

THE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE EXTERNAL MIGRATION OF THE ROMANIAN POPULATION

RADU BRÎNDUȘA MIHAELA

ASSOCIATED PROF. PHD. SR III, INSTITUTE FOR ECONOMIC FORECASTING,
ROMANIAN ACADEMY
e-mail: bmradu@yahoo.com

BĂLAN MARIANA

UNIV.PROF. PHD. SR I, INSTITUTE FOR ECONOMIC FORECASTING, ROMANIAN ACADEMY
e-mail: dr.mariana.balan@gmail.com

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.

The 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 pandemic.

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 effects of pandemics on migration

The OECD believes that migrants are particularly affected by the coronavirus pandemic. And as for migration, it has decreased considerably, which is bad for both sides. The pandemic and its consequences have affected the lives of people all over the world. But migrants are much more affected than any other population groups. This is what the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found. Migrants would have managed to ensure the functioning of sectors such as the sanitary, commercial and logistic sectors, even during the period of restrictions. In the midst of the pandemic, governments have taken exceptional measures, such as the one decided by the executive in Berlin regarding allowing foreign seasonal workers access to Germany.

According to data published by the OECD, migrants represent on average 24% of all doctors and 16% of nursing staff, thus being on the front line in the fight against Covid-19. Due to the greater number of direct contacts but also, often, due to inadequate living conditions, in overcrowded spaces, a large percentage of migrants became infected with the coronavirus. Several studies carried out in a number of OECD member countries revealed the fact that the risk of infection is twice as high among migrants as compared to the local population.

At the same time, migrants are more than other groups affected by the economic consequences of the pandemic. Many of them work in gastronomy, in hotels, in tourism - so exactly in the branches that are now fighting for survival. 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, migrants are the first to be sent into unemployment. There is not enough data yet, but it is already clear that migrants are strongly affected in the countries of southern Europe, in Ireland, Sweden, Norway and the USA.

An important aspect is also the closing of schools. The children of migrants were and remain particularly affected when the courses are held online. Parents have, on average, fewer means, for example, they do not have a computer, they have smaller living spaces and, lacking language skills, they cannot help their children with their homework. Home-schooling puts migrant children at a greater disadvantage.

The pandemic has drastically reduced migration in OECD countries. According to some first estimates, in the first half of the current year, the migration rate was reduced by half. The closing of the borders, the restriction of travel, the suspension of air transport determined this evolution. The OECD does not believe that the situation will change anytime soon, even if the economy will start again at normal capacity. One reason is that during the pandemic, many jobs have been replaced by telecommuting, which involves much less human mobility.

The obvious effects of Covid-19 are also felt in the migrants' countries of origin. Bank transfers from those working abroad to families back home have been drastically reduced. OECD analysts also believe that the coordinated actions of the authorities in the countries preferred by immigrants aimed at combating illegal migration have led to increased frustration in the countries of origin.

Against the background of increasing unemployment, the OECD also believes that xenophobia will be much more present in everyday life, because immigrants are seen as potential competitors. In some states there are campaigns that try to combat the idea that immigrants are competitors on the labor market and are to blame for the spread of the virus.

Also, the OECD considers migration to be fundamentally positive, "an integral part of our lives", "something that connects us". Precisely the pandemic, the isolation and the fences have shown us "how much we need others", explains Stefano Scarpetta, director for social issues and the workforce within the OECD. There is a danger that through the pandemic and its consequences, the

progress made in the field of migration and integration will be partially annihilated. Governments should perceive the integration of migrants as a long-term investment, in the interest of all.

The atypical global crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic has affected all sectors of society, having a significant impact both from an economic-financial, social and health perspective, as well as from the point of view of the migration phenomenon, whether we refer to international migration or intra-EU migration.

The declaration of the state of pandemic on March 11, 2020 by the World Health Organization was equivalent to the onset of a deeper global crisis than any other similar event, in the context in which, according to the data shown in Table 1, the epidemics or pandemics of the last hundred years have recorded a low geographical and demographic impact, affected only a few states of the world and involved an insignificant percentage of the population compared to the global level.

