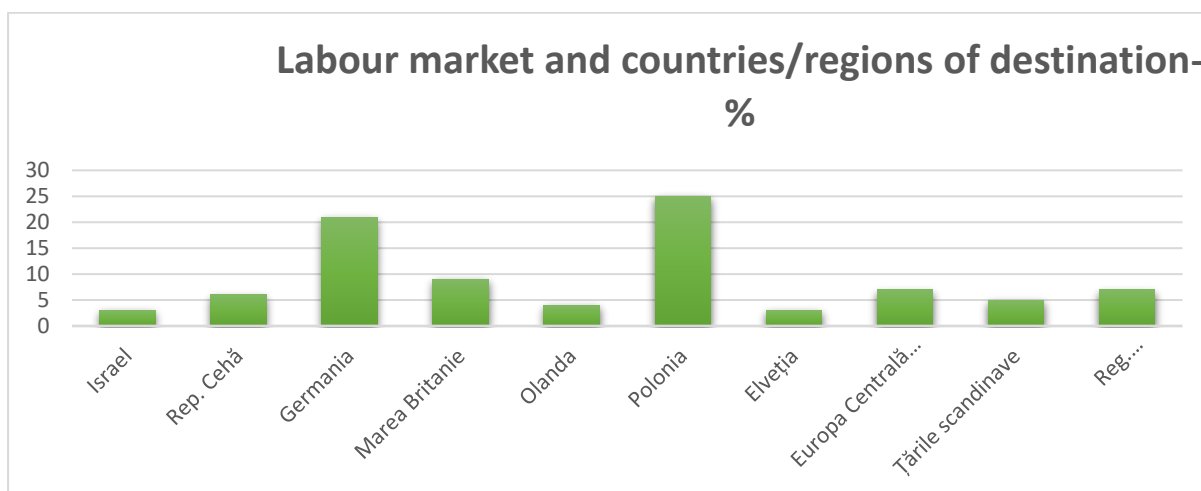
Here are the areas of activity in which domestic intermediary agencies propose job offers abroad:



Qualitative data accumulated by HLA advisors during the campaign, but not only, outline very worrying trends related to the activity of intermediary companies that propose job offers abroad, namely:

- 66 % of callers do not know (have not been told) about the need for a work visa;
- 22% received offers as holders of dual citizenship (MD-RO) precisely to avoid the need to obtain a working visa;
- 26% said that the agency assures them that there is no need for a work visa if the period of work does not exceed 3 months (job with a "tourist visa");
- 60% reported that they were promised that the contract will be signed at the destination;

- they are obliged by the mediation contract to pay compensation (worth tens of thousands of lei) if they renounce the offer;
- they are asked to make the decision as soon as possible and leave shortly, so as not to lose the offer;
- are obliged to take the transport and accept agency's conditions;
- 8% received the job offer from both known and unknown individuals with whom they met in person to hand in money and papers.




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*"Come to the office and we'll find something for you"*

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Every fifth caller to the HLA says that his Romanian passport has been requested in order to be employed, since for the employment of Romanian citizens in the EU countries a work visa is not required, which is true. It is also true that no intermediary company on the territory of the Republic of Moldova can hold a license for hiring foreign (Romanian) citizens abroad, unless it is a subsidiary of a Romanian company.

The variety of tricks that some intermediary companies resort to sometimes exceeds the limits of imagination and common sense. A large number of information calls were recorded in relation to job offers in the UK between March 15 and April 19. They all describe the same procedure of employment in agriculture, for the citizens of the Republic of Moldova: should obtain a work visa, entering into a contract with the employer shall be made on the territory of the United Kingdom, but the callers have been assured by the company that it is not necessary to be worried about, since we are talking about a project in which "the authorities in the United Kingdom provide 1,200 work visas for citizens of the Republic of Moldova".

In the vast majority of situations the beneficiaries reported that once in the offices of the intermediary company (and it is not a single one), staff avoid giving them too many details about the place and working conditions they propose. On the other hand, they are hurrying and do not look into the details, and sign mediation contracts with the company. They often don't get the actual job offer but just the information with regard to the alleged offer, the mediation contract providing for more responsibilities, which they undertake towards the intermediary, the amounts to be withheld from the salary without specifying the exact amount, and what types of services or goods, i.e., the withholdings are for **And if they ask too many questions, they risk losing the job offer in general.**

One of the "surprises" of the campaign have been the requests for long-term partnerships and collaborations, which we received from intermediary companies. They, hesitate giving us more details about themselves (not even the name of the company), have requested from HLA advisors information support about the procedure of hiring moldovan citizens abroad, facilitation of procedures for concluding contacts with various embassies in order to prepare the necessary documents for the work of moldovans abroad (mainly Czech Republic), etc.

