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THE INFLUENCE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE ROMANIAN POPULATION MIGRATION

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Abstract: *The pandemic and its consequences have affected the lives of people all over the world. But migrants were much more affected than any other population groups. The pandemic has, in the first phase, drastically reduced migration in all OECD countries, a phenomenon noted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, although migrants would have managed to ensure the functioning of some sectors strongly affected by the pandemic, such as the health, commercial and logistic, even during the restrictions period. In the midst of the pandemic, governments took exceptional measures, which limited the mobility of people and in this case, the mobility of migrants. The OECD believes that migrants have been particularly affected by the coronavirus pandemic, and as far as migration is concerned, it has been considerably reduced, an unfavorable phenomenon for both parties: both for the countries providing migration and for those receiving migration. Many of the migrants work in gastronomy, in hotels, in tourism - so exactly in the industries that were most affected by the pandemic. In the so-called HORECA sector in the EU, about a quarter of the employees come from third countries, twice more than in the rest of the economic sectors. The work contracts in the field are often very short-term. As such, the migrants were the first to be sent into unemployment. This paper aims to present an analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international migration from Romania starting from the analysis of the phenomenon from the pre-pandemic period, then extending the analysis of this phenomenon for the period 2020-2021.*

Keywords: *population migration, emigration, immigration, COVID-19*

JEL Classification: *J21, J61, J64*

1. Introduction

In Romania, international migration is a phenomenon that has produced both favorable and unfavorable effects at all levels of society: individuals, households, local communities, but also at the national level. In the period that followed after 1989, the most important and visible effect of international migration was the decrease of the resident population and the aging of the population, by drawing in migration especially the young population, the people who are generally the most active from the point of view economic.

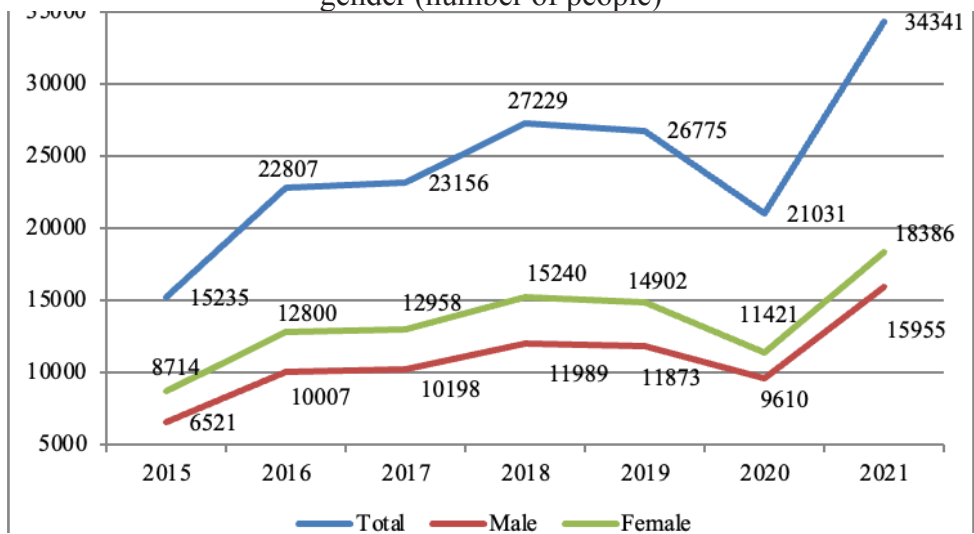
The impact of international migration, especially emigration, is felt especially on the labor market: decreasing the share of the active population, increasing the pressure on the one left to support the elderly, dependent population, but it also has extensive implications on the systems of social services, health and education ; also, migration produced changes in the evolution of demographic phenomena, especially on fertility, changes in the age and gender structure of the population and changes in family composition. Another unfavorable effect of international migration was the total or partial depopulation of some localities.

2. The evolution of the international migration in Romanian in the pre and pandemic period

Analyzing the evolution of the number of permanent emigrants from Romania (Figure 1), we find that at the level of 2020, it recorded much reduced values compared to previous years. This phenomenon was recorded both overall and by gender. Compared to 2019, this decrease was -21.5% overall, -19.1% male and -23.4% female.

