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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE VOLUME OF LABOR MIGRATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND REMITTANCES

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Abstract: Flows of external labor migration in most cases occur under the influence of the internal economic and political situation in the country; however, in 2020 these trends changed significantly for reasons which did not depend on the socio-economic situation. In order to determine the volume of labor migration in 2020, an analysis was conducted. According to the results, it has been concluded that, despite the restrictive quarantine measures implemented in the European Union (EU) that caused the partial return of migrants to their countries, the rise in unemployment and slow economic growth, labor migrants are highly employed in key occupations of EU that are vital in the fight against coronavirus disease (COVID-19). It has been noticed that EU countries increase the number of officially issued residence permits to citizens of non-member countries every year, and Ukraine has become the absolute leader in the number of received residence permits, as well as the leader among European countries by the volume of the received remittances. An abstract-logical and systematic approach, analytical, comparative, graphical, and critical methods were used in the study. Prospects for external labor migration of Ukrainians to European countries have been identified.

Keywords: migration; residence permits; remittances; restrictions; COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

The processes of globalization and internationalization contribute to the growth of migration around the world. Flows of external migration until 2020 were formed under the influence of the state and the development of the internal situation in different countries and depended on the level of their social, economic, innovative, political development, and other domestic factors. The situation changed dramatically in 2020 with the advent of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which caused a pandemic and whose impact on public life is still difficult to evaluate, as well as to predict future losses associated with economic stagnation and the increase of world poverty. Almost all the economies of the world have been significantly affected by COVID-19, especially in terms of the rise in unemployment, decline

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in economic activity and income, investment reduction, etc. Countries had to close borders, restrict their economic activity, return migrants to their countries of origin, maintain social distance, and take other measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As the pandemic spread, migrants, especially in low-paid workplaces, became more vulnerable as they were forced to leave host countries and lost the opportunity to make another work trip. At the same time, it should be noted that migrants played an important role in a number of key occupations that are vital in the fight against COVID-19.

Both Ukrainian and foreign scientists have devoted their work to the study of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration and remittances, the economic downturn, and the rising unemployment. Thus, Libanova and Pozniak (2020) studied the impact of the pandemic on the volume of labor migration and its prospects in Ukraine, and they also offered recommendations for adjusting migration policy in the pandemic and post-pandemic periods. Scientists made a brief assessments of the impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers, investigated how reduced remittances would affect households and economies in Asia and the Pacific, and what policy makers can do to soften the blow (Takenaka, Gaspar, Villafuerte, & Narayanan, 2020).

The key trends, reasons, and consequences of the impact of migration on the economy of Ukraine were studied by Ukrainian scientists (Podra, Levkiv, Koval, Petryshyn, & Bobko, 2020), and it was established that migration growth in Ukraine was related to structural changes in the economy and the labor market, economic growth slowdown, low wages and quality of life compared to the nearest neighbor countries, visa liberalization with the European Union (EU) countries, and access to education abroad. Libanova and Ftomova (2019) conducted a thorough study of the international dynamics of personal remittances of migrants, assessing their scale and consequences. Contemporary studies of the migration process have shown the influence of migrants' remittances on socio-economic processes at the macro level and at the household level (Chubar & Mashiko, 2019). Fasani and Mazza (2020) tried to investigate the role of migrant workers in performing basic functions in the EU societies hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, in the research it was stated that low-educated migrants are employed in occupations that are key for hosting societies. As a result, scientists proposed to reconsider a migration policy debate which, up to day, was almost entirely focused on the importance of attracting high-skilled migrants to the EU. Adams-Prassl, Boneva, Golin, and Rauh's (2020) research was devoted to measuring the economic impacts of the pandemic to further vary by age, gender, household structure, type of employment contract, and firm size. Some aspects of the peculiarities of migration process and its influence on the human capital formation and investment process were highlighted in the research of Ukrainian scientists (Podra, Kurii, Alkema, Levkiv, & Dorosh, 2020).

