



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The UN Migration Agency

IOM rapid field assessment  
of the impact of COVID-19  
on the wellbeing of the Moldovan diaspora:  
an evidence base regarding migrants'  
coping strategies and contributions





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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This report from a rapid field assessment among the Moldovan diaspora gives the first indications on how COVID-19 is changing migration in the Republic of Moldova and how it affects the situation of the individual diaspora members, in terms of their livelihoods, possibilities to send money back home and their intentions to return to Moldova. Understanding the situation of the Moldovan diaspora has always been essential to have the full picture of the social and economic life in the country. This diaspora effectively represents a third of the country's population, typically only a low-cost flight away, an overnight ride in a mini-van, with families and friends staying in touch over countless Facebook groups and most of all returning in legions for visits each August.

The freedom of movement between Moldova, the Russian Federation and the European Union, the proximity of countries of reception, income disparities and job opportunities has driven Moldova's outward migration for decades. In recent years it has been unrelenting with around with around 1,000 families leaving every month. This reality has created a diaspora that now remits home the equivalent of 16% of the country's GDP. Remittances are literally a lifeline for more than 100,000 Moldovan families who without them would fall deep into poverty. At the same time the diaspora contains numerous individuals who have become successful in their adopted countries creating businesses and getting the chance to establish themselves as professionals that might not have been possible for them at home.

This survey shows with clarity that COVID-19 has turned the dynamics of Moldova's migration on its head. Almost immediately wide-spread border closures and other COVID-19 related restrictions changed the fundamentals for Moldovan migrants. Some 55,000 of the approximately 350,000 short term migrants manage to return before the declaration of national emergency in Moldova on 15 March. The rest were left in dire straits as many of the jobs migrants held in the gig economy and in domestic care simply vanished. According to the survey, 83 percent reported being affected by COVID-19 in terms of either losing their job, seeing decreased income or becoming without a dwelling.

For the first time in decades, there is likely be significant and sustained returns of Moldovans to their home country. 30 percent of the surveyed stated currently having plans to return, which would represent around 255,000 returnees. A significant amount of these stated they were planning to return for good. Another important finding is that far from being destitute or without skills, tens of thousands of the returnees will bring back skills for which they want certified and valorized. Many will also return with investments wanting to start new businesses.

But on the negative side, of those surveyed almost half reported having virtually stopped sending money home. This will have devastating consequences for the numerous households in Moldova that are directly reliant on remittances.

From the vast amount of data collected from thousands of surveyed Moldovan migrants the following preliminary policy recommendations are put forward:

- Returnees under COVID-19 are a boon for Moldova; numerous return with skills and/or are ready to invest. National employment schemes, registration procedures and other services need to be more accessible.
- Investment schemes directed at diaspora, such as PARE 1+1 of ODIMM, will not be large enough to satisfy the future demand. Investment programs/SME support (e.g. those by EBRD or EU) should be made accessible to returnees.
- Relatively few of the surveyed stated needing social protection, however current programs like Ajutor Social will need to scale up to meet demand of returnees.
- Among those surveyed, many stated that they would migrate again once the situation becomes normalized. Therefore, safe and orderly re-migration arrangements should be part of a mixed approach in the medium term.

This research is the part of a series of surveys on Moldova's migration patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic. The next survey will be dedicated to the situation of returnees in Moldova and remittance dependent families.



Lars Johan Lönnback  
Chief of Mission, IOM Moldova  
14 June 2020

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IOM Moldova carried out a rapid empirical assessment of the impact of Covid-19 on Moldovan citizens residing abroad over the period 17 April – 17 May 2020 in order to better understand how and to what extent Covid-19 pandemic impacts welfare of labour migrants originating from the Republic of Moldova, and to identify key challenges, vulnerabilities, expectations and specific needs of Moldovan migrants in the context of pandemic. To collect empirical data the methodological tools in the form of on-line questionnaire were used. In addition, semi-structured interviews with migrants workers and representatives of diaspora from the ten destination countries such as Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, France, Ireland, United Kingdom, Poland, Russian Federation and Israel were carried out (which host circa 80% of all Moldovan migrants). The survey was conducted among 1,186 Moldovan migrants (38% men and 62% women) including more in-depth interviews with 59 respondents, among which 49 migrants and 10 leaders of diaspora organizations from 10 destination countries. The survey could identify the following trends related to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on welfare, revenue, remittances and future plans of Moldovan migrants:

- COVID-19 has in the short- and medium term undone the rationale of Moldovans to migrate, especially for those employed as domestic workers and those employed in the so-called gig-economy; 20% Moldovan migrants abroad work under a precarious status, with 47% having lost or suspended their jobs, while 57% of them not receiving any compensation/unemployment support.
- Up to 30% of migrants abroad indicated the intention to return, i.e. 255,000 persons, of whom 67% indicated the intention to return as soon as possible (170,000 persons). 31% of those planning to return (79,000 persons) indicated they intend to remain in Moldova for a longer period of time. As returning migrants in high numbers are bound to face challenges as they seek to reintegrate and establish new livelihoods, this will have a significant impact on unemployment, which can increase up to 8.5% (79,000 persons) by the end of 2020, compared to 5.1% in the end-2019 (46,900 persons), following the return of approx. 32,000 returning migrants seeking jobs in Moldova.
- High rates of dependency on remittances of vulnerable populations in Moldova, with a quarter of Moldovan households (237,000 households) receives remittances and for half of these households (118,000 households) remittances constitute more than 50% of the disposable income; 23.4% of households, i.e. 224,000 households (30.5% in rural areas) would be placed below the poverty line if they did not receive remittances; with 17% of all migrants indicating that they already stopped remitting, this would concern 37,500 Moldovan households which will fall under the poverty line (i.e. some 108,750 persons).
- On the other hand, 26% or approx. 21,000 returning migrants bring investments and can create jobs, indicating that they will need financial support and consultancy to open new business in Moldova. 39% or 32,000 migrants bring skills and knowledge, indicating that they will require support to adapt and get employed, as follows: 24% or 7,700 will need career guidance/job recruitment services; 15% or 4,800 will need requalification and vocational training services. Only 9%, or approx. 7,000 are vulnerable and would require social /financial/ humanitarian / logistic support upon return (the actual figure is likely higher, as the most vulnerable groups were not covered by the survey); currently the social services ajutorul social cover approx. 15,000 persons. Therefore, Moldovan migrants who are forced to repatriate because of COVID-19 should be valorized as major contributors for the development of their home country. Many will come back to stay and invest their savings and put their acquired skills to use, in case the appropriate policies and conditions will be put in place.
- 28% (of circa 255,000 returnees) indicate the intention to re-migrate once restrictions lift, and the job markets in the countries in the destination countries can effectively absorb them. Therefore, approx. 71,000 persons will need safe and organized/regulated migration in the post-COVID-19 circumstances.

### 3. CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

Various assessments<sup>1</sup> indicate that Covid-19 pandemic will have a significant socio-economic impact in the Republic of Moldova in the coming years, and the migration profile of the Republic of Moldova will be a decisive factor in this regard. In this context, four key problems stand out: (i) high level of unemployment among one-third of Moldovan nationals who reside and work abroad due to Covid-19. This leads to the increase of return rate of Moldova labour migrants. As a consequence, this creates an additional pressure on internal labour market; (ii) migration trends from Moldova have created a group of vulnerable citizens separated from their family members who left to work abroad, and who are currently deprived of remittances as a principal source of disposable income; (iii) important challenges in retention of essential staff for internal labour market of Moldova such as professionals in the area of health and education. This will have a major impact on post-COVID-19 early recovery; (iv) economic growth of the Republic of Moldova partially stems from consumption, which, in its turn, is supported by financial remittances that are also contributing to fiscal revenues. It's possible that these financial flows (approximately 16% of GDP) could drop due to socio-economic impact of Covid-19.

In recent years approximately 350,000 Moldovan nationals have been involved in short-term labour migration, among whom 20% with a precarious legal status. The sector of recruiting abroad of Moldovan labour migrants through private agencies, whose activity is unregulated, has been often leading to precarious contractual arrangements for these migrants. Also, many Moldovan migrants are employed in services delivery sectors, which are the most affected by Covid-19 and, therefore, many of these labour migrants who took loans to be able to go abroad to work, are losing their jobs. It is estimated that they will have to return in Moldova in 2020. The Government implemented early measures to support those returned, which will allow them to get unemployment assistance in times of pandemic. However, additional efforts will be necessary over the medium term to create new jobs and to retain human capital in the country returned in the period of post-Covid-19. For those returned an alternative solution could also be opportunity to “re-emigrate” to respond to demands of the labour markets from destination countries as the economies of these countries will start re-launching.

Notwithstanding the fact the remittances have dropped from one third of GDP to approximately 16.05% of GDP in 2018, they are still an important source of income for many families (WB, 2019). 24.7% of Moldovan households were receiving remittances from the members of their families who were working abroad in pre-COVID period. Remittances amounted to more than half from the disposable income of households in the country that depend on remittances. In 2018 they were accounting for 52.4% of disposable income. In rural areas the share of remittances in disposable income is particularly high, making up 59.7% in 2018, difference compared to urban environment being 7.9%. Proportion of households that would be placed below the poverty threshold if they wouldn't get remittances, would be 23.4%, and 30.5% in the rural areas (NSB, 2019). According to the current estimations, there is a strong likelihood that COVID-19 pandemic will affect households dependent on remittances, amplifying even more a high level of poverty. This happened, for instance, in the time of financial crises of 2015 when remittances dropped by 30%.

<sup>1</sup> Evaluation of socio-economic impact (UNDP); Evaluation of COVID-19 impact on education (UNICEF); Effects of COVID-19 crises on women (UN Women); Rapid assessment of the needs of organizations that support persons with HIV (UNAIDS); Rapid mapping of economic vulnerabilities of Moldova in the context of challenges posed by Covid-19 pandemic (macro-economic evaluation) (RCO); Consultations with representatives of diaspora from Spain, France, Germany, Poland on impact of COVID-19 on the situation of Moldovan migrants (IOM)

## 4. PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Empirical evidences in this IOM's rapid assessment aim at complementing evaluations and prognosis of other national and international actors concerned about identification of some efficient solutions for early economic relaunch of the Republic of Moldova, taking into account, however, migration aspect and specific needs of migrants in the process of post-COVID recovery.

Empirical data collection was carried out in the period **17 April – 17 May 2020** in ten destination countries for Moldovan migrants residing abroad for work purposes as follows Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, France, Ireland, United Kingdom, Poland, Russian Federation and Israel.

Results obtained are meant to support the relevant authorities of the Republic of Moldova to develop and implement some urgent interventions to combat immediate consequences of Covid-19 pandemic as well as to plan some socio-economic strategies of early recovery based on empirical evidence and considering specific needs of Moldovan labour migrants.

Quantitative component was realized through developing a questionnaire addressed to Moldovan migrants from the ten countries covered. The questionnaire that was circulated (i) through emailing to a comprehensive data base of diaspora and Moldovan migrants administrated by the Diaspora Relations Bureau, (ii) through the channels of Embassies and Consulates of the Republic of Moldova in target destination countries, (iii) through Facebook and Odnoklassniki social networks capitalizing in particular on more than 120 on-line groups and initiatives administrated by diaspora and Moldovan migrants from those ten covered countries. This resulted in collection of **1.186 questionnaires completed**<sup>2</sup>.

To complement quantitative evidences with qualitative data concerning experiences and perceptions of Moldovan migrants on Covid-19 impact on their welfare, on the community, where they reside, and on the community of origin as well as to reflect about future plans, including perspectives of returning to the country, **59 semi-structured interviews** were carried out, among which 49 semi-structured interviews with Moldovan labour migrants from those ten host countries, and with 10 representatives and leaders of diaspora of the Republic of Moldova. They acted as resource persons with an advanced level of understanding of specific socio-economic, political, cultural and migration context from the countries of residence of Moldovan migrants. To carry out interviews, on-line communication tools such as WhatsApp, Viber, Skype and Facebook Messenger were used. Potential participants in discussions were recruited through posting an announcements on social networks with the invitation to attend these discussions, observing the most active users of informal on-line groups of Moldovan migrants on social networks and their direct contacting, inclusion of a question in the questionnaire that directly approach the availability of respondents to be contacted by the IOM data controllers and the availability of those wishing to leave relevant contact details, but also following discussion with migrants and leaders of Moldovan diaspora who suggested, in their turn, relevant contacts for participating in this research, applying the "snowball" sampling.