The year 2021 registers a “strong” return of the phenomenon, it registering a worryingly high value of permanent migration: 34341 people chose to leave their country permanently, being the third highest value of permanent emigration recorded after 1990 (the higher values of permanent emigration were registered in 1990 – 96929 people and 1992 – 44160 people, according to the data published by the National Institute of Statistics, in the TEMPO Online Database <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>).

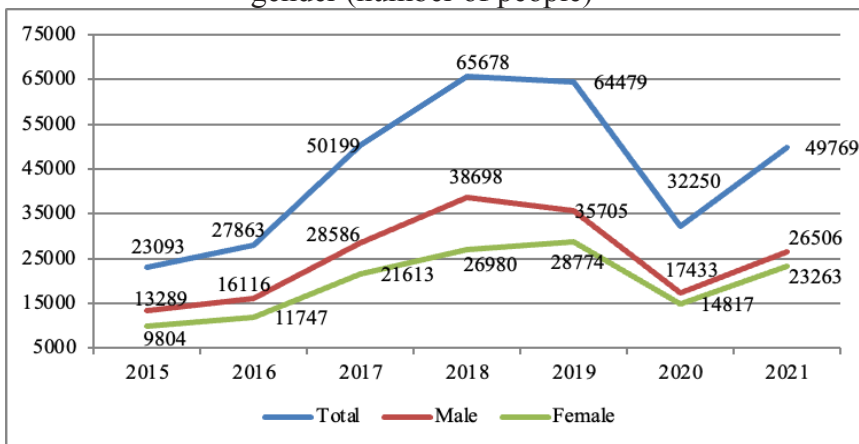
Figure 1 Evolution of the number of permanent emigrants in total and by gender (number of people)



Source: National Institute of Statistics, Tempo online database

Regarding the evolution of the number of immigrants (Figure 2), we note that by 2020, Romania had become a country where permanent immigrants had a remarkable increase, year after year. In 2017 we had an 80% increase compared to the previous year, after which 2020 brought a -50% decrease in the total number of immigrants, -51.2% for males and -48.5% for females. The year 2021 records an increase in definitive immigration, but at much lower values than those recorded in the pre-pandemic period.

Figure 2 Evolution of the number of permanent immigrants in total and by gender (number of people)



Source: National Institute of Statistics, Tempo online database

With regard to the labor market integration of foreigners with legal residence, as an important component of the integration process, with a significant economic impact, in 2017, an atypical situation was recorded, in the sense that the number of requests for issuance of employment permits for permanent and seconded workers exceeded the number of permits approved by the quota for the year 2017. Social integration represents the process of active participation of foreigners in the economic, social and cultural life of Romanian society. The policy regarding the social integration of foreigners has as its objective the possibility for foreigners who have their residence or domicile on the territory of Romania to accumulate a minimum amount of knowledge and skills, mainly 3 through Romanian language courses, cultural orientation and counseling programs that will enable them to access the other services and social policies under conditions similar to Romanian citizens.

3. Conclusions

At the international level, labor migration is a phenomenon with great potential, primarily for the development of developing states, reducing poverty and increasing investment in human capital. It also represents serious challenges for developed countries that compete to attract immigrants to cover their economic needs.

Speaking of negative aspects, we have in mind that the great mass of emigrants also includes a large number of specialists in the fields of IT, health, medicine, education and even in the field of innovation as well as others. Therefore, the labor force remaining in the country is slightly destabilized, in the sense that in priority areas and for our economy there is a lack of forces, cadres that can be used to carry out national projects.

In order to increase the positive effects and minimize the negative effects in the field of labor migration, the following aspects can be identified: stimulation of return migration and circular labor migration; creating favorable conditions for the businesses of returned migrants and the development of SMEs in the regions; adapting national educational policies to the needs of the labor market; more active and effective involvement of the diaspora in development policies.

One of the most visible effects, with a great impact on migration flows, is the evolution of the labor market. Both the massive migration for work and the aging process of the population are currently affecting the labor supply. The overwhelming share of those who migrate is in the age group of the active

population, followed by the population under 18 years old. In other words, we are witnessing the phenomenon of emigration of the entire family. After 2001, Romania became an increasingly attractive country for immigration, especially immigration for the purpose of work, with a marked increase in employment contracts of this category.

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