



**STUDY-RELATED MIGRATION
FROM A POST-SOVIET UNRECOGNIZED STATE:
THE CASE OF MOLDOVAN ETHNICS
FROM THE TRANSNISTRIAN REGION**

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Abstract. This article aims to present a comprehensive analysis of study-related migration of Moldovan ethnics from the Transnistrian region, also known as a post-Soviet unrecognized entity. The Transnistrian region is a narrow strip of land located between Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, which is affected by massive migration flows. The young people of the Transnistrian region are inclined to migrate permanently to neighbouring countries and Western EU member states. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of migration from the disputed land is an under-researched topic. Therefore, this study aims to determine the particularities of this phenomenon, the main root causes and the perception of students concerning studies abroad, life in a disputed territory, and the impact of the unresolved status issue. The research is based on a two-pronged approach in order to determine the complexity and the magnitude of study-related migration. It presents the results of 20 semi-structured interviews conducted with students who graduated from Moldovan-administered Latