Title: The circular migration regime in Moldova: A case study on the division of labour in European food production

Abstract

Whereas in the past agricultural workers in Switzerland, were mainly recruited from Southern Europe (Moser 2013), for about a decade seasonal workers from Eastern Europe have increasingly been employed during the short, labour-intensive harvest months (Chau et al. 2015). Currently around 30,000 people travel to Switzerland each year to work in the agricultural sector (SEM 2016). What we observe is the phenomenon of circular migration in the organization of agricultural labour power in Switzerland. Many migrant farmworkers themselves operate as smallholders at home and have dependents they have to take care of. While they perform harvest work in Switzerland, other people take care of their agricultural subsistence and family members in their home countries. This results in transnational labour and care chains. Owing to workers’ periodic absences in rural areas and the ensuing absence of care, care chains arise not only in relation to children and the elderly, but also the maintenance of plants and animals.

The case study presented here focuses on postsoviet Moldova, a country on the so-called periphery of Europe. It thus deals with one of the countries from which labour to Europe is recruited, although Moldova is not part of the European Union and hence does not fit into the two-circles model.

Looking from the periphery at the entangled histories of the current agricultural recruitment structures, this paper aims (1) to analyse the circular migration regimes within Moldova as part of an inner-European postcolonial/postsoviet (agricultural) labour regime (2) and the effects of these forms of labour and life relationships on migrants.