### • Methodological limitations

It should be noted that field research was carried out in the time of accelerated spread of COVID-19 pandemic on the European continent, Russian Federation and Israel. In this context, the majority of countries has imposed tough limitations on internal and international mobility, and the majority of labour migrants suspended the activity on temporary basis. Sources of income have diminished considerably or have completely disappeared. Following in-depth discussions with labour migrants, it was found that many of respondents were perplexed concerning the context in which they found themselves and, consequently, most of them had considerable difficulties to discuss about own strategies and actions to overcome challenges induced by this medical crises.

In addition, on-line promotion and collection of quantitative and qualitative data have some limitations, which should be taken into account by us when interpreting findings. These methodological limitations are related to the limited access to the electronic communication tools of some groups of migrants such as the most vulnerable

<sup>2</sup> In accordance with Facebook statistics, a total number of 26,683 users, among which 1,114 accessed it, and others 602 distributed it, has viewed on-line questionnaire, since its placement.



ones, in particular with irregular status, who, generally, have a limited access to on-line communication tools or avoid to participate in surveys because of precaution, lack of knowledge or fear. Furthermore, reduced digital dexterity of some groups of respondents who are not used to on-line self-administrated questioning lead to a low quality of some questionnaires.

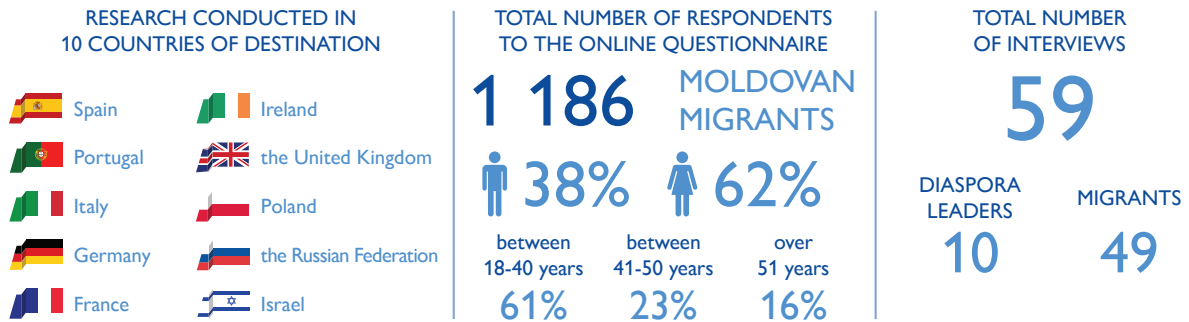
- **Relevancy of methodology**

Moreover, in the context of COVID-19 crises that has imposed limitations for international mobility, social distancing, but also time limitations, on the one hand, but also active presence of a significant number of informal groups of Moldovan migrants on social networks, on the other hand, complemented with the wish of significant number of fellow citizens to participate, we believe all these contributed to completing a sufficient number of questionnaires to reveal some aspects linked to impact of COVID-19, and facilitated successful piloting of on-line tools of data collection. It also facilitated to collect relevant quantitative and qualitative data that could contribute to a better understanding of the following analytical elements:

- Socio-economic profile of Moldovan migrants;
- Moldovan migrants' perceptions related to general impact of COVID-19 on their welfare and safety in the host country;
- Challenges for Moldovan migrants in times of COVID-19 crises in destination countries;
- Personal strategies of Moldovan migrants (short- and medium-term) to respond to constraints/ challenges related to COVID-19;
- Plans of Moldovan migrants to return to Moldova: the reasons to return and the needed support for successful return and reintegration in Moldova, and constraints/challenges that could emerge in this process;
- COVID-19 response measures of host and destination countries and Moldovan migrants' perceptions concerning their relevancy and impact on migrants and their specific situation;
- Expectations of Moldovan migrants related to immediate response of Moldovan public authorities on COVID-19 challenges and strategy of medium/long term socio-economy recovery;
- Post-COVID-19 plans of Moldovan migrants, including options for re-emigration versus settlement in Moldova.

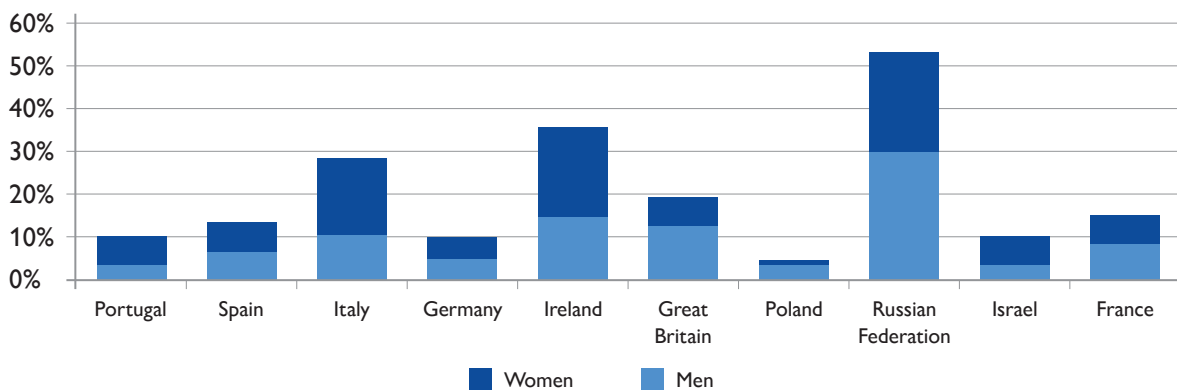
The collected data are disaggregated depending on sex, age, country of residence, occupational sector, legal status, employment status etc.

## 5. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS



A total number of **1.186 respondents** from **10 destination countries** participated in the study. They indicated that they were in the Russian Federation (25%), Ireland (19%), Italy (15%), United Kingdom (9%), Spain (7%), France (7%), Israel (6%), Portugal (5%), Germany (5%) and Poland (2 %) at the moment of the study. Taking into account exemplified methodological limitations in methodological paragraph, distribution by countries doesn't necessarily reflect a classification of the main destination countries for Moldovan migrants, Ireland being an eloquent example in this sense as being over-represented. Following in-depth interviews with some diaspora leaders from Ireland, this could be explained by the fact that Moldovan migrants residing in that country are more engaged from civic perspective and use frequently social networks and electronic means of communications to make their position heard concerning various current topics, which target them directly, so that this group was more active in completing questionnaire and its distribution within informal on-line groups. On the other hand, Poland is placed on the opposite side, being under-represented, from our point of view, because Moldovan migration to Poland is a recent phenomenon, communities of Moldovan migrants are still in the process of making and rather passive, including in on-line environments. Moreover, a part of Moldovan labour migrants from Poland were affected by the loss of jobs, places of residence and were rather concerned by identification of possibilities of a an urgent return home in the period of survey.

**Figure 1: What countries are you in at the moment?**

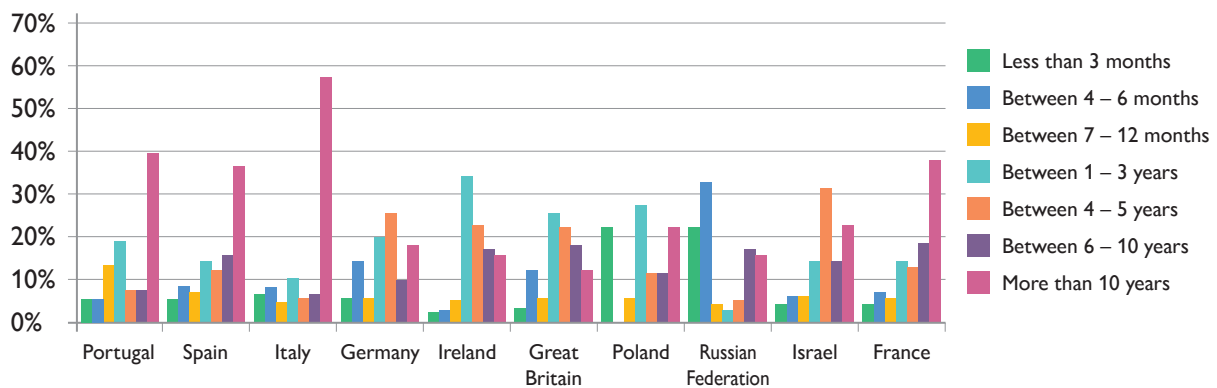


Almost twice as **many women** (62%) as men (38%) participated in the study. The share of men is 71% and respectively 54% of the total number of interviewed only in Poland and in the United Kingdom. The most of respondents **are aged between 31 – 40 years** (37%), followed by those aged between 18 – 30 years (25%), 41 – 50 years (23%) and over 51 years (15 %). Poland, Germany and France are top three countries that attract for work related purposes the youngest Moldovan workers, so that 46%, 35% and, respectively, 29% among respondents from these countries are aged between 18-30 years. The most respondents who indicated that they were over 51 years could be found in Italy (26% of respondents), Russian Federation (23%) and Portugal (20%). These three countries were the first destinations of Moldovan migrants and, consequently, they concentrate the older population of fellow citizens who emigrated abroad.

The most of those who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they had been abroad **between 4 and 10 years (29%)**, followed by those who are abroad more than 10 years (27%) and, respectively, less than 1 year (27%), and those who are abroad between 1-3 years (17%). Respondents with the longest migration experience

are those from Italy, 58% of which indicated that they had been living in that country more than 10 years, followed by respondents from Portugal (40%), France (38%) and Spain (36%). Furthermore, respondents with the shortest staying abroad are those from the Russian Federation, 52% of which are in that country between 3-6 months, followed by respondents from Poland with 22% of respondents who are less than 3 months in that country.

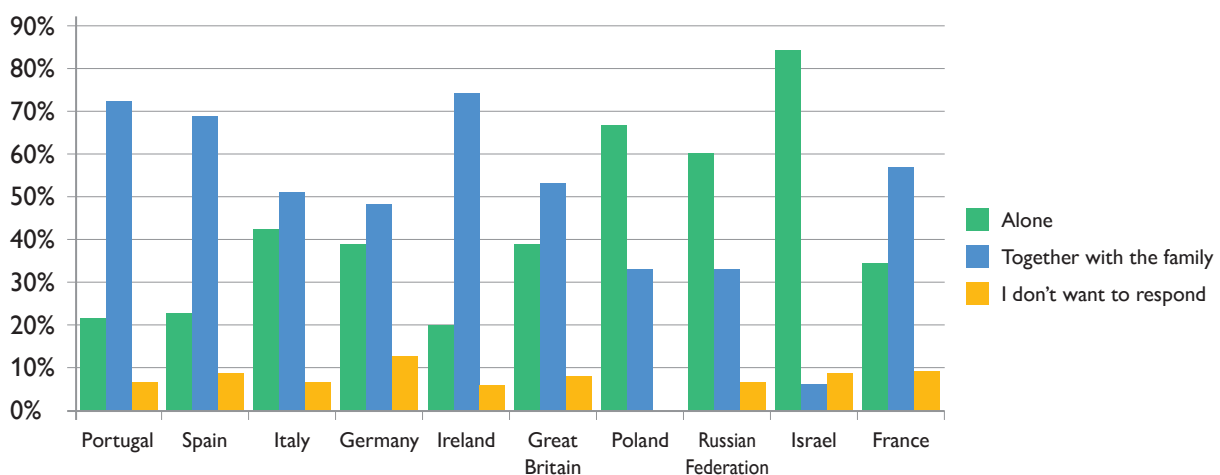
**Figure 2: How long have you been abroad?**