Table 1 *Geographical and demographic impact of pandemics from 1918-2020*

Epidemics/Pandemics	Cases (thousands)	Cases (% of world population)	Deaths (thousands)	Most affected countries
Spanish Flu (1918-1920)	500000	~25%	17400-50000	China, India, Indonesia, Russia USA
SARS (2002-2004)	8	Negligible	0,7	Canada, China, Singapore
Swine Flu (2009-2010)	762630	11%	284	Australia, China, Mexico, Thailand, USA
MERS (2012)	~3	Negligible	0,8	Iran, Jordan, Korea, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates
EBOLA (2014-2016)	~29	Negligible	11	Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea
Covid-19 (2019-2020)	2019	0,03%	119	China, Italy, France, Germany, USA, etc. (210 of the world's countries)

Source: World Bank and Knomad (2020)

It has been noted in the specialized literature (World Bank Group and Knomad, 2020, p. 2) that a situation similar to the current one occurred during the so-called "Spanish flu" of 1918-1920, which affected approximately one third of the global population at the time (approx. 500 million people), leading to around 50 million deaths, in three recurring phases. In this context, it is appreciated that, if the pattern of the first part of the 20th century were to be repeated, the Covid-19 crisis could have a longer duration than that which was foreseen by many of the governments of the world's states and would could have several recurrences in the next 24 months.

Reported on the recent evolution of Covid-19, the official statistics made available by the states of the world at the end of August 2020 show that, worldwide, between March and August 2020, more than 25 million people were infected with this type of coronavirus, of which approximately 860,000 have lost their lives. In order to combat the rapid spread of Covid-19, the governments of the world have instituted, as an immediate action, social distancing measures, reducing or even stopping the development of some economic activities, as well as travel bans. Thus, measures such as bans on travel across borders or, as the case may be, within borders, the introduction of quarantine for arrivals were provided, first in China and later in most states around the world, depending on the evolution of the coronavirus on their territory international (and sometimes domestic), home confinement for a specified period of time. More precisely, according to the official information made available by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), on June 8, 2020, 65,692 travel restrictions were issued in a number of 220 states, territories and areas, 10 % of these being introduced as a result of increased restrictions related to medical requirements.

The same data collected by the International Organization for Migration also indicate some so-called "relaxation measures", adopted in June in a number of 176 countries, territories or areas, these exceptions that allow mobility being reduced, however, being registered, by example, only about 700 exceptions until the beginning of June.

In this context, the measures to prevent and combat the spread of COVID-19 adopted at the state level led, globally and in the short and medium term, to the blocking of global economic activities, with significant consequences on health, living standards, the economy in general, and in particular, on mobility, the most affected categories of people being migrants.

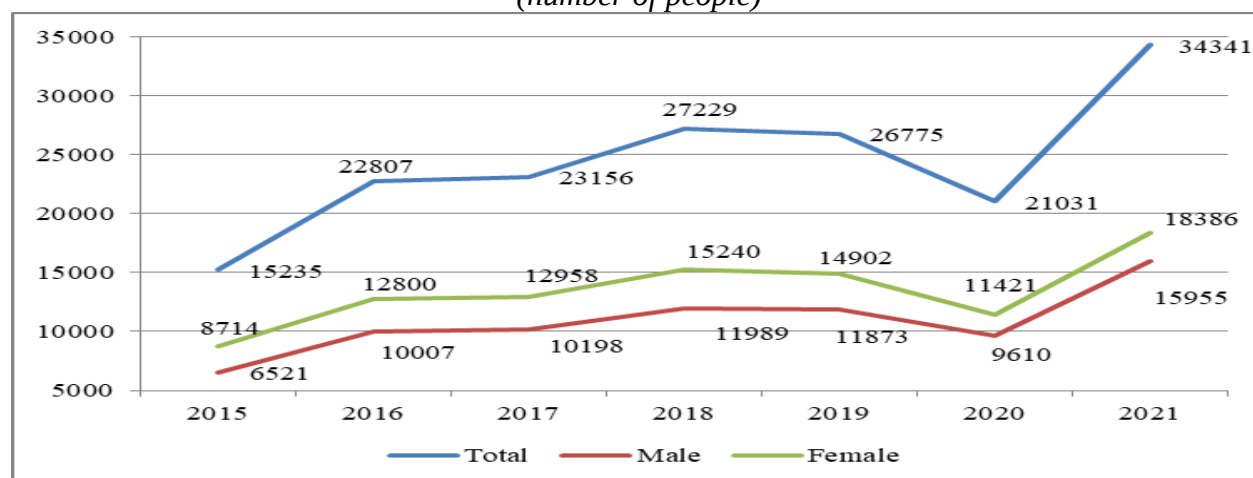
Referring to the EU member states, measures were also adopted within them to help combat the spread of Covid-19, generating profound effects, mainly on freedom of movement, but also on the labor market and the economy in its whole.

3. The evolution of the external 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)

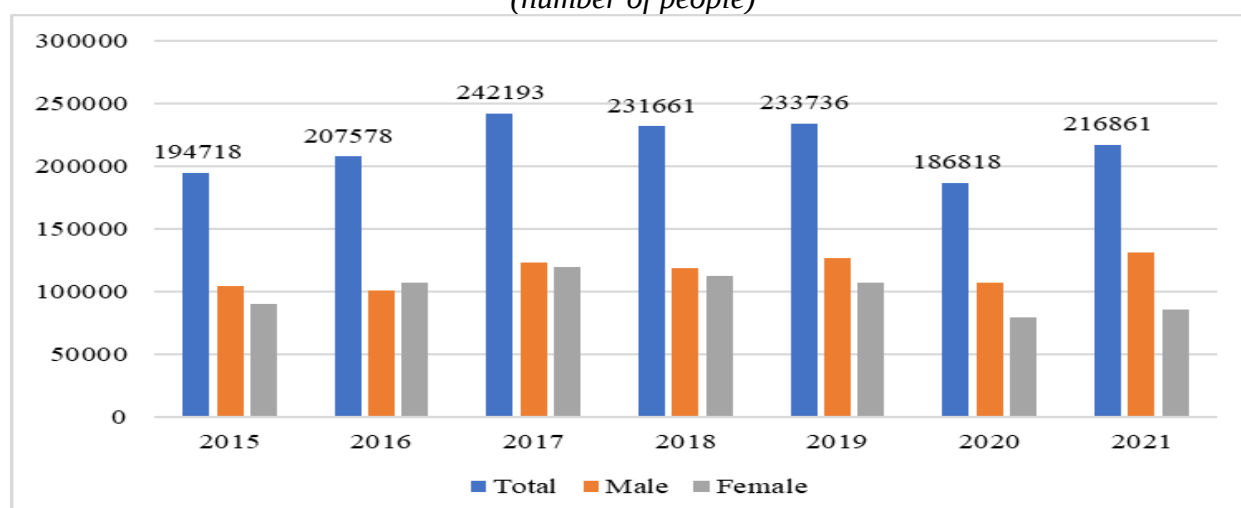


Source: National Institute of Statistics, Tempo online database

This phenomenon was registered, both in total and by gender. Compared to 2019, this decrease was -21.5% overall, -19.1% male and -23.4% female.

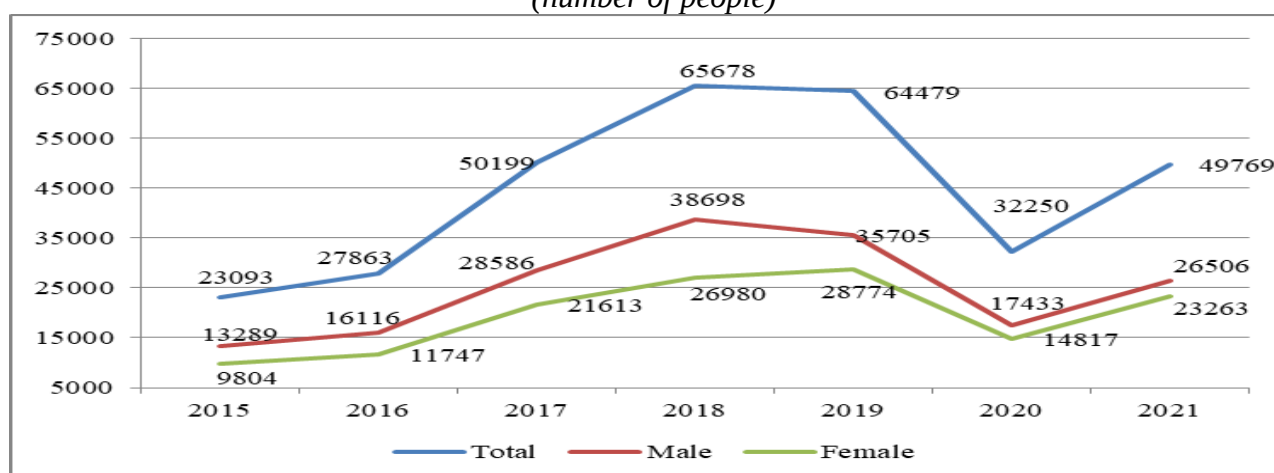
The flow of people who left the country for a period of at least 12 months registered significant variations from one year to another, but especially from one period of economic development to another, the phenomenon of international migration also being influenced by the social context and national politics and of the European community. Temporary emigration was also affected (Figure 2), we find decreases of -17.6% overall, -17.5 for men and -17.7% for women.

As for temporary migration, it also registered a return in 2021, both in total and by gender, but without reaching the pre-pandemic level.

Figure 2 Evolution of the number of temporary emigrants in total and by gender (number of people)

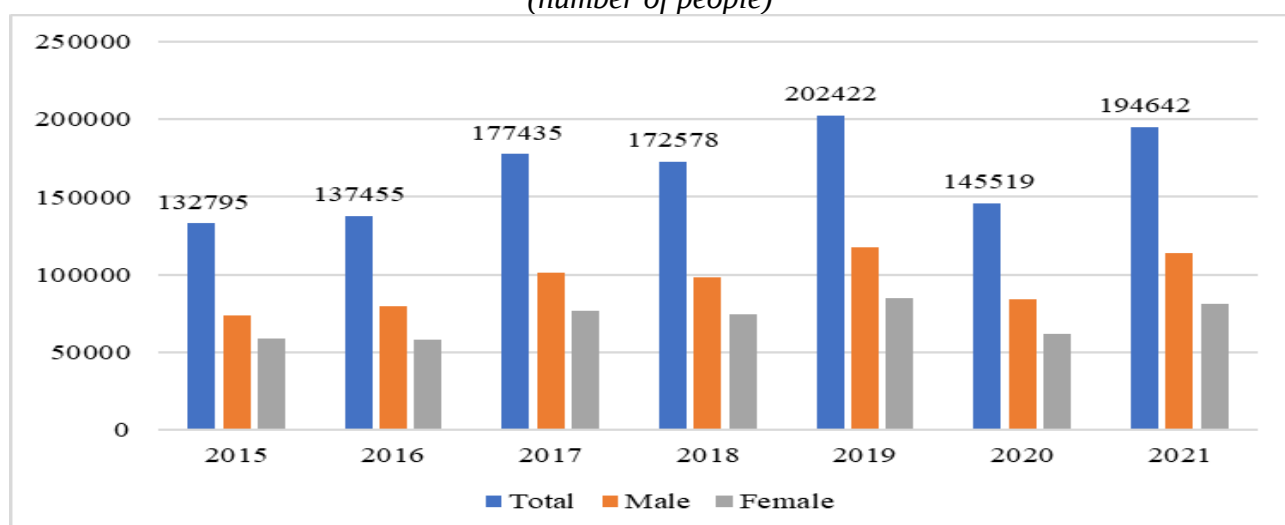
Source: National Institute of Statistics, Tempo online database

Regarding the evolution of the number of immigrants (Figure 3), 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. In 2021 it returned to the growth level.

Figure 3 Evolution of the number of permanent immigrants in total and by gender (number of people)

Source: National Institute of Statistics, Tempo online database

The evolution of the number of temporary immigrants in total and by gender (Figure 4) reveals the same situation, but in much lower proportions. After an increase of 29% in 2017, we are witnessing in 2020 a decrease of -19.1% overall, -17.7 among male immigrants and -23.7% among female immigrants. As with the other categories of migrants, in 2021 it returned to the growth level.

Figure 4 Evolution of the number of temporary immigrants in total and by gender (number of people)

Source: National Institute of Statistics, Tempo online database

Migration continues to be a problem for the Romanian authorities, an aspect revealed both by the statistics recorded at the European level and by those established at the national level. Relevant in order to take preventive measures in this field is the year 2017, when our country was exposed to very high pressure both in terms of migration and asylum. Thus, as regards the legal migration component, in 2017, 16,103 visa requests submitted by foreigners to diplomatic missions abroad and sent for approval to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were registered, an increase of 9% (compared to 14,864 of applications registered in 2016).

Also, 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. This situation was encountered only in 2008, when the quota of employment permits was exhausted, and it was necessary to supplement it with 5000 votes. This fact determined the necessary steps to be taken in order to supplement the quota of employment permits for permanent and seconded workers. This situation was mainly due to the acute lack of labor on the domestic labor market, against the background of the economic growth recorded by Romania in 2017 and the relaunch of investment projects, both in infrastructure and on the real estate market.

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.

Thus, integration is a dynamic process, in a double sense, assuming, on the one hand, the host society's willingness to integrate, and on the other, the immigrant's desire to integrate. Central and local public authorities have the role of facilitating this process.

The measures provided by the law for the achievement of integration refer to the facilitation of access to a series of economic and social rights, such as the right to work, to education, the right to a home, the right to medical and social assistance and to integration programs. Each institutional

actor within the Coordination Group for the implementation of the National Immigration Strategy has carried out the necessary steps in order to fulfill the duties established in this regard. Thus, in 2017, 1553 foreigners with a form of protection benefited from the integration programs. Considering the recorded statistics, as well as the unpredictable nature of the phenomenon of immigration and asylum, compared to the European forecasts in the field, the establishment of a coherent policy and some directions of action is a priority.

4. 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.

5. References

1. Aceleanu, Mirela, (2011), *Indicators of Migration and Their Relevance to Employment and Quality of Life Analysis. Romania's Situation, Management & Marketing. Challenges for the Knowledge Society*, Volume 6, Special Issue/Summer, <http://managementmarketing.ro/>;
2. Andriescu, M. (2020), *Under Lockdown Amid COVID-19 Pandemic, Europe Feels the Pinch from Slowed Intra-EU Labor Mobility*, Migration Policy Institute, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/covid19-europe-feels-pinch-slowed-intra-eu-labor-mobility>;
3. Anghelache, C., Manole, A., Anghel, M.G., Popovici, M. (2016), *Resursele umane: rolul și dezvoltarea lor în economia națională / Human resources: their role and development in the national economy*, Romanian Statistical Review Supplement, Issue 4/2016, pp. 51-58/59-65;
4. Fana, M., Tolan, S., Torrejón, S., Urzi Brancati, C. și Fernández-Macías, E, (2021), *The COVID Confinement Measures and EU Labour Markets*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/covid-confinement-measures-and-eu-labour-markets>;
5. OECD, (2022), *What has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants? An update on recent evidence*, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-has-been-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-an-update-on-recent-evidence>;

6. Comisia Europeană, (2021), *Intra-EU Labour Mobility at a Glance. Main Findings of the 2021 Annual Report on intra-EU Labour Mobility*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union;

7. United Nations, (2021), *Integrating migration into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*;

8. OECD, (2021), *International Migration Outlook 2021*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://www.oecd.org>;

9. OECD, (2022), *What has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants? An update on recent evidence*, <https://www.oecd.org>;

10. *World Migration Report 2010-2022. The Future of Migration: Building Capacities for Change*, International Organization for Migration, <http://www.iom.int>;

11. Institutul Național de Statistică, *Baza Tempo-on line*, <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>.