According to the above mentioned scientific research, it is necessary to state the need and relevance of research to determine the impact of the pandemic on migration in Ukraine and in the world, study trends and forecasts of remittances, investigate and access the state of regional labor markets, and the problems faced by migrants. Trends in external labor migration have changed radically; the reason of changes was not the internal socio-economic or military-political situation in the countries, but the pandemic.

Methodology

Our study of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on labor migration, employment, and remittances in Ukraine and the EU is based on three main approaches. First, it is necessary to assess labor migration changes and identify key trends that have affected them and were caused by COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, we used statistics from the World Bank, the EU statistic, the Organization

for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the International Labor Organization (ILO), and we analyzed the EU labor market and identified the main reasons for rising unemployment. Based on the analysis, it was found that 17.8% of all workers in Northern, Southern, and Western Europe are migrant workers, who played an important role in the response to COVID-19 by working in critical sectors as well as in the sectors most affected by the crisis. Secondly, it was necessary to determine how many Ukrainian migrants work in the EU and how different factors affect the volume of migration. For this reason, an analysis of EU statistics of the issued residence permits in EU countries was carried out. Based on the research, it was found that Ukraine was an absolute leader (25.6% of the total number of first residence permits issued in the EU-27) in the total number of the residence permits issued in the EU. The study identified conflicting trends in labor migration in the EU; firstly, due to the implementation of quarantine restrictions and significant returns of migrant workers to their native countries, the EU countries faced a great need for low- and middle-skilled workers, because despite the large number of such vacancies, EU citizens did not seek a "migrant" work. Furthermore, Fasani and Mazza (2020) propose to review the EU's migration policy, as the current situation shows that the low-skilled workers are especially over-represented in a number of key occupations that are vital in the fight against COVID-19. Secondly, it is necessary to research the World Bank's forecasts for the international remittances decline in Europe and Ukraine in particular. According to experts' projections, remittances were expected to decline in Europe and Central Asia by 16.1% or $48 billion in 2020 and by 7.5% or up to $44 billion in 2021 (The World Bank, 2020). The positive and negative consequences of remittances of labor migrants on the economy of Ukraine have been determined.

Results and discussion

According to the Migration Data Portal (2021), on February 4, 2021, emigrants from the 20 countries with the highest number of COVID-19 cases (USA, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France, Belgium, Spain, etc.) accounted for 31% of the total international migrant stock and they had sent the estimated 37% of all remittances globally to their countries of origin in 2019. According to the calculations made in the research, immigrants accounted for at least 4.5% of the population in 12 of the 20 countries with the highest number of COVID-19 cases, and this share is more than 10% in eight of these countries. Compared to the global share of international migrants making up 3.6% of the total population, international migrants are overrepresented in these countries. However, it should be noted that the policy of movement restrictions and the lockdowns implemented by many countries have significantly affected the mobility of migrants.

Between March 11, 2020, when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, and February 1, 2021, the total number of movement restrictions implemented around the world increased to nearly 107,000 (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2020). At the same time, 167 countries, territories or areas (CTAs) issued 751 exceptions to these restrictions, thus enabling mobility. Countries around the world implemented various border control measures on the grounds of preventing further spread of the coronavirus, these measures ranging from state-specific travel restrictions to complete border closures, and some countries have gone so far as to dismantle the entire international asylum processes.

According to Meer and Villegas (2020), roughly 196 CTAs have imposed restrictions, with the bulk of those (178 CTAs) imposing over 201 mobility restrictions per CTA (Table 1). At the same time, it is worth to mention the research of the IOM (2020) that assessed 2,619 Points of Entry (PoEs) across 156 CTAs

including border crossings, airports, sea border points, and internal transit points and found that only 9% remained open. According to the IOM (2020), 1078 PoEs were fully closed, 939 partially closed, 136 closed for entry, 24 closed for exit, 94 open for commercial traffic only, 244 open, and for 104 the status was unknown.