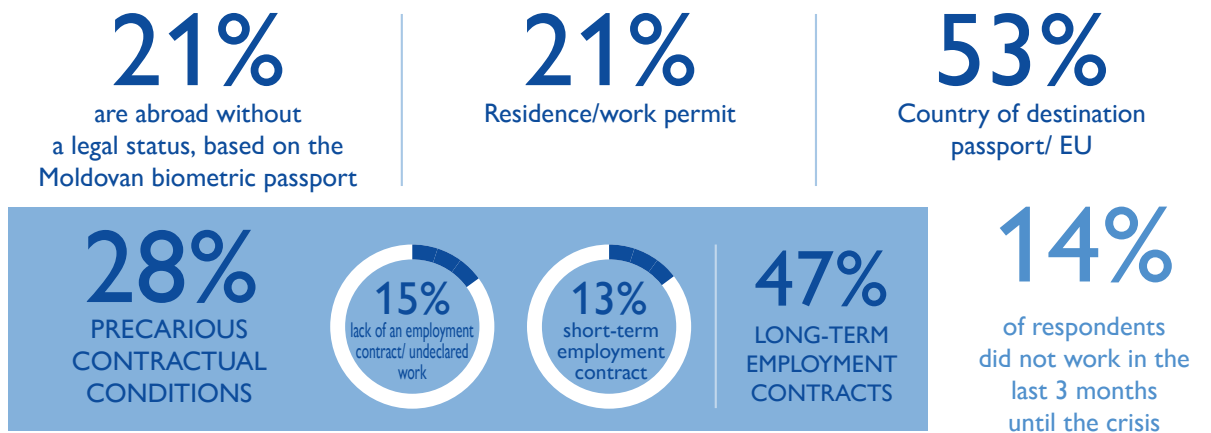
**Most respondents pointed that there were married (64%) and had children (74%).** More than half of all respondents (51%) indicated that there were abroad together with family, among whom more than half (53%) indicated that there were abroad with husband/wife, 41% - with children, 9% - with parents, 18% - with other relatives (brothers/sisters, brothers-in-law etc.), and 24% didn't want to specify with whom from the members of the family they were abroad at the moment. Situation when respondents who are abroad with the family is common in particular for those seven EU countries and UK that participated in the study, so that the highest rate of the reunified families could be identified in Ireland with 74%, Portugal with 72%, and Spain with 69% of respondents who indicated that they were living with their family abroad, with the exception of Poland, where 67% indicated that they were residing abroad alone. This exception could be explained by the fact that Poland is one of the most recent destination countries for Moldovan labour migrants, and the process of family reunification is still under way. Consequently, Moldovan labour migrants from the EU and UK are integrated in destination country, they have succeeded in bringing their families to the country where they reside. And, for the other part, in accordance with discussions within semi-structured interviews, this process was under way before the pandemic.

Moreover, 85% and respectively 60% of respondents in Israel and the Russian Federation indicated that they were abroad alone, and 22% of respondents from Israel indicated they were divorced. The phenomenon of divorces of respondents from Israel could be explained by entry restrictions imposed by the state of Israel for the members of families, who work in this country as well as by the bureaucratic difficulties for those who work in Israel to return home for vacation. These restrictions in movement lead to both fictive dissolution of marriages for those members of families, who want to come for work and/or to visit husband/wife who work in Israel, and to divorces and de facto separation of families, due to the impossibility to come back home more frequently and to be together with the beloved ones.

**Figure 3: Do you live alone or together with your family?**



## 6. PREREQUISITES FOR MIGRATION AND OCCUPATIONAL STATUS



### 5 TOP SECTORS OF ACTIVITY UNTIL THE CRISIS

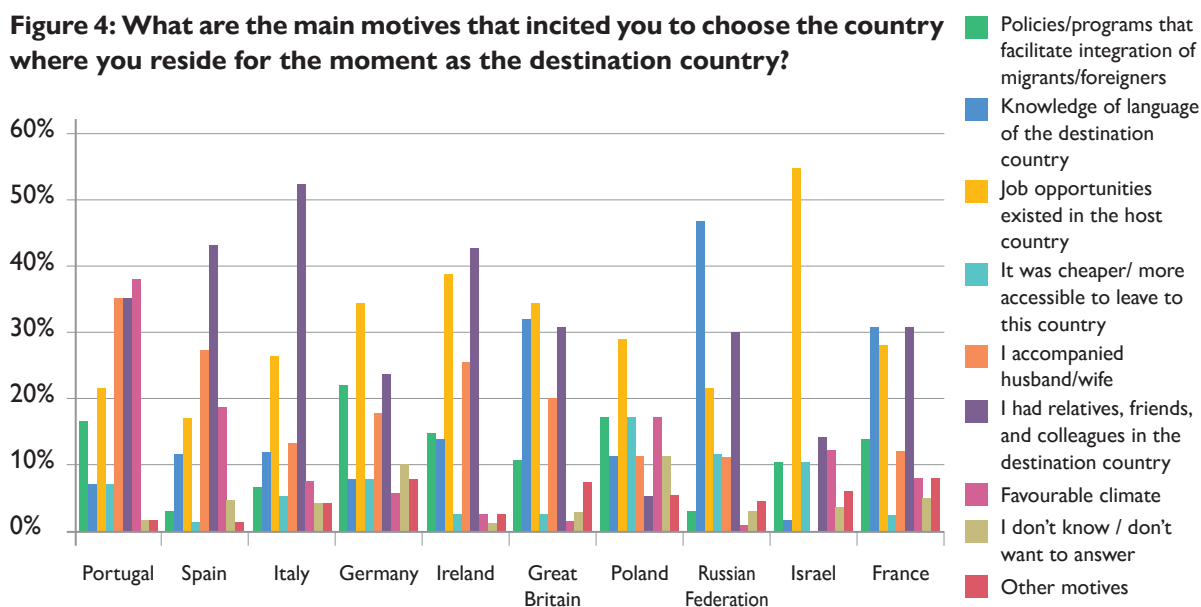


The basic reasons for emigration remain to be of economic nature, but also social ones, covering the access and the quality of essential services, quality of governance, envisioning a mix of push and pull factors as well as **dissatisfaction by the offered wage in Moldova for 34%** of respondents, dissatisfaction how things work in Moldova – 31%, job opportunities/ higher revenues abroad - 22%, difficulty to find a job in Moldova – 18%, accumulation of debt/loans – 14%, dissatisfaction by the quality of public services in Moldova (medicine, education) – 14%, a consistent number of respondents indicated the reasons of family reintegration (10%) as well as related to study abroad (8%) for a large majority of respondents.

Although, as we can see above, the factors that contributed to the decision to emigrate are almost uniformly distributed, being perceived almost equally important by respondents in terms of taken the decision to emigrate by respondents, however when we desegregate them by country, we observe that 50% of respondents in Ireland indicated dissatisfaction by how the things work in Moldova as a main factor, whereas the difficulty to find a job in Moldova ranked the first place in Russia with 32%, and dissatisfaction with the offered wage in Moldova prevails with 54% in Israel.

For **36% existence of a network of relatives and friends mattered in the choosing the destination country**, coupled with the existence of job opportunities for 30% of interviewed, other respondents indicated keeping/ reunification of family through accompanying husband/ wife in the respective country (18%), knowledge of language of the host country (23%), existence of some policies/ programs that facilitate integration of migrants (11%) as well as favourable climate for a small number of respondents (8%) as a reason for choosing the destination country. For the majority of respondents from Italy (53%) existence of social connections mattered primarily for choosing this destination country. However, this aspect mattered the least for those from Israel (15%) so that for respondents from this country as well as for their fellow citizens from Ireland, United Kingdom and Germany the existence of labour opportunities (for 57%, 39%, 35% and 37% from respondents) mattered most of all in this sense.

**Figure 4: What are the main motives that incited you to choose the country where you reside for the moment as the destination country?**



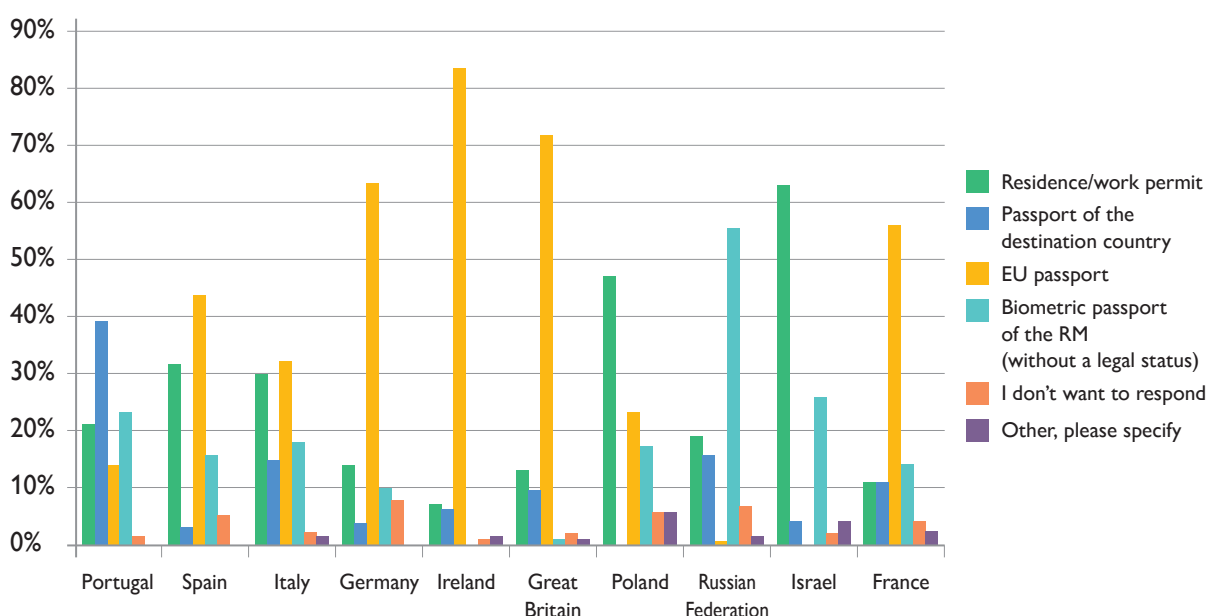
## DIASPORA VOICES: REASONS FOR MIGRATION AND CHOOSING THE DESTINATION COUNTRY

- „Many Moldovan migrants have chosen to emigrate due to the deception in Moldova, **because of high corruption in Moldova**. Moreover, destination country **offered easy accessible jobs** in the area of homecare, and the medical, social and educational systems are much more attractive”. (F, diaspora leader, Italy, 44 years)
- „I have chosen Poland because **it is closer to Moldova, and I was able to get a work visa easily** on the basis of Moldovan passport, but the most importantly is the fact that **it's paid better here** for the work I was doing in Moldova. I feel I don't work for fee. I'm welder by profession, and I could have a good life with the money I'm getting here, to save something. I had to work overtime at home, but I had a salary based on which I wasn't able to survive. After COVID passes, I plan to bring my child here, to growth up and to study in a normal country.” (M, migrant, Poland, 34 years)
- „I decided to leave not because of lack of jobs or lack of money, but because nothing was changing to good in Moldova. **I was sick and tired: so many governments changed, so many hopes, but without any result**. I chose Ireland as a destination country because this is an Anglophone country. **I know the language and know that there are many affinities with Moldova** such as surface, population.” (F, migrant, Ireland, 38 years)
- „I left home regardless the fact I was working as a deputy director in an educational institution. However, **I was not able to support my children with the money I was getting** to have better studies. I arrived to Israel because I have knowledge here, which helped me to find a job. I like the country, people, the sea...” (F, migrant, Israel, 42 years)
- „Those two boys of mine left in 2015, and **in August 2016 I went to them**. Moreover, the wife arrived later on. Now we live all together in the same house with the wife, two children and their wives” (M, migrant, United Kingdom, 53 years)
- „I arrived to Spain because of two motives: **first of all, I had someone in Spain**, who helped me a lot, and after having visited many countries, I liked Spain, **I liked the climate, their diet and their way of lifestyle**.” (M, migrant, Spain, 51 years)
- „**I didn't choose, my father was here**, I was visiting Portugal during school holidays, and I've been settled in Lisbon since 2010” (M, migrant, Portugal, 34 years)

Most of respondents indicated that they were abroad on the basis of the EU passport (41%), for those who are currently in the EU and UK for the purpose of studies this figure is 57%, followed by 18% of those who are in the EU and UK on the basis of residence/work permit, passport of destination country – 11%, and **21% of Moldovan citizens** reside in destination countries on the basis of Moldovan biometric passport, **without a legal status**. Most of respondents who are the bearers of an EU passport, reside in Ireland, with 84% of respondents from this country, followed by their fellow citizens in the United Kingdom with 72%, Germany with 64% and France with 56%. Moreover, the passport of destination country (Portuguese citizenship) is the one that legitimizes their staying in that country for 39% of respondents from Portugal.