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*"Everything's fine with us. We have a license, we operate legally. But we'd like some training, seminars, so we can be even better"*

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These calls reconfirm the fact that there are still many social and economic circumstances, which favor the semi-legal activity of intermediary companies, which are exploiting the growing demand of persons interested in working abroad.

## Migrant workers in vulnerable situations and the specifics of SOS cases

Moldovans that end up in vulnerable situations abroad with a temporary job through an intermediary company, report a number of specific problems, which can be described as false promises at the limit of exploitation through labor of our citizens. They left the country with biometric passports (63%), but also with Romanian identity documents (37%). No matter where they go, regardless of identity documents, age, gender, social origin or other peculiarities, moldovan migrant workers face the same problems:

- Are partially paid;
- Unofficial payments are withheld from the promised salary (for tools, accommodation, transport, etc.) about which they were not previously informed, so the amount received at hand is quite small;
- The kind of work they have to do in the foreign country is different from the one promised or agreed at home. For example, they are told that they will be working "at the warehouse", but without specifying the type of storage (regular or cold chain), what jobs they will actually perform (they will carry weights, they will pack or they will arrange products on shelves), what types of products they will be working with etc., etc.



- They are forced to work in conditions that are different from those promised by the intermediary company at home. All promises were made only verbally. They have no legal documents to confirm those promises. Some of them have only the job offer without a stamp and without a signature.
- Upon arrival in the country of destination they were not employed or met by anyone. The beneficiaries were in a foreign country without knowing the language, without knowing where they could ask for help (72% of victims of scams are men and 28% - women, respectively).

After the disappointments they go through while abroad, deceived migrants, once returned home often hesitate to report these situations to the competent bodies. For example, 50% of moldovans who suffered from false job offers called HLA only after seeing the TV spot. Worse still, every fifth of those who called to report false promises of employment or labour exploitation have been referred to the HLA service by institutions such as the NEA or the police. **Representatives of police either discourage the filing of such complaints, citing lack of evidence, or do not know how to handle such situations. The resolution of these cases takes a very long time, often years, and people simply give up. The basic need for people is to receive the salary they have worked for.**

The profile of SOS cases has changed a lot. We must recognise that currently, we cannot, unfortunately outline a very clear picture of the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings for labour exploitation purposes. Instead, we can talk about an essential change of the phenomenon. The conditions in which key players on the market of intermediary companies in Moldova operate today on the one hand, and the methods of operation and manipulation by foreign employers on the other hand, push the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings to a very fine line between labour exploitation and forced labour.

And if we take into account the state's faulty actions aimed at ensuring a well-coordinated social policy, the situation of the moldovan migrant worker becomes even more confusing. On the one hand, the authorities do not sufficiently facilitate the citizen's access to an alternative labour market under safe and fair conditions as part of bilateral government agreements. On the other hand, those agreements that the state says it signed are either not operationalized or not sufficiently communicated about (for example, bilateral agreement on employment of Moldovan citizens in Bulgaria).

## Conclusions

- Trafficking in human beings and labour exploitation of migrant workers equally affects all categories of adult citizens of the Republic of Moldova.
- Trafficking in human beings for labour exploitation purposes has undergone essential changes and it is at the border with forced labour of the migrant, as part of mixed migration flows. Diffuse indicators of the "new human trafficking" are outlined, characterized by the very close connection between human trafficking, exploitation through labor, forced labor, deceit and scam.
- Citizens are looking for short-term jobs with greater mobility, opting for short-term work involving average financial and social security risks associated with trafficking in human beings. These risks are often assumed consciously in the absence of safe alternatives.
- The access of Moldovan citizens to relevant public services (Licensing Chamber, National Employment Agency, Public Services Agency, MFAEI call center, etc.) is limited and deficient and does not meet the real information needs of citizens.
- The response of the law enforcement bodies responsible for combating the THB and labour exploitation of citizens is slow, and is often lacking. The actions of authorities do not meet the expectations of citizens regarding the recovery of salary payments for the work done and the damage caused by intermediary agencies.