Table 1.
Travel restrictions and exceptions, by number of restrictions and CTAs, 2020

Most common restriction measures	
Entry restrictions for passengers from restricted CTAs	38,293 restrictions
Medical requirements (such as quarantine)	5,738 restrictions
Visa requirements/arrangements changed	422 restrictions
Restricted nationality	299 restriction
Other	1,208 restrictions
Key travel restriction exceptions	
Nationals (including family)	97 CTAs
Residents (including family)	82 CTAs
Humanitarian workers	36 CTAs
Healthcare workers	22 CTAs
Those in need of urgent medical treatment	12 CTAs
Cross-border workers	7 CTAs
Other	56 CTAs

Note. Adapted from "The impact of COVID-19 on global migration," by N. Meer and L. Villegas, 2020, *Governance of the Local Integration of Migrants and Europe's Refugees (GLIMER)*, p. 4 (https://www.glimer.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Global-Migration-Policies-and-COVID-19.pdf). In the public domain.

On March 17, 2020, the EU Commission and the European Council agreed to adopt a 30-day coordinated restriction on non-essential travel to the EU as a measure to contain the further spread of COVID-19 within the Schengen Area. This restriction was later extended to the month of May. At the same time, this travel restriction included exceptions for specific categories of travelers and ensured the free movement of workers, especially in the health care and food sectors (Meer & Villegas, 2020).

According to the study of the ILO (2018), migrants accounted for 17.8% of all workers in Northern, Southern, and Western Europe. Moreover, almost one in five workers in the EU was a migrant who was threatened with dismissal due to restrictions, lockdowns, economic activity slowdown, and business closure. At the same time, it should be noted that migrants play a significant role in the critical health sector in the 20 countries with the highest rates of COVID-19, for example, in 2015–2016 in the UK 33% of doctors and 22% of nurses were foreigners (OECD, 2019).

Migrants make a significant proportion of employment not only in critical sectors but also in the sectors most affected by the crisis. Thus, more than 13% of all employees employed in services and sales are foreigners in seven of the 20 countries with the highest number of COVID-19 cases. In addition, according to the information provided in the Database on Immigrants in OECD (2016) Countries, more than 9% of all skilled agricultural, forestry, and fisheries workers in five of these countries were foreigners. On average, 13% of all key workers in the EU are immigrants.

According to the research of Fasani and Mazza (2020), it was found out that all the key occupations in which migrants are over-represented are low-qualified ones. For example, more than a third of cleaners and helpers, more than a quarter of workers in mining and construction sectors, stationary plants, and machine operators, and one in five workers in food processing are migrants. Extra-EU citizens alone account for more than 25% of cleaners and helpers, 17% of mining and construction workers, and 14% of personal care workers.

Restrictive measures implemented by EU countries, as well as Ukraine, have led to sharp restrictions on population mobility, as well as the suspension of enterprises and even sectors where migrants are traditionally employed. Thus, it can be assumed that labor migrants, including Ukrainian ones, are one of the groups most affected by the loss of work, earnings, and adequate social and healthcare protection in the recipient countries due to the spread of COVID-19. The disappointing economic situation in the EU is reflected in the labor market; in particular we can observe the rise in unemployment, which in turn also affects the volume of migration.

According to Eurostat (2020a) estimates, there is a significant reduction in the number of jobs, resulting in the reduction of household's wage income, unemployment rising in the Euro area in 2020. Thus, the unemployment rate for the Euro area increased to 7.9% or 12,8 thousand persons in 2020 when in 2019 it was 6.7% or 12,4 thousand persons; while the figure for the EU-27 as a whole went up to 7.1% other words 15.0 thousand persons were unemployed in the EU-27 in 2020, when in 2019 this figure was 14,4 thousand persons.

Grzegorczyk and Wolff (2020) undertook a research and noted the significant unemployment increase among EU youth as younger generations are facing a harsher labor market than older generations. According to the data it can be concluded that the unemployment rate in European countries had an upward trend. In particular, in December 2020 in the EU-27, the unemployment rate was 7.5%, in the Eurozone-19 it was 8.3%, and in Ukraine the rate was 9.7%. For example, in 2019 the unemployment rate in the EU-27 was 6.7%, in the Eurozone it was 9 7.5%, and in Ukraine it was 8.6%. From the above mentioned data it can be seen that there is a slight unemployment increase in the EU-27, especially compared to 11.4% in 2013. This situation may confirm that most of the business environment has been able to adapt to quarantine requirements and continue to operate through the use of modern innovative technologies and a flexible management system.

In addition, the measures taken by individual countries to simplify the procedure for migrant workers' movement were of great importance. A number of European countries invited foreigners for seasonal work and even organized their transportation. In particular, in the spring and summer of 2020, charter flights were organized from Ukraine to Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, Finland, and the United Kingdom (Libanova, 2020).

According to Unian (2020), Ukraine and Finland agreed to return the Ukrainians to seasonal work as the country planned to attract 15,000 Ukrainians to seasonal work. In addition, the Finnish government has increased the quota for agricultural workers from non-EU countries. Another example is Italy's policy on legalizing migrants and attracting workers employed in the agricultural sector or household, including the ones from Ukraine. The new rules will allow extra-EU citizens to obtain a six-month residence permit if they are agricultural or domestic workers and entered Italy before March 8, 2020. The Portuguese government also took similar steps. To confirm this information, we used Eurostat (2020b) data, according to which migrants were mainly employed in the areas such as service-providing, construction, and agriculture in 2019. The highest employment rate of non-EU residents in 2019 was observed in the household sector (13.3%), as well as in the provision of individual services. Only 1% of non-EU residents were employed in the field of public administration and defense, and 2% in the field of business administration.

It is also important to determine the number of Ukrainian migrants that work in the EU and how different factors affect the volume of migration. In 2019, almost three million first residence permits were issued in the EU-27 to citizens of non-member countries, which is the highest value recorded over the most recent decade for which data are available (2009–2019). The number of first residence permits that were issued increased by 5.8% (or 163,000) compared with 2018, continuing an upward trend. It is necessary to point out that citizens of Ukraine (received the highest number of first residence permits

(25.6 % of the total number of first residence permits issued in the EU-27), ahead of citizens of Morocco (133,000 or 4.5%), India (131,000 or 4.4%), China including Hong Kong (110,000 or 3.7%), and Brazil (101,000 or 3.4%). Among the EU Member States, Poland issued the highest number (724,000) of first residence permits in 2019, followed by Germany (460,000), Spain (320,000), France (285,000), Italy (176,000), the Czech Republic (117,000), the Netherlands (102,000), and Sweden (102,000) (Eurostat, 2019).

Poland was the principal destination for Ukrainian citizens, as 79.2 % of all the resident permits issued to the Ukrainians in the EU-27 in 2019 were issued in this country. Slightly more than 87% (660,000) of all the Ukrainians who were granted a residence permit in the EU-27 in 2019 received their permit for employment-related reasons. Thus, the main reason of Ukrainians' migration growth is the opportunity to earn more, compared to only 2.5% of all the Ukrainians who were granted a residence permit in the EU-27 in 2019 who received their permit for education reason, and 5.3% of them with family reason. Despite the pandemic, it is assumed that the situation did not change significantly in 2020, and the Ukrainians continue to be the leaders in the number of the first residence permits that were issued in EU countries.

The situation in recent months suggests that despite the slowdown in economic growth and the rise in unemployment in the EU, people in these countries do not seek a "migrant" job. This problem was highlighted by Grzegorczyk and Wolff (2020), who indicated a significant increase in unemployment among young people aged 15–24 due to the pandemic. It is logical that the main reason for the migration of the Ukrainians is the economic one, the opportunity and desire to earn more, as well as the low assessment of the Ukrainians' prospects for economic development in their country. If the situation in Ukraine does not change cardinally, and if they cannot earn 70% of the wages they earn abroad, then the migration will not be reduced. Moreover, it will significantly increase, especially if a number of EU countries simplify the procedures of work visas issuance for the Ukrainians.

External labor migration has both negative and positive effects. The volume of remittances of migrants is undoubtedly considered to be a significant positive effect. According to The World Bank (2020) research, in 2020 the volume of remittances of migrants was projected to decline to 14%. According to the assessment of World Bank (2020), the volume of remittances to low- and middle-income countries will decrease by 7% to $508 billion, and in 2021 a further decline for another 7.5% to $470 billion is projected. Based on the research of World Bank (2020), remittance decline will affect all the regions, with the largest reductions expected in Europe and Central Asia (27.5%), Sub-Saharan Africa (23.1%), the Middle East and North Africa (19.6%), East Asia and Pacific (13%). Factors that have the greatest impact on the reduction of remittances include the slowdown in economic development, rising unemployment in host countries, implementation of movement restrictions, fall in oil prices, currency fluctuations, etc. Therefore, it is logical that all these factors have a negative impact on migration and lead to a greater unemployment rate among the migrants. Consequently, remittances will decline, and, as a result, consumer demand reduction can be expected, as well as the employment reduction in ECA countries and increased pressure on the foreign exchange market. According to the World Bank experts' projections, remittances in the ECA countries are expected to decrease by 16.1% or $48 billion in 2020 and by 7.5% or up to $44 billion in 2021.

Ukraine remained the region's largest recipient of remittances, received as estimated $14 billion in remittances in 2020, that is about 13% less than in 2019 (Ratha, De, Ju Kim, Plaza, Seshan, & Yameogo, 2020). Russia is the second-largest recipient of remittances in the region, with an estimated $9 billion after a decrease of 15.8%. Meanwhile, remittances to Ukraine dropped by 14% in Q2 2020 compared to Q2 2019, a decline similar to that seen during the 2009 financial crisis.

According to official statistics of the National Bank of Ukraine (2021), in 2020 the volume of remittances of migrant workers increased to $12.121 billion, which is $200 million more than in 2019

($11.921 billion). Most remittances (27.6%) were sent from Poland, than from the United States (9.7%), the Russian Federation (8.6%), the United Kingdom (8%), and Czech Republic (7.2%).

Undoubtedly, the macroeconomic consequences of remittances are complex and contradictory. On the one hand, remittances from migrant workers stimulate the growth of consumer demand. Consequently, the development of industries and the creation of new workplaces ensure the growth of national income, have a positive impact on the balance of payments, and reduce poverty. On the other hand, it is necessary to ensure an effective government policy to stimulate and direct remittances of migrants, as they may also have negative consequences. They are primarily manifested in increased risks, including export reduction due to the national currency exchange rate rising, imported goods demand increase, reduction of aggregate labor supply in the labor market, rising inflation, rising prices of land and real estate in certain regions.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the impact of the pandemic on external labor migration, employment, and remittances in 2020 was significant due to the implementation of quarantine restrictions in almost all the countries, both in Europe and worldwide. The impact reflects in the recession, the closure of certain businesses, increase of the unemployment rate, etc. However, despite the economic activity slowdown in the EU, it should be noted that the countries of the region faced a great need for employees of working professions that traditionally have been occupied by migrants, because EU citizens did not seek such jobs. As a result, from the second quarter of 2020 the number of issued residence permits in EU countries has increased. The study identified the need to change EU policies based on the involvement of highly skilled migrants, as the analysis shows that low-skilled workers are employed in critical sectors of EU countries and are particularly widely represented in key occupations that are vital in the fight against COVID-19. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct an effective and balanced demographic policy, to develop a mechanism for attracting remittances of migrant workers to the country's economy. A good example of such a practice is Moldova, where they used PARE 1 + 1 program to promote small and medium business. They also developed and implemented a circular migration program between Ukraine and the largest EU recipient countries, to implement legal employment programs abroad that provide adequate social protection for migrants, etc.

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