Things are a bit different for those who are in the Russian Federation and Israel, taking into account specific legal conditions of access to these labour force markets so that **56% of respondents from Russia were in the country on the basis of biometric Moldovan passport**, followed by residence/labour permit for 19%, and the passport of destination country for 16% of respondents. The majority of respondents in Israel indicated that they were in the host country based on residence/labour permit with 63%.

**Figure 5: Based on which document you are abroad?**



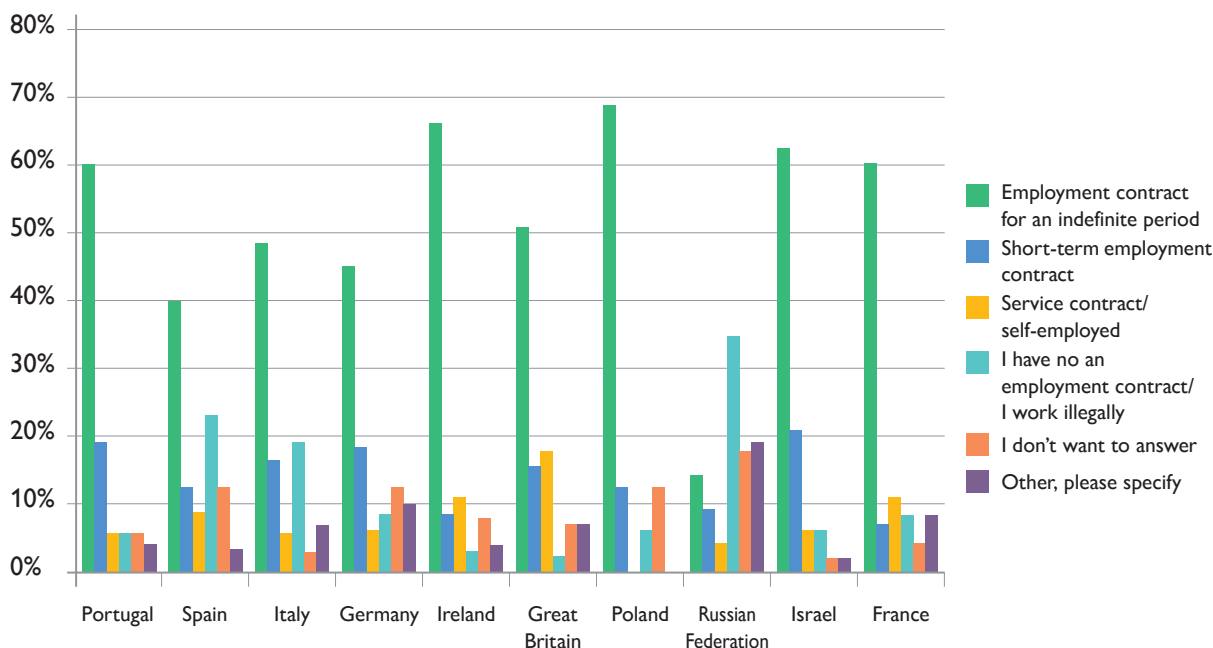
The above data are complemented by empirical evidences on the type of work contract so that the majority of respondents from the EU countries and UK (51%) indicated that they were working on the basis of a work contract for an indefinite period, followed by those who have a short-term work contract (14%), or a service/self-employed contract (8%), and **9% of labour migrants from the EU and UK indicated that they were working illegally, without any contract**. On the European continent, most who work illegally are respondents from Spain (23% of respondents from this country) and Italy (19%).

The situation is more alarming for **35% of respondents from the Russian Federation, who work illegally, without any contract**. Only 28% of respondents from Russia indicated that they were working on the basis of a form of contract so that 14% have a work contract for an indefinite period, 9% for a short term period, 5% indicated that they were working on the basis of a service contract/ they are self-employed. Since there are stricter rules of access and staying in Israel, 90% of respondents from that country indicated the existence of one or another contractual form with the employer and only **6% of respondents from Israel indicated that they worked illegally**. Concerning the duration of work contracts in Israel, they are regulated by the Israeli legislative framework and labour migration agreements signed by the state of Israel. Therefore, many deviations in the duration of staying in Israel with some exceptions couldn't exist, in particular when homecare workers could request issuance of a humanitarian visa, which, once granted, extends the right to work of a labour migrant over several years.

The most popular occupational sector are homecare (27%), construction (25%), HORECA (12%), light industry (10%) **for those who work without a formal work contract**. Moreover, in accordance with the study, women involved in informal labour, make up 13% of all respondents, and men 17% of total male respondents.

Most of respondents, who indicated that they didn't sign work contracts, are in the Russian Federation (35% of respondents from this country), followed by Spain (23%) and Italy (19%). The fewest percentage of those who work without a contract are in the United Kingdom, Ireland (having each 2% of respondents from these countries) and Israel (6%).

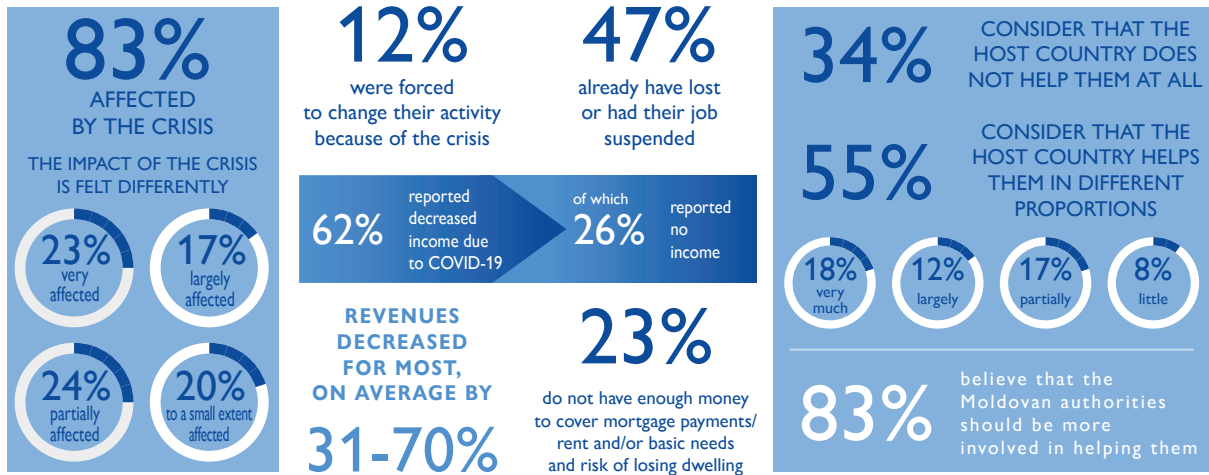
**Figure 6: Based on which document do you work abroad?**



Concerning the employment sector, the most popular are the construction sector (20%), followed by homecare (16%), hotel services and restaurants (11%), commerce (9%) and light industry (6%). 21% of respondents indicated that they worked in other sectors, among which the majority was high skilled ones such as public administration, education, research, culture, management, information technologies, finance, justices. Approximately 5% of respondents specified that they worked in such sectors as beauty, cleaning and agriculture. The most popular sector for men are construction (48%), transport and logistics (13%), hotel services, light industry and commerce (7% each) whereas women work predominantly in the homecare sector (23%), hotel services and restaurants (14%) and commerce (11%). Further, 18% of women and 7% of men indicated that they have not worked for the last 3 months before COVID-19. Most of them were in the Russian Federation (23% of respondents from that country), followed by Ireland (15%) and Italy (11%) at the moment of study, and the least of them were in Israel (10% of respondents from that country).

In this context, we note that most of respondents indicated monthly income between EUR 501-1500 (34%), followed by those who are earning more than EUR 2000 on monthly basis (14%), and respectively up to EUR 500 on monthly basis (13%), 12% of respondents indicated that they didn't have income before the pandemic, 15% of women and 8% of men indicating the same thing. The lowest income, up to EUR 500, indicated respondents from Portugal (26%), followed by respondents from Russia (25%). The highest income was obtained by respondents from Germany, where 38% of respondents from this country indicated incomes between EUR 1001-2000. Other 20% of respondents indicated monthly income more than EUR 2000. The sectors, which brought the highest income were transport and logistics with 29% of respondents from this sector, indicating that receive a salary more than EUR 2000, followed by construction and health sectors with 23% and, respectively, 21% of respondents who indicated a salary more than EUR 2000. In addition, it worth mentioning that while 24% of male migrants obtain a salary more than 200 EUR, only 9% of women indicated similar incomes.

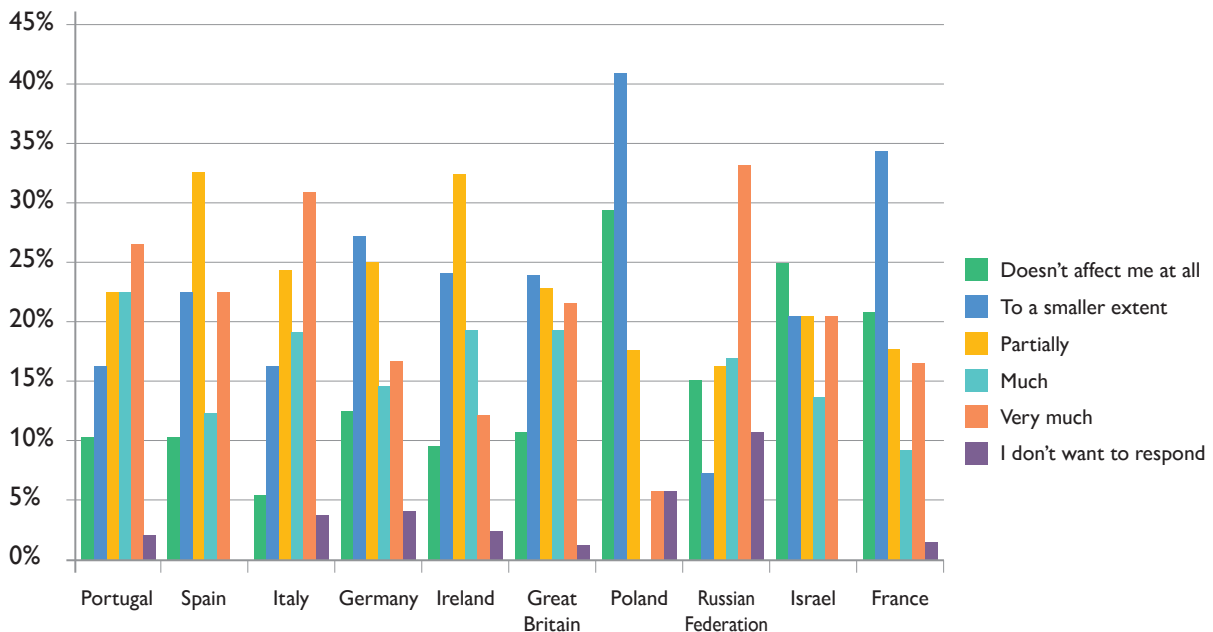
## 7. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WELFARE AND SAFETY OF LABOUR MIGRANTS



### • General perception of impact of COVID-19

**83% of respondents indicated that the pandemic was affecting them directly** at the moment of carrying out the study. Asked to evaluate the impact of Covid-19 on welfare, we note that the perceptions are distributed almost uniformly on the proposed rating scale – from the „very much” for 23% of respondents to „much” (17%), „partially” (24%) and „to a smaller extent” (20%), only 13% of respondents indicating that there are not affected by the pandemic (only 9% indicating that they are not affected at all) whereas this percent is 76% for men (and the rate of those who don't consider being affected at all by the medical crises is 19%). The most affected by Covid-19 seem to be respondents from Italy with 91% of those interviewed. They indicated that they experienced negative impact on welfare and safety, followed by their fellow citizens from Spain (90% of respondents from that country) and the United Kingdom (88%). In the Russian Federation, we find the highest rate of respondents (33%), who estimated the impact of crises on their welfare and safety caused by COVID-19 as being high, followed by their fellow citizens from Italy with 31%.

**Figure 7: How much COVID-19 pandemic affects your own wellbeing and safety?**





• Challenges in the workplace

It should be mentioned that **47% of respondents indicated that they continued to work over the pandemic in the same sector**, facing, however, certain challenges related to the lack of safety and protection measures in the workplace (for 4% of respondents) or fear that despite of protection measures they could be infected with Covid-19 virus (for 17%). The most exposed to the feeling of fear to be infected in the workplace are respondents from Ireland (34%), followed by respondents from France (25%) and the United Kingdom. On the opposite side with the highest rates of trust that the infection with the new virus could be avoided during work were manifested by respondents from Israel (46%), Poland (38%) and Spain (29%). The latter declare themselves confident that the work they deliver takes account of the compliance with the protection measures and they will not get sick.

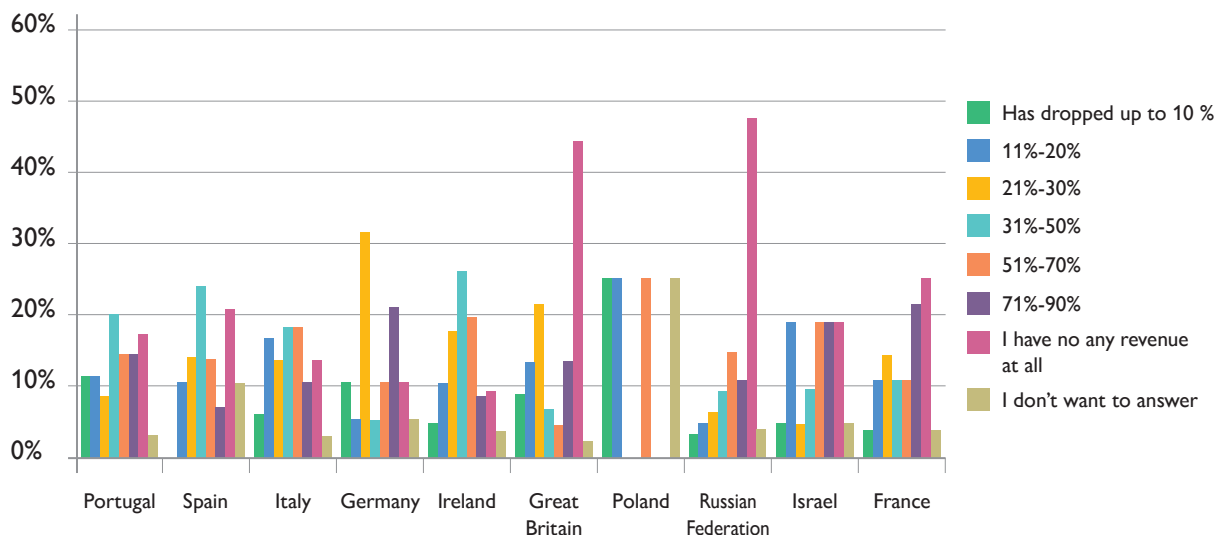
• Impact on revenue

However, to avoid the spread of virus, the majority among employers in many host countries has suspended economic activities and, as a consequence, for the main part of respondents revenue generated from the provision of work either has dropped or depleted. They are eligible for the “urgent” support in the time of crises offered directly to employees or employers in the time of crises to discourage mass redundancies and exaggerate growth of unemployment rate. Furthermore, a big number of labour migrants, in particular those with irregular status, was not included in the policies of protection of workers in times of pandemic by host countries and remained without any source of income. They found themselves in the situation when they were forced to return to the Republic of Moldova as soon as possible.

As both quantitative and qualitative data point to us, for the vast majority of respondents one of the immediate consequences of Covid-19 is suspension of professional activity or lose of job for 47% of respondents, among which 57% indicated that they didn't receive a compensation from the employer or the host country for the situation, in which they found themselves (58% of female respondents and 56% of men). Suspension of professional activity resulted inevitably in sharp decline of revenues so that **62% of respondents indicated they their monthly revenue had dropped**, for 31% of them decline in revenues oscillates between 31-70%, and **26% have no any revenue at all**. Quantitative data point to the fact that female and male migrants feel the financial impact of the pandemic in the same mode (62% of women vs 63% of men, indicating that revenue was affected in negative sense).

The biggest part of those who were deprived of source of income and haven't received compensations to be able to sustain themselves in times of crises are respondents without work contracts, who work “illegally”, many on the basis of Moldovan biometric passport. Thus, 43% of respondents from this category have no revenue at all, comparing to 10% of respondents, who indicated the same challenges, but who have work contracts for indefinite period or 33% of respondents with short-term contracts and 27% of respondents with patents/service contracts. Furthermore, the most affected among respondents who lost their revenue because of suspension of professional activity or lose of job, are informal workers, who due to their status were not eligible to get unemployment allowance from the host countries.

Figure 8: If the revenue has dropped, please specify by how many percent?



To a large extent, respondents who didn't have access to compensations for suspension of professional activity or loss of job have resorted to own savings (38%) to be able to live through the state of emergency while others have appealed to friends or relatives from the host country or Moldova (17%) to receive help. **16% of respondents who remained without sources of income indicated that they didn't have anyone to request help and they were at the limit of survival** at the same time. Other 3% of respondents indicated that loss of revenue pushed them towards informal sector, performing "illegal" work.

In accordance with obtained results, respondents from the Russian Federation experienced the most the financial impact of the pandemic at the stage of field research so that 77% of them pointed to revenue shortfalls, followed by respondents from Portugal (73%), Ireland (68%) and Italy (63%). To cope with the drop and/or loss of sources of income, 12% of the total number of respondents had to change the area of activity so that homecare (26%) and construction sector (13%) are the main areas, which absorbed new labour forces from among Moldovan migrants. The most affected by revenue shortfalls are workers who work without a work contract, 85% among them indicated that their revenue had dropped, and 43% had not any revenue at all.

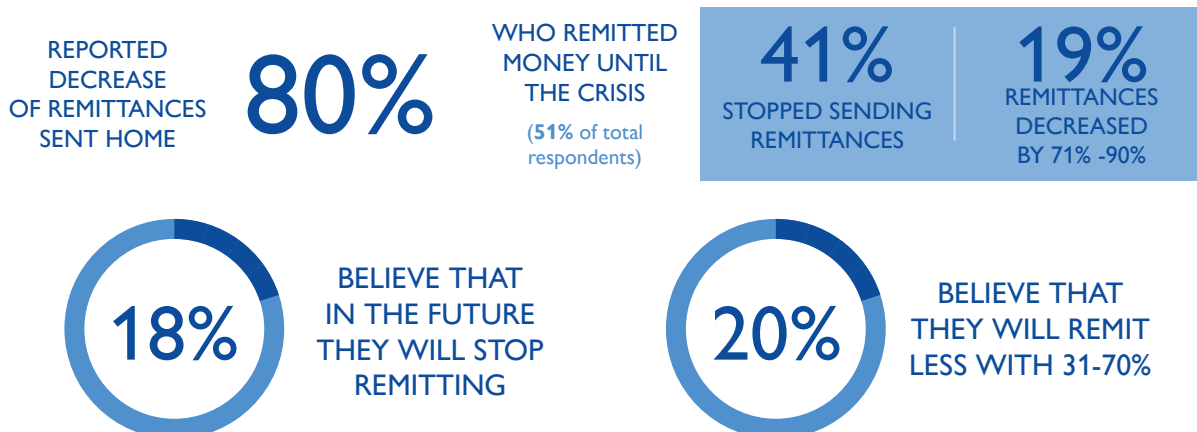
Sectors of activity where the revenue dropped most is construction, where 76% of respondents employed in this area indicated about the revenue shortfall, followed by homecare with 71% and hotels and restaurants with 70%. In accordance with accumulated statistical data, sectors that were affected less were light industry with 50% and commerce with 57%.

• **Challenges at the place of residence**

For the vast majority of respondents decline in revenue resulted like a chain reaction in the emerging of challenges linked to the difficulty or impossibility to pay for the rent of apartments, for the utilities and for the mortgage payments. Although authorities of host countries implemented measures that prohibit evacuation of tenants in the time of medical crises, facilities to restructure reimbursement of mortgages and possibility to postpone payment of services of renting accommodation, following interviews with migrants and representatives from diaspora, given that revenue has dropped or the persons were fired, these measures only help for a moment. Once the state of emergency/quarantine is over, these financial obligations have to be honoured anyway, even to a greater extent because debts accrued will complement rates, which even so was rather difficult to reimburse for many migrant families. Moreover, irregular labour migrants, in the absence of a registered employment and/or tenancy contract in most cases were not able to benefit of the above-mentioned provisions and were reported the cases when they were evacuated from rented accommodation.

In this context, **23% of respondents indicated that** they didn't have sufficient money to cover the mortgage/renting payments, maintenance costs and **risked to be evacuated from the dwelling** (26% men vs. 20% women) while 19% agreed with the bank or landlord to honour the financial obligations once the crises is over (18% men vs. 19% women), other 35% of respondents indicated that they would not respond to this question.

• **Reduction in the volume of remittances**

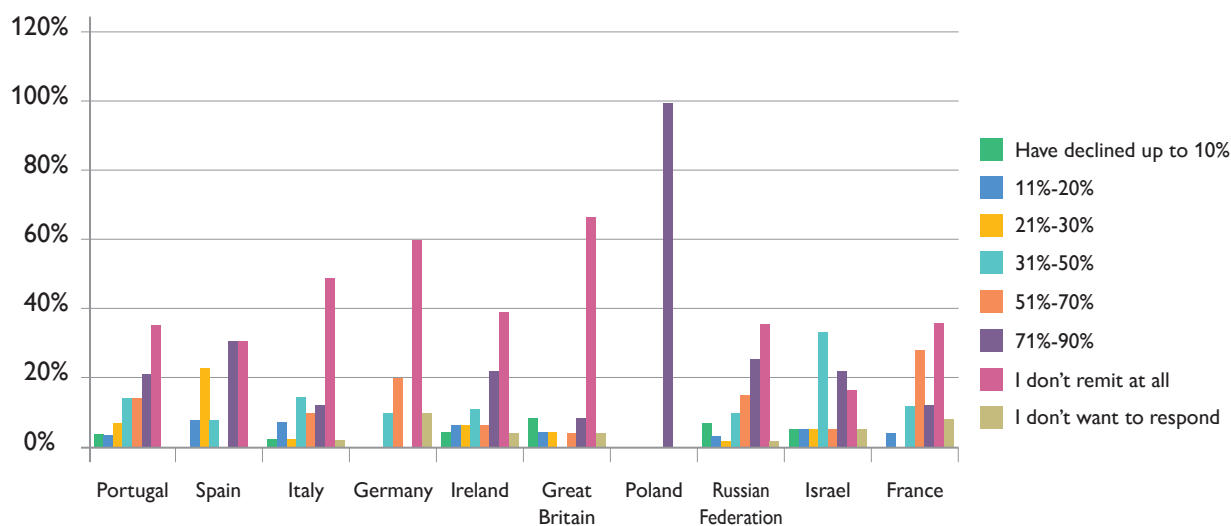


Reduction in the volume of remittances as a above-mentioned direct consequence of substantial shortfall of revenue is a consistent one. In accordance with empirical evidences, 51% of total respondents remitted money home before the crises (56% of men vs. 47% women). For the majority of respondents from Israel (81%), Portugal (67%), France (59%) and the United Kingdom (57%) this was a normal practice before the crises while

less than a half of respondents from Ireland (46%), Russian Federation (46%), Spain (39%), Germany (33%) and Poland (29%) were used to remit money home before the crises.

**Following the crises, 80% of respondents** (82% women vs. 77% men), who were used to remit previously, **have started to remit less in times of pandemic, and 41% of them were not remitting at all** at the time of survey (40% women vs. 42% men). Moreover, 19% of respondents indicated that the volume of remittances had reduced by 71%-90%, and for 24% of respondents the reduction was of 31%-70%. While desegregation by gender of these tendencies is uniform, however the impact appears to be greater in some countries, the most affected being affected labour migrants from the Russian Federation, with 91% of respondents who indicated reduction in remittances, followed by Portugal with 90%, Spain with 87% and Italy with 84%. We observe a different situation in Poland, where 75% indicated that the volume of remittances had not dropped. However, this should be treated with caution as a reduced number of respondents from Poland offered their response to this question. Taking into account the economic impact induced by the pandemic, crises will be most probably a long-term one, which will not be felt immediately. We asked respondents to evaluate their capacity to remit in the nearest future. Thus, **18% of respondents estimated they would stop remitting in the nearest future**, 20% estimated that they volume of remittances could drop between 31%-70%, and 13% of respondents considered that this drop could amount to 71%-90% of the total number of those who were still continuing to remit at the date of interview.

**Figure 9: To what extent have declined the amounts of money remitted home by you in times of COVID-19 pandemic?**



#### • Profile of vulnerabilities

It should be mentioned that tendencies prefigured by quantitative data concerning the pandemic's impact on welfare and safety of migrants are backed up by qualitative evidences, which indicate that the impact of pandemic is experienced unevenly by different groups of migrants, depending on many factors such as the legal status in the destination country, occupation sector, type of work contract, which they succeeded to sign with the employers before the pandemic, availability of protection policies in the host country and inclusion of migrants as beneficiaries of these policies, cumbersome bureaucratic procedures for accessing government's support in time of crises etc. Thus, in accordance with these parameters, we could distinguish 3 main categories of Moldovan migrants, who will be affected with a different intensity by COVID-19 pandemic, depending on the degree of their vulnerability.

As representatives of diaspora with whom we talked to confessed us as well as the above-analysed quantitative data show, the most affected category is those who have an irregular status in their destination country. As a rule, this category of migrants entered in the EU countries and UK on the basis of biometric passport and exceeded the legal term of residence or work "in shifts" (work 3 months in the host country, and then return back to the country of origin, repeating this cycle many times) or both. They don't have formal work contracts (they count on the verbal agreements with their employers in most cases), and starting from the first day of quarantine (that suspends their undocumented professional activity), they remain unemployed without any source of income, without access to social benefits offered by host countries in times of crises for citizens and

labour migrants with legal status. Many of them risk to be evacuated by the owner of rented dwellings in the absence of funds and because of their irregular status. Ireland is exception to this rule as the Government offers support in times of crises there regardless of the legal status of the migrant.

The second category is Moldovan citizens residing abroad who are bearers of a Moldovan biometric passport or an EU country's passport (in particular, Romanian or Bulgarian), or a working permit issued by the host country, but work based on precarious work contracts, which as a rule are fixed term/short term contracts. They are not affected in the same way comparing to irregular migrants (they do not risk to be evacuated from dwelling, have access to assistance in the case of forced unemployment). However, due to the type of contract (short-term), they risk to end it any time in the nearest future and, respectively, loose of the source of income/protection.

The most protected are Moldovan migrants who managed to sign work contracts for a longer term/ indefinite period. They enjoy the benefits and support programs in times of crises similar to residents from the country of origin and, as a rule they are protected through mechanisms, which allow for partial compensation of damage caused by the pandemic. Consequently, the talks revealed that in the context of this health crisis, while the EU host countries and UK take all the protection measures of workers, including labour migrants, there is, however, an important part of migrants who remain without protection or compensatory measures because of their irregular status in the host country. Furthermore, discussions revealed that migrants' vulnerabilities (in particular of those with an irregular status and those with short-term work contracts) are amplified through the limited access to the credible sources of information (most of them don't know the language of host country while the official messages from the authorities of the country of origin reach them only to a limited extent), and as a consequence they are based largely on information distributed through social networks by other fellow citizens who on many occasions are not the most trustful.

The above findings are supported also by testimonials offered by labour migrants who noted that broadly if they had a regularized status in the destination country and were employed or had a business before the crises, the host country protects them both in the workplace through compensation of loss of revenue that have occurred because of crises, and at the place of residence through prohibition of suspension of lease contracts and restructuring of rent costs and banking loans for mortgage. Moreover, some less positive experiences exist. Hence, while Ireland grants compensation and aid to all residents in times of crises regardless of their legal status, cumbersome bureaucratic procedures in the Russian Federation cause impediments for employers to access the state aid in times of crises to support employees who have suspended professional activity. In addition, in Italy some professions were treated discriminatory with respect to other (home care workers were not supported by the state to the same extent as employees from other areas), procedures of getting unemployment allowance being over-bureaucratic, and the administrative procedures for transfer to other employer were suspended in Israel. This fact puts some of home carers from this country, who had to transfer to another employer at the time of pandemic in informality.

In addition, following interviews we were able to note that in some countries professional activities in some sectors was not suspended, and the labour migrants confessed in these cases that the pandemic had not affected their revenue. They trust authorities in the host country and are more concerned by the situation in the Republic of Moldova. This situation is relevant for the majority of labour migrants from Israel (construction and home care sectors), Germany and Spain (constructions on the site), where work restrictions in these sectors lasted little enough or have never been imposed.

## DIASPORA VOICES:      IMPACT OF COVID-19

- **„The majority of sectors are affected**, except food industry. The Irish Government from the very beginning has adopted a set of support measures of employees through granting weekly support of EUR 350 in times of quarantine to all those who lose their jobs or are in technical unemployment. This is well enough comparing to the revenue, which the majority of Moldovans from Ireland get”. *(M, diaspora leader, Ireland, 45 years)*

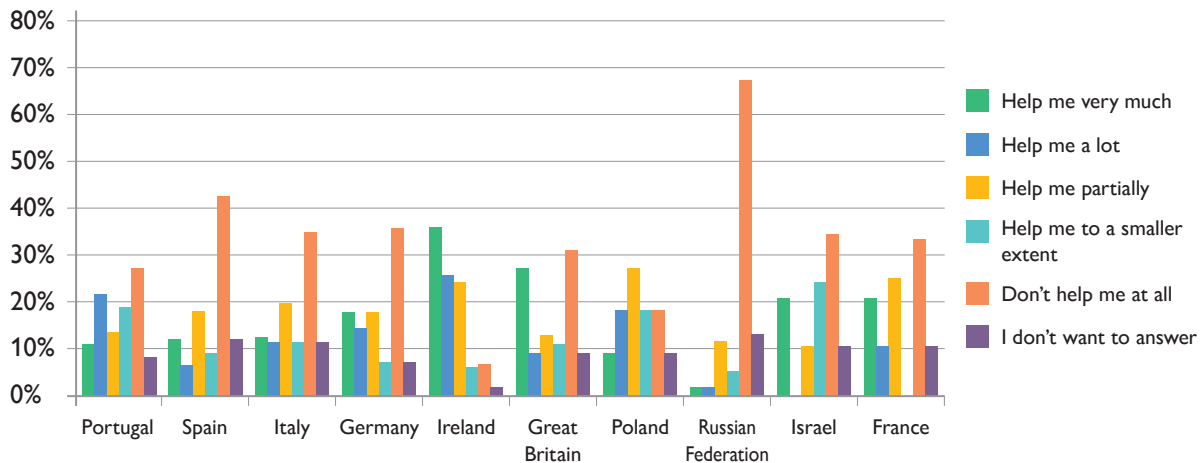
- „The Italian state issued two decrees „Care for Italy” and „Emergency revenue”, which, in fact, discriminated Moldovan migrants. These decrees provide for the social support in times of crises for certain social layers in Italy, beginning with businessmen, Italian families, self-employment, only **home careers were not included at all.**” (F, diaspora leader, Italy, 44 years)
- „**We sit around doing nothing since the quarantine has begun.** I have a small construction company. Thanks to the fact I have some money in the account, I take care of my employees so they can live. Not to be forced to leave home. The costs to leave to Moldova are very high. All people who work for me are legally employed, and nobody wishes to leave home because no stability is in Moldova: neither a well-paid job, nor the confidence in the future.” (M, diaspora leader, Russian Federation, 41 years)
- „**Maximum impact of the pandemic will be felt when this medical crises will transform in an economic one,** which will affect destination countries, and the workers who will be finally allowed to return to the work place will have no where to come as many enterprises where we used to work will either cut the staff or/and will reduce the employees’ wages or will go bankrupt. Under these circumstances, I believe that migrants will have to suffer, first of all, because will be the first ones who will receive lower wages and **will be the first who will be fired,** if the employers will succeed to continue the activity and will not go bankrupt.” (M, migrant, France, 36 years)
- „Persons who worked legally in the country we don’t suffer. We are accommodated in the family, eat, work, we are all ensured from medical point of view. **Problems have many persons who work illegally.** These persons, since the pandemic has begun, do not work, do not have where to live and, respectively, do not have money. These persons were replacing, and now when nobody goes home, there is nobody to be replaced. Moreover, there is no possibility for them to work occasionally on clean-up duty as they were doing previously because the families are afraid to deal with them not to be infected”. (F, migrant, Israel, 56 years)
- „The construction sector is not affected at all because of pandemic or quarantine. **As we were working before the crises, like that will continue to work.** We were given travel permits at the place of work during quarantine, facemasks and protective gloves. However, we continue working in the same tempo. The revenue has not been affected” (F, migrant, Israel, 38 years)
- „Fortunately, the hospital where I work offers maximum comfort and safety both to the patients, and to the medical staff. **I don’t run into major difficulties,** we are equipped and work in normal mode. Medical services have not been almost interrupted, even those that are not urgent” (F, migrant, Germany, 26 years)
- „I don’t work temporarily; **I was expected to suspend my work contract** as I had no one to leave children with, taking into account that education institutions ceased their activity. The husband works and this somehow makes us to be more optimist, from all points of view.” (F, migrant, Germany, 34 years)
- „Once the pandemic came, the owner told me that the firm had closed, but he would help me to seek a job in other part. While I was waiting for the help from the former owner, I had no money, **I lived for two weeks in the forest, I was eating mushrooms to survive.** A friend who was also in Poland helped me with the money, another friend found a job for me on the construction site in Warsaw now” (M, migrant, Poland, 46 years)

#### • Support in times of pandemic

However, in accordance with quantitative data, 37% of respondents indicated that authorities of the host country help them in different proportions in times of pandemic: 12% of respondents indicated that they help them very much, 12% - much, 17% - partially, 8% - to a smaller extent, while 34% indicated that they doesn’t help at all. The most disgruntled by the support provided by the authorities of destination country are respondents

from the Russian Federation, where the percent of those dissatisfied is 67%, followed by those from Spain with 42% and Germany with 36%. However, the most appreciated help offered by the host country is, in the opinion of respondents, unemployment allowance (which varies between 30%-90% of the basic salary of the employee, or up to 100% in case of parents with children), restructuring of mortgage loans and deferral of rent and maintenance payments following completion of quarantine, automatic extension of the availability of all documents expired in times of quarantine, free medical and psychological support, free protective equipment (facemasks, gloves, disinfectant), tax exemption, advantageous loans for small business, vouchers for free food for those in need, child benefit etc.

**Figure 10: To what extent the actions undertaken by authorities of your host country in this period help you?**



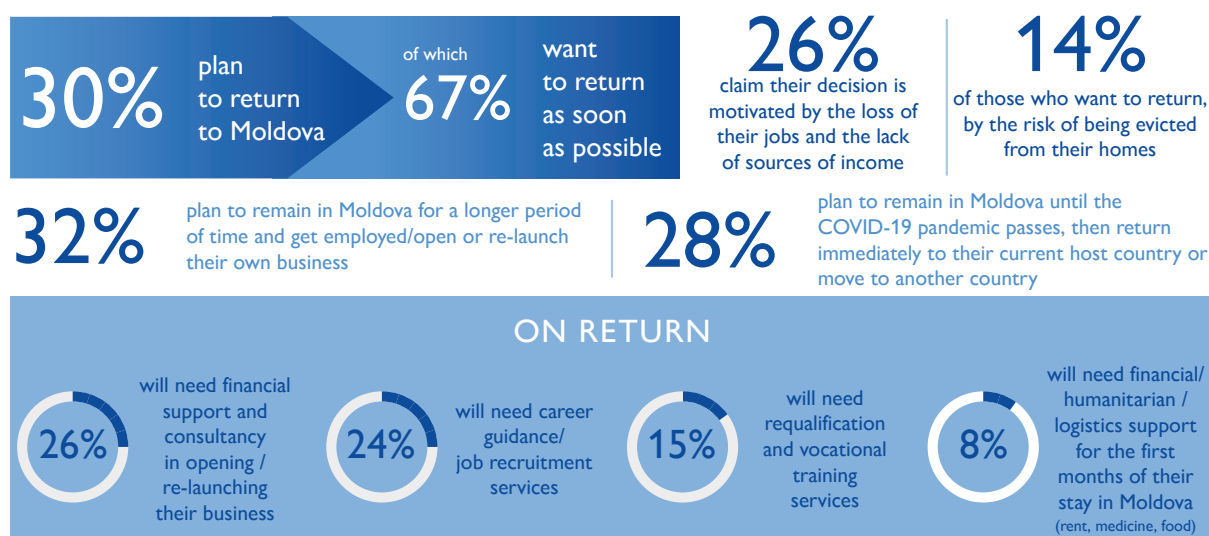
On the question about the help received from the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, 83% of the total of respondents indicated that they were not helped by them. The highest rate of respondents, who declared that they were not helped by the authorities of the country of origin are in Spain with 100%, followed by respondents from Israel with 93% and Portugal with 89%. Considering the context of the pandemic as well as the fact that the authorities of the Republic of Moldova implemented only few support instruments during the pandemic designated in particular to the most vulnerable, these figures must be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, some experts from diaspora expressed their opinion that Embassies and consulates were overburden by a high number of demands from Moldovan migrants and, considering the limited human resources they had at their disposal, they coped with difficulty with this situation on numerous occasions. Moreover, the practice of many diplomatic missions of the Republic of Moldova of extending direct on-line communication with migrants through social networks, including through co-opting diaspora leaders as key persons for distributing messages formulated by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova was highly appreciated.

**Figure 11: To what extent the actions undertaken by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova in this period help you?**



Following discussions with the representatives of diaspora and labour migrants the informational and logistical support of Embassies and consulates of the Republic of Moldova related to organization of charter flights for repatriation of the distressed Moldovan migrants was appreciated the most. Furthermore, many of those with whom we talked to underlined some essential elements in the process of organization of these flights, which refer to a small number of charter flights comparing to a high number of demands from Moldovan citizens, the need to establish more rigorous eligibility criteria to support repatriation, first of all, of the most vulnerable – the elderly, mothers with small children, people without income as well those with severe medical conditions, institutionalization of more strict conditions to limit the spread of virus after returning to Moldova. Noting that repatriation per se could be an increased risk of spreading the virus both for those from the same flight and for the local communities from home, it was suggested to apply more stringent measures of control over the pandemic, referring specifically to a more rigorous medical screening at the entry points to the country, institutionalized quarantine for all repatriated persons during the first 14 days from return (hotels, guesthouses, other public facilities could be mobilized), distribution of clear messages on return procedures and on the existing measures of reintegration at home to a large public from diaspora / migrants and local communities (to avoid stigmatization after repatriation), offering „initial packages of reintegration” in the form of social subsidies during the health crises as well as more complex reintegration packages depending on the specific needs of those returned, after the end of medical crises for a sustainable integration of those returned in the national economy.

• Post-COVID-19 plans



Following discussions with migrants, we were able to note that, although for the majority of respondents revenue dropped substantially, nevertheless many of them are concerned in particular by the period after lifting restrictions, because it is anticipated that once the medical crises is over, many authorities from the host countries will suspend urgent help to compensate the losses due to the temporary suspension of work. Many respondents ask themselves whether the companies where they work on will be able to coop with the economic challenges, following post-medical crises. Some indicated the fact that most probably those who will be fired could be, first, migrants, regardless of their citizenship. Other people indicate that even though they will keep their jobs, the salary could decrease considering lower sales, more competition on the market of services (in particular in the sectors of home care, HORECA, beauty), so that they will have three options such as (i) change of the occupational sector to one that is less affected by the pandemic, (ii) change of the host country and reorientation to a country where a higher demand of skills held by migrant exist and (iii) return home.

Moreover, empirical data on socio-demographic profile and in particular the fact that the vast majority of respondents are abroad with their family with such a long migration experience suggest us that they are largely integrated in destination countries, they passed successfully through the stage of families' reintegration, and for this category of respondents the option of return to Moldova forced by COVID-19 will be the last one in the priority of existing options, which will act as a safety net. This fact was confirmed by the testimonials during interviews carried out as a part of study.

Another category of migrants, mostly irregular and/or circular ones, who have relatively recently arrived to the destination country, which have not succeeded to integrate in the host country and who also maintain strong links with the country of origin, will return home, most probably, as the economic impact of medical crises will amplify. However, the decision to remain over a longer period will depend a lot on the opportunities of socio-professional reintegration in Moldova. Moreover, contacted exponents from diaspora believe that the current crises mobilizes also private solidarity<sup>3</sup> as a structural component of social groups. Consequently, taking advantage of this occasion, some groups of migrants in precarious conditions will try to extend the residence in the host country based on the private solidarity within the Moldova community from diaspora.

## DIASPORA VOICES: INTENTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

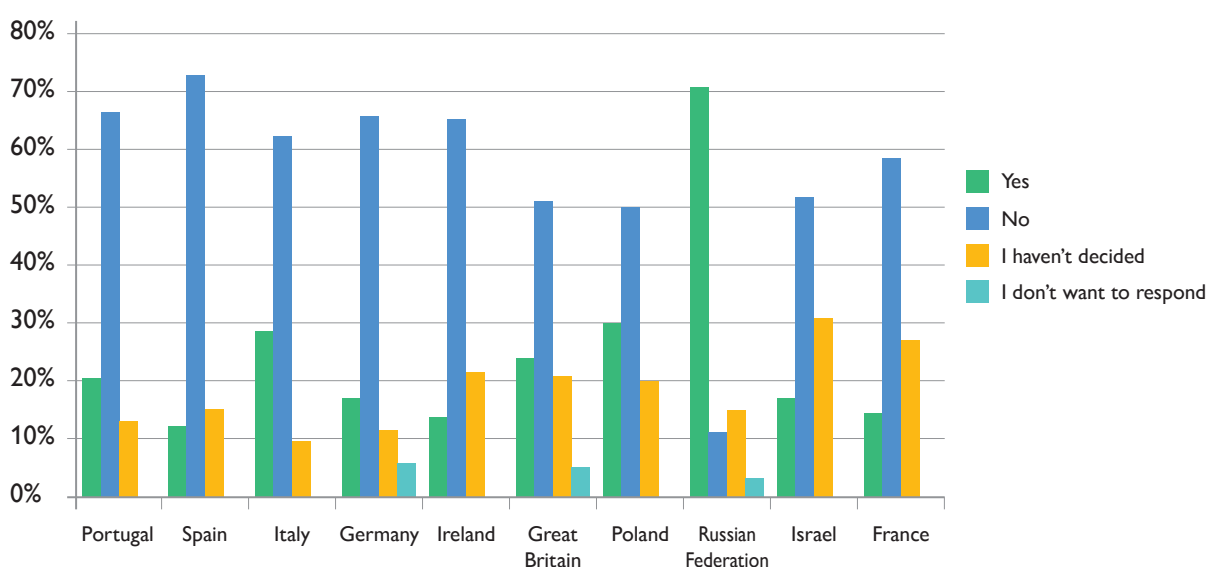
- „A few days ago when I had even nothing to eat, I certainly wanted to return back to Moldova. I didn't have another option. However, I didn't have money for the trip and was not able to return. However, once I have found a job in Warsaw on the construction site, I will work and I will see what I'm going to do in the future. **I don't want to return home without money. What can I do home without money?**” (M, migrant, Poland, 46 years)
- „It's very hard to imagine what authorities could do to make us to return. I have a business here for which I have worked, and now I reap the benefits. **I have no way to leave everything and to start from zero, when I know how the situation looks like in Moldova**”. (M, migrant, Italy, 42 years)
- „I categorically don't plan to return, I see no reason. I have a salary and a job, what would be the reason? I hope everything will be ok and I will be able to continue my life here. It's difficult to respond what could make me to change my mind because, unfortunately, I believe that Moldova will be not as Germany in the next 30 years. However, **I have a life and I don't want at all to waste it waiting when it is better in Moldova**.” (F, migrant, Germany, 26 years)
- „I don't think to return home, neither even 25%. **It's difficult to accept differences between two societies**. The one is to live day by day and another one when you just go to work and return home.” (F, migrant, Portugal, 34 years)
- „Now it is just as a vacation. Many have support from the technical unemployment. However, when the period of quarantine is over and **people will be fired because their business will have to close**, then real crises will start and then we don't know what is going to happen. Perhaps, a part of Moldovans will have to return home.” (F, diaspora leader, Spain, 43 years)
- „Many restaurants, Italian guesthouses, where Moldovans work, will go bankrupt very soon and **our fellow citizens who have the children of kindergarten/ school age, with mortgages for the purchased houses and without revenue to sustain their existence will have to return**” (F, diaspora leader, Italy, 44 years)
- „I came to work in Poland together with the husband 5 years ago. The children work in Germany. We want to help them to finish their house. We have little and ready. **After we collect money, we return home**, enough so much time abroad.” (F, migrant, Poland, 50 years)

<sup>3</sup> To see, for example, initiative „Diaspora for diaspora” from France // [https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=2995983557133577&set=a.5894\\_03194458304](https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=2995983557133577&set=a.5894_03194458304) [accessed on 21.05.20]



The above considerations are supported also by quantitative evidences, which show us that 50% of respondents don't plan to return to Moldova being influenced by the impact of COVID-19. Moreover, **30% of respondents intend to return**, among which **67% want to return as soon as possible, and 17% in 1-2 month**. The other **18% have not taken a decision for the moment in this sense**. Men are more likely to return comparing to migrant women (38% men vs. 25% women among respondents). Even if we would desegregate the intentions to return, depending on the legal status of respondents, we observe that migrants who are in the destination country on the basis of biometric passport are the most determined to return, making up 44% of all respondents, followed by those with the EU passport (Romanian/Bulgarian) with 25% of respondents. If we look at the type of work contract of those who intend to return, then the above observed tendency is hereby confirmed: those more likely to return are irregular migrants with 59% of exponents from this group indicating that they were intending to return, followed by the respondents employed on the basis of the fixed/ short term contracts, among which 43% intend to return. Twice less of those with service contracts/self-employed expressed the willingness to return with 21%, and only 15% of those with contracts for an indefinite period plan to return.

**Figure 12: Considering the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on your situation in the host country, do you plan returning to Moldova in the near future?**



The country where the majority of respondents indicated intentions to return is the **Russian Federation with 71% of respondents from that country indicated that they wanted to return, among which 91% indicated that they wanted to return home as soon as possible**. This percentage is at least twice lower in other countries. Respondents from Spain, Portugal, Germany, and Ireland indicated the highest rates of intentions to remain in their host country with 73%, 67%, 66% and, respectively, 65% among interviewed migrants. These were also the countries with the most inclusive policies of pre-COVID 19 socio-economic integration policies and support programs in times of crises mentioned as positive practices by the respondents of the studies.

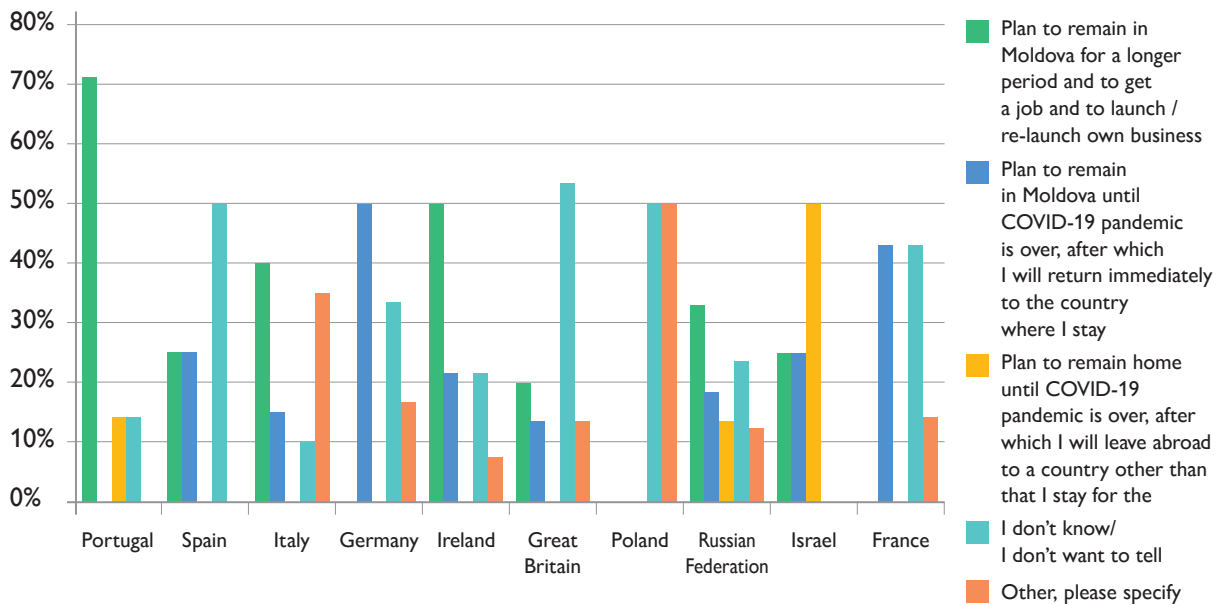
For those who want to return home the key motives are related to the lose of job for 26% of respondents, temporary suspension of the professional activity for 20% of respondents, risk to be evacuated from rented dwelling for 14% of respondents as well as health related problems and the fear to be infected with COVID-19 for 12% of respondents. Other reasons indicated by respondents were related to the willingness to be with the family (in particular parents and children) in need back home, vacation planned long time in advance, expiry of travel documents. The majority of respondents indicated that they would prefer to return by air (67%), in particular to get home in short time (for 50% of respondents).

From the perspective of returning home, respondents were asked to indicate which could be main challenges that would need to be overcome by them to return home. From this point of view, we can note short-term challenges, organizational challenges related to return and challenges that are more complex, structural ones, of reintegration. Those organizational ones indicated by respondents cover the requirement to respect a 14 days quarantine after return home, internal mobility restrictions, lack of Moldovan medical insurance, fear to

be infected in Moldova due to the collective irresponsibility. Considering challenges that are more complex, the potential returned migrants referred to the potential economic crises in most cases, lack of financial resources to survive in Moldova, difficulty to employ after the return, insufficient pension and social allowance, corruption at the level of political elites, deliberate disinformation and not easily accessible trustful information, disappearance of the country. An important enough part of respondents indicated that they didn't know what could be the challenges on return while others mentioned that the challenges didn't matter, most important thing is to get home safely.

On the question about their personal plans after returning home, **32% of those who want to return home indicated that they were planning to remain in the country for a longer period** and to launch/ re-launch a business while 28% of these respondents plan to return immediately in the country where they are currently or in other destination country.

**Figure 13: What are your intentions and plans upon return?**



## 8. PERSPECTIVES OF REINTEGRATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Among respondents who wish to return to Moldova for a longer period and plan to get a job or to launch/ re-launch own business, 26% indicated that they would need consultancy and help in initiating/ developing a business and financial support in this sense, 24% indicated that they would need career guidance and job-finding services, 14% indicated that they would need training, requalification and refresher courses, 10% indicated the need to recognize the skills acquired abroad to successfully integrate on labour market, and 8% would need financial/ humanitarian/logistical support over the first months of staying in Moldova to cover the costs related to rent, medicine, food etc.

Respondents who plan to return intend, however, to go abroad shortly. They could consider the opportunity to remain in Moldova, if some preconditions would be set up, which would influence their decision. Thus, 42% of respondents of this category pointed to the need of a competitive salary and quality of life similar to that in the destination country. Other 16% underscored an improved access to the qualitative public services in the area of health, education etc. Once the medical crises is over, the vast majority of respondents who don't plan to return home intend to continue professional activity in the country where they reside (80%), among which 8% plan to change their field of activity. On the question about the size of a competitive salary from the perspective of a returned migrant, the vast majority of respondents indicated sums ranging from 9,000 to 14,000 Moldovan lei, depending on many cumulative factors such as area of residence (rural – lower salary/ urban – higher salary), age, family status, the presence of family or not, the presence of a proper accommodation or not, existence of bank loans etc. during in-depth interview.

Moreover, Moldovan migrants suggested a variety of solutions for a successful reintegration home, whereby we note of the following nature (i) institutional-administrative such as eradicating corruption, reducing bureaucratic barriers, promoting political stability, transparent communication on existing reintegration opportunities in the country; (ii) economic measures: attracting foreign investments, efficient implementation of some new economic development projects, which take account of the specific needs of returned migrants, creation of jobs for those returned, support of small entrepreneurs, promoting local agriculture and protecting local market for the sale of agri-food products, creation of opportunities of professional reintegration home, reducing the shadow economy; (iii) measures of social nature such as raising salaries for workers in the medical area, financial support of vulnerable layers, promoting social justice. Top three recommendations were related to eradicating corruption, creating jobs, supporting entrepreneurs.

In response to the request to identify top three strategic/ competitive economic areas that would need to be supported first and foremost to contribute to socio-economic recovery of the country, 73% indicated agriculture, food industry with 39% and rural tourism, hotel industry with 18%. Moreover, social fields that were indicated as being essential for the economic recovery are medicine and public health for 61% of respondents, and education, culture and research for 46% of participants in the study. In the same context, participants in the study expressed their vision on their potential contribution to the economic recovery. The most frequent ways of contribution of returned migrants to the economic recovery of the Republic of Moldova covered: sharing experience and know-how acquired abroad for developing strategic sectors such as agriculture and education, electronic engineering, harnessing social remittances through promoting European values in the change of outdated mentality and conflict resolution, investments in the economy of Moldova through launching small enterprises subject to the stability guaranteed by the state for a term of 15 years, promoting civic spirit and personal responsibility in pursuit of good, harnessing financial remittances, resetting way of thinking and capitalization on own skills, refuse to participate in acts of corruption.

A significant proportion of respondents indicated that they wouldn't contribute to the development of country as they were disappointed by the quality of governance, political situation in the country, and they were not believing that anything could be changed in this sense. Others mentioned that this was the responsibility of authorities rather than of migrants, while some noted that they didn't know how they could contribute.

In accordance with our interlocutors from diaspora, Moldova will have to manage two major shocks of COVID-19 pandemic in the nearest future: (1) shock induced by pressure on the health system characterized by

“maximum magnitude of medical/epidemiological crises in Moldova”; (2) migration shock of „extremely high flows of Moldovan migrants over a very short period while the Moldova economy will get into recession and demand for labour will drastically reduce in the country“. Therefore, according to our exponents from diaspora, Moldovan labour migrants expect authorities of the Republic of Moldova to act rapidly and to apply „a short- and medium-term strategy to manage crises and post-crises situation“, which should be people-centred, considering the needs of Moldovan migrants and their vulnerabilities, and which should include three elements as follows: (i) a broad information campaign aiming at diaspora/ migrants, addressing specifically the rights of Moldovan migrants in the destination country in times of crises, measures of protection and prevention of infection with COVID-19, repatriation procedures for the most vulnerable, existing instruments/ green lines for immediate remote support; (ii) providing humanitarian support, social reintegration subsidies through implementation of social programs to cover the initial basic needs of those in need on return as well as addressing specific medical needs of returned migrants; (iii) implementing reintegration programs, including through requalification programs, recognition no-formal skills, support to small enterprises etc.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

- Global medical crises had a disproportionate impact on welfare of Moldovan migrants, depending on the degree of vulnerability of migrants, which, in its turn, is determined by many variables such as the legal status in the destination country, sector of activity, type of work contract, which was managed to be signed with the employer before the pandemic, availability of migrants and existing procedures to get the help in times of pandemic;
- In accordance with these parameters, we were able to distinguish a differentiated impact on 3 principal categories of Moldovan migrants: (i) irregular migrants, most of them are circular, who reside in the destination country on the basis of Moldovan biometric passport; (ii) migrants who are bearers of the passport of an EU country (in particular Romanian or Bulgarian), or a work permit issued by the host country, but working on the basis of some precarious work contracts that as a rule are fixed/short – term contracts; (iii) Moldovan migrants who reside in the destination country on the basis of Moldovan biometric or the EU passport. However, they managed to sign work contracts for a longer/ indefinite period;
- The most affected category are the migrants with an irregular status in their destination country. Without formal work contracts, starting with the first day of quarantine they remained unemployed without any source of income, without access to unemployment or social benefits offered by host countries in times of crises for citizens and labour migrants with legal status (exception Ireland). Thus, 43% of respondents from this category have no revenue at all, comparing to 10% of respondents who indicated the same challenge, but who have work contracts for an indefinite period, or 33% of respondents with short-term contracts and 27% of respondents with patents/service contracts. This category of migrants has started the process of return to the Republic of Moldova once the state of emergency was introduced in the majority of host countries, and will continue as the financial savings of these migrants will run out;
- For other categories of migrants, suspension of professional activity resulted inevitably in a sharp decline of revenue so that 62% of respondents indicated that their monthly revenue dropped. For 31% of them decline in revenue oscillated between 31-70%, and 26% have no revenue at all;
- In accordance with the statistical data, the most affected by the pandemic's consequences are labour migrants from the Russian Federation, among which 77% indicated decline in revenue, and 71% of respondents from this country indicated that they wished to return home, among which 91% indicated that they wished to return home as soon as possible;
- An important consequence of decline in revenue for the vast majority of labour migrants is decrease in remittances for 80% of respondents. This decline will accentuate as the economic crises will complement medical crises, and will affect those sectors, where most of Moldovan migrants work, in particular tourism, construction, commerce, transport and logistics as well as homecare, thereby affecting the welfare level of households, depending on remittances and further amplifying the high level of poverty in the Republic of Moldova, and forcing a part of labour migrants to return home;
- Although for the vast majority of respondents revenue has dropped significantly during the crises, however most of them are concerned in particular by the period beyond lifting restrictions as alongside with the start of economic crises, under the best scenario revenue will drop significantly for the most, and under the most negative scenario many of migrants will lose their jobs;
- Migrants and exponents of diaspora identified some possible medium and long-term survival strategies to cope with a possible significant drop in revenue or loss of jobs such as (i) (temporary) change of the sector of activity that is less affected by the pandemic, for example, that of agriculture (ii) change of host country and reorientation towards a country where a higher demand for skills held by migrants exist and (iii) return home;
- The fact that 51% of respondents are abroad with the family, and the majority (57%) has a long-term migration experience suggests that they are broadly integrated in destination countries, successfully passed through the stage of reintegration of families or are in this process, and for many of them the option of forced return by Covid-19 impact will be the last one in the priority of existing options;
- However, considering the unpredictability of amplitude of economic recession, return of some flows of migrants back home with their families should not be neglected. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that

the return option for many respondents is not the finality of migration cycle, but only a transitional stage, of re-launching to identify some opportunities for a better life wherever they may be;

- Meanwhile, the majority of respondents who manifested their interest to return (30%) indicated that they would need support of authorities of the Republic of Moldova for social and professional reintegration, including access to career guidance services (24%), financial support and consultancy in the process of launching or re-launching own business (26%), re-qualification courses (15%), financial, humanitarian and logistical help for the first months of staying in Moldova (8%);
- In addition, respondents who plan to return mention, however, that they intend to go abroad shortly. They indicated that they could consider the opportunity to remain in Moldova if some pre-conditions would be created that would influence their decision to stay in Moldova such as jobs and competitive salaries, enabling investments climate, improvement of the quality of life and access to the qualitative public services etc.
- In this sense, to harness the human capital that returns home, the authorities of the Republic of Moldova would have to develop and implement complex programs of return and reintegration focused on people, taking into account vulnerabilities of migrants and targeted towards specific needs of different categories of migrants.

## 10. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Returnees under COVID-19 are a boon for Moldova; numerous returning with skills and/or are ready to invest. National employment schemes, registration procedures and other services need to be more more accessible.
- Investment schemes directed at diaspora, such as ODIMM, will not be large enough to satisfy the future demand. Investment programs/SME support (e.g. those by EBRD or EU) should be made accessible to returnees.
- Relatively few of the surveyed stated needing social protection, however current programs like Ajutor Social will need to scale up to meet demand of returnees.
- Among those surveyed, many stated that they would migrate again once the situation becomes normalized. Therefore, safe and orderly re-migration arrangements should be part of a mixed approach in the medium term.

