

DIASPORA TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Daria Zaharov, Turiba University, Tourism and Hospitality Management, STA3D1,
dashazaharov280@gmail.com

Abstract: *The given paper is focused on Diaspora Tourism in Moldova on its current stage with suggestions for the development in the long run. Following chapters illustrate an analysis of Diaspora Tourism in Moldova, a research based on diaspora tourism experiences including immigration destinations, pull factors contributed to the emigration, main purposes of travel to Moldova as well activities done apart from main purpose of travel. The author's main reason was to demonstrate the significance of this sector of the industry and its ability to be beneficial for relevant parties if managed accurately. Findings of the research prove that the predominant pull factor contributed to emigration from Moldova is education. Most favoured immigration countries are the United Kingdom, Russia, Canada, Germany, Romania and Italy. As anticipated the largest proportion of the respondents travel to Moldova to visit family and friends.*

Research objectives – To identify pull factors of diaspora tourism in the Republic of Moldova; To discover favourable emigration destinations for Moldovan citizens and their experiences while travelling to Moldova.

Tasks of the research –

- 1. To analyse theoretical and scientific sources about Diaspora Tourism and VFR Tourism.*
- 2. To characterise the emigration process and diaspora.*
- 3. To create a methodology for research.*
- 4. To conduct a questionnaire with Diaspora Tourists.*
- 5. To detect pull factors of Diaspora Tourists in Moldova.*
- 6. To make conclusions and recommendations.*

Research methods used – Literature review covers interpretation of documentary written materials: organisations' websites, journals, interview transcripts; and multiple source time-series based evidence: industry statistics and reports, books, journals (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2009, 259). Primary data collection is based on a survey. Data analysis includes descriptive analysis of the research and cross-sectional analysis.

Key words: Diaspora, Tourism, Emigration, Motivation, Moldova.

Introduction

According to the updated data, in 2019 2 million 681 thousand 735 people lived in Moldova. Thus, since 1989, the population of Moldova has decreased by almost a million people. The main reason for it remains mass emigration, which is still impossible to stop, because the process has ceased to be controlled. At first, people were leaving the country to feed their families, gradually settling down in new countries and taking all their relatives there, but over time those who were feeling good in Moldova began to emigrate. A whole generation of people, who know from childhood that they will leave, has grown up in Moldova. They are too young to understand why, but they just know it from the senior generation. Now even those, who never thought they would do it, are leaving the country. These are not only purposeful, very efficient and young people, who have energy, desires and plans, but also those who do not set high goals for themselves. It is worth mentioning, that those few people, who are not going to leave their homeland, do not want their children to study at Moldovan universities. They are looking for opportunities for youth to study overseas. Accordingly, their children will most likely leave the country anyway. It will be difficult to stop this process, because the consciousness of people has been forming in this direction for too long. Over decades the inhabitants of Moldova have

become accustomed to the idea that there is no future there. However, well-structured management and creative approach can lead to formation of diaspora tourism, which can be beneficial for both: diaspora and state.

Research question – What motivates diaspora tourists to travel to Moldova?

Study period – 01.02.2021 – 04.04.2021

Methodology – Primary data collection is based on a survey – detailed questionnaire targeted at people, who emigrated from Moldova. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions and 3 sections; embracing demographic information, diaspora tourism experience and promotion of Moldova as a tourist destination. The first section of the survey contained 7 questions finding out gender, age, occupation status, country of residence and pull factors contributed to immigration. The last question in this section divided the respondents into those who travelled and did not travelled to Moldova within the last three years. Those whose answer was no, were directed straight to the last section. The second section incorporated 9 questions and referred to the experiences of diaspora tourists, covering the main purpose of travel, frequency of trips, length of stay, expenditures, activities, negative and positive aspects of travelling to Moldova within the last three years. Finally, the third section numbered 4 questions concerning promotion of Moldova as a tourist destination. Questionnaire was created on 19 of March, 2021 using Google Forms. Later, the link was sent to 35 people. In addition, the recipients were invited to pass the form on other Moldovan emigrants, nominating them to participate in the research, making up the snowball sampling technique. It is worth mentioning, that the number of responses returned amounted to 123, making the response rate 351%.

1. Theoretical part

Definition of diaspora refers to the “dispersal of a people from its original homeland” (Butler, 2001, 189). Diaspora in sociology, political science and related fields is a part of the people (ethnos) living outside the country of their origin, forming cohesive and stable ethnic groups in the country of residence, and having social institutions to maintain and develop their identity and community.

According to the legislation of the Republic of Moldova, the concept of "Moldovan Diaspora" includes citizens of the Republic of Moldova, based on permanent or temporary residence abroad, immigrants from the Republic of Moldova and their descendants, as well as communities formed by them (Monitorul Oficial, 2012). Migration for the Republic of Moldova is a challenge containing both: certain opportunities and threats for the further sustainable development of the country. The attention of the authorities and researchers is still drawn to the problem of migration, as there is a constant tendency for the growth of the population looking for work abroad. It should be noted that migrants who have left for work abroad, after some time, decide to stay and settle in the host countries. In the current situation, the study of the problems of the Moldovan Diaspora, the future life strategies of its members, as well as the ways of the diaspora's influence on the development of the Republic of Moldova, become especially relevant (Cheianu-Andrei, 2014).

From the historical aspect, compared to other post-Soviet countries, Moldova never dealt with the Diaspora phenomena before. However, from the contemporary context, as soon as the Republic of Moldova proclaimed its independence in 1991, Moldovan societies began forming abroad. Additionally, Moldovan citizens got the right to travel to other countries for personal reasons such as emigration, marriage, family reunions, studies, etc. A few years later, with the development of Moldovan labour-migration, this process received a mass-character. The main

goal of the newly-formed Moldovan Non-Governmental Organizations, societies and students abroad became the preservation of the national, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of Moldovan citizens; as well as the establishment and strengthening relationship between them. These organizations hold the “Mărțișor” festival, demonstrate and promote national traditions and customs, traditional Moldovan cuisine. In addition, a program for children of diaspora “Dor” was launched. It covers teenagers from Moldova, who live outside the country. Participants of the program are involved in a number of activities, whose purpose is to familiarize with the customs, language and culture of their country of origin (Mosneaga, 2011, 160).

Based on the analysis of the positive experience of other countries, Diaspora Relations Bureau was established in order to coordinate activities to support the development and organization of the Moldovan Diaspora. The mission of the bureau is to create strong links between the government, partners and stakeholders working on migration issues and to attract the knowledge, skills and capital of the diaspora for the development of Moldova.

2. Analysis of the situation

Earlier, when the Republic of Moldova was part of the Soviet Union, "external migration" was prohibited. As a result, migration flows from the Republic of Moldova were limited to Soviet territory. Nevertheless, at the very first signals of liberalization in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, migration restrictions eased, and many countries witnessed the return of citizens to their historical homeland and to their families (Mosneaga, 2006, 250). This phenomenon became even more widespread after the collapse of the USSR, which led to the subsequent formation of Moldova as a new independent state. The hallmark of this time period was the growing interethnic tensions, resulting in ethnic and military conflict. These circumstances caused ethnic migration in the first half of the 90s, mainly towards Russia and Ukraine.

Starting from the second half of the 90s, initially caused by economic reasons, the outcome of Moldovan migrants became widespread. The first mass migration was provoked by economic reasons and was of a commercial nature (buying goods abroad for their subsequent sale on the Moldovan market). However, the introduction of a visa regime, stricter customs regulations and price equalization in post-communist states have made this type of commercial migration less profitable for the migrant entrepreneur. Consequently, commercial migration gradually gave way to labour migration (Mosneaga, 2009, 160).

According to the national and United Nations statistics (2019), the population of Moldova has been constantly dropping since 2000 (*Figure 1*). The National Statistical Database of Moldova shows that the total population was at 4,5 million in the beginning of the XXI century. Meanwhile, as reported by the National Statistical Database of Moldova, the total population is 2 681 734 inhabitants. The major role of this phenomenon plays migration, particularly emigration of Moldovan citizens. The Extended Migration Profile Report has shown that in years 2010-2015 the total number of citizens residing abroad was around 753 800, which made up approximately a quarter of the whole population. 37,4% of citizens living abroad stayed there for 12 or more months. During the research, it was noted that the vast majority of emigrants are women from rural areas with experience in agriculture and without a university degree.

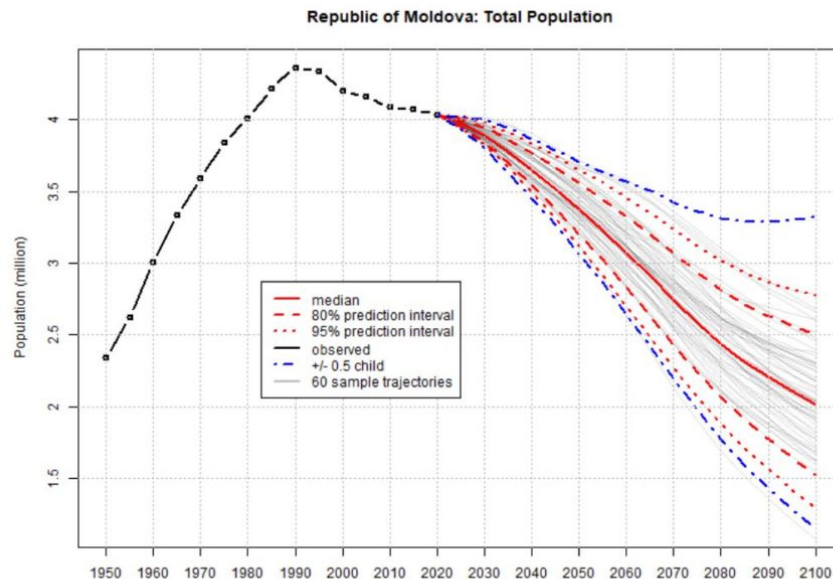


Figure. 1. Population division and the prediction on population of Moldova for 2100 (United Nations, 2019)

The predictions of the United Nations show that the total population of Moldova will drop to 2 million by the year 2100. Even though in April 2014 the Moldova–European Union Association Agreement was signed, which meant that Moldovan citizens could stay in EU countries for 3 out of 6 months, they still required a visa or a working permit for longer stay. However, for most citizens this is not an issue, as due to historical reasons the majority of Moldovans can apply or already have a Romanian passport, removing migration restrictions across the whole EU.

The Extended Migration Profile Report has shown that most Moldovans prefer Russia as their emigration destination (Figure 2). It can be explained by the fact that Moldovan citizens have friends and relatives, who moved to Russia during the end of the XX century. Additionally, there are almost no limitations in terms of legal aspect: to work in Russia citizens of Moldova require a working permit, which they can easily obtain within the first three months of migration. Moreover, many Moldovans still prefer to work illegally.

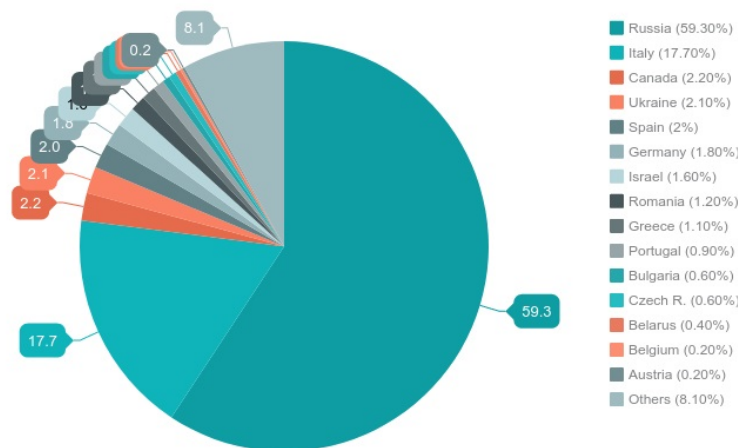


Figure. 2. Distribution of Moldovan citizens by destination country (Extended Migration Profile of the Republic of Moldova Report for 2010-2015)

Currently, the main reasons for migration are poverty, unstable economy, lack of opportunities with reasonable salaries and high living standards in the EU. The expert of the Institute of European Policies and Reforms, stated that pension system is inefficient and unable to guarantee the employee a decent pension, another cause is excessive corruption and

bureaucracy in local public institutions, selective justice, the interests of the citizens are not protected by the law and they no longer trust the prosecutor's office, poorly developed medical and educational system, destroyed infrastructure. Thus, it can be concluded that people do not feel protected by their government and would rather emigrate to a foreign country.

One of the consequences of high emigration rate is people sending money back to their families in Moldova in terms of remittances. These money constitute a high percentage of Moldova's GDP. In 2018, Republic of Moldova was ranked 9th in the world according to remittances related to GDP, having a total of 16.1% according to the World Bank data.

3. Part of the research

Findings of the research were built on the analysis of 123 survey responses from Moldovans living abroad. It was found that the majority of the respondents are in the age category from 18 to 25, consequently the largest proportion accounts for students. 44.7 per cent have emigrated from Moldova within the last 3 years, which can be explained by the young age and the student status of the largest share.

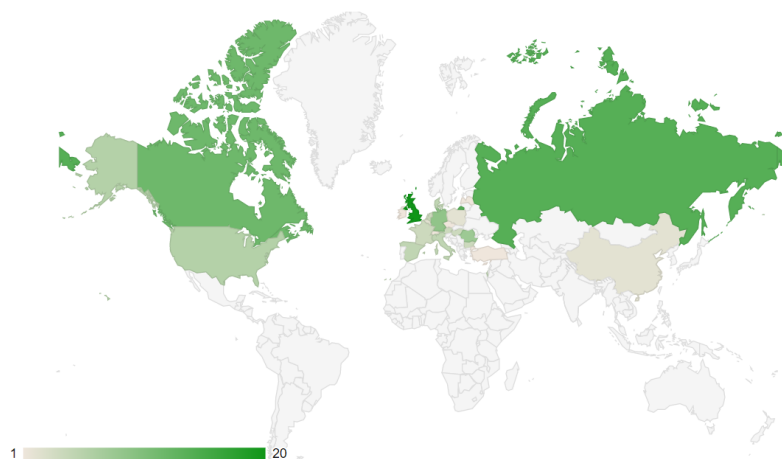


Figure 3. Map of the immigration destinations of Moldovan citizens

As it can be noticed from the map, the most popular immigration countries with percentage 8-16% are the United Kingdom, Russia, and Canada. Less popular countries are Germany, Romania, The United States, Italy, Israel, Bulgaria, Austria, which amounted to 3-8% of Moldovan migrants. From this data it was extracted that approximately 80% of Moldovans emigrate to Eurasian continent and 20% to North America.

6. Which pull factors contributed to your emigration from Moldova?

123 responses

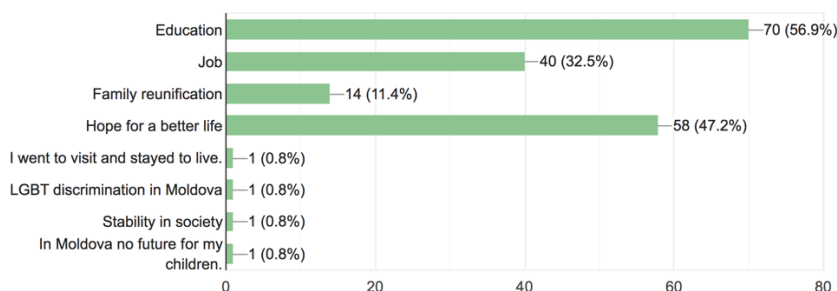


Figure 4. Pull factors contributed to emigration from Moldova

Leading pull factor for most of Moldovan emigrants is education. A general hope for a better life and employment are the secondary factors.

A considerably high proportion of the respondents (75,6%) have stated that they travelled to Moldova within the last 3 years. This implies that most emigrants leave their family in Moldova and travel for the benefits of well-developed countries, but prefer returning to socialize in their motherland. This fact is reaffirmed by the question asking the main purpose of travel.

8. Which was the main purpose of travel?
93 responses

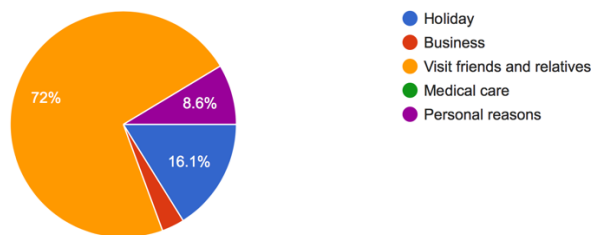


Figure. 5. Distribution of Moldovan migrants by main purpose of travel to Moldova

As anticipated almost 90% of Moldovan emigrants travel back to visit family and friends or spend holidays with them.

14. What activities do you usually do in Moldova apart from your main purpose of travel?
93 responses

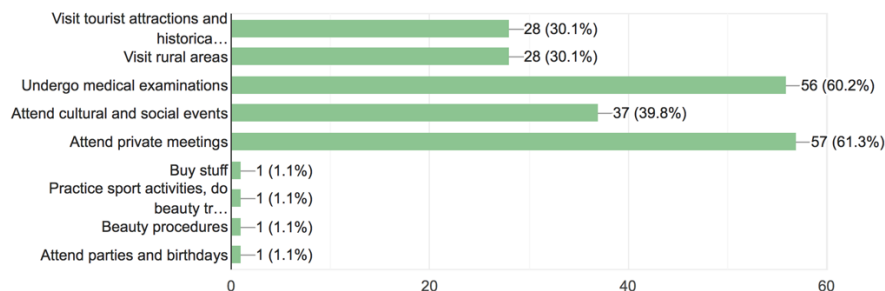


Figure. 6. Activities done in Moldova apart from main purpose of travel

60.2% of the respondents prefer to undergo medical examinations during each trip to Moldova. This can be explained by low prices for high quality medical care compared to other European and North American countries. Other frequently done activities are attending private and social events, visiting historical sites and rural areas, doing beauty treatments.

Lastly, 59.3% invited their friends from their new country of residence to Moldova. It is worth mentioning that 34.9% managed to bring their foreign friends to Moldova, which means that over 58% of the invitations are successful and foreigners are interested in Moldova as a tourist destination.

Conclusions

To conclude, the study revealed that:

1. The main pull factor contributed to emigration from Moldova is higher education.
2. Most popular immigration destinations are the United Kingdom, Russia, Canada, Germany, Romania and Italy.

3. Regardless of the age, Moldovan migrants primarily travel to Moldova to visit friends and relatives.
4. Additionally, Moldovan migrants prefer to undergo medical examinations in Moldova rather than in the country of residence.

Cross-sectional analysis proved that:

1. Youngsters 18-25 years old tend to leave Moldova with the purpose of education mainly in the United Kingdom because of its world-recognised universities and outstanding academic reputation. Other countries chosen for higher education are Russia, Romania, partially due to an opportunity to communicate in native language, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands and Hungary. For this age category primary motivation for travelling back to Moldova is visiting friends and relatives during university holidays. Frequency of trips to Moldova in 66.6% of cases accounts for 1-3 times per year with the average length of stay in 53.3% of cases around 2 weeks. Other activities done in Moldova by youth apart from the main purpose of travel cover going out with friends and undergoing medical examinations.
2. Adults from 26 to 45 emigrated from Moldova with a desire to live a better life with greater career opportunities in Canada and the UK. Less desired countries among this age group are Russia, France, Italy, Spain. Primary motivation for travelling back to Moldova is visiting friends and relatives and frequency of trips accounts for 1-3 times per year with the average length of stay 1 week or less. This age category attends private meetings and receives treatments upon arrivals in the country of origin.
3. Elderly people for their immigration destinations have chosen Italy and Canada. Regardless of the age they immigrated for work and improved living conditions. They travel to Moldova to visit friends and relatives and obtain medical services.

Recommendations

To the state:

1. To maintain the quality of education at a high level in all departments: preschool, school and university. This will enable diaspora and Moldovan citizens to keep their children in the home country. In this regard, the connection between members of the diaspora and the motherland will be much stronger.
2. To take measures to enhance each element of infrastructure faced by tourists to enable members of the diaspora willingly invite foreign guests to Moldova

To the diaspora:

1. To follow closely the changes taking place in Moldova in the field of legislation and trends in the field of business and politics.
2. To keep in touch with the diaspora community and with the Embassy of the Republic of Moldova in the country of residence.
3. To tell new friends about Moldova and its traditions, treat them with Moldovan national dishes, invite them to visit Moldova to show historical and cultural attractions.

To the Embassies of the Republic of Moldova:

1. To organise mass events for members of the diaspora and their friends to introduce them to each other so that people do not feel lonely far from their homeland, support each other and feel their involvement in the life of Moldova.
2. To help citizens integrate more easily into life in a new country.

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Questionnaire on Diaspora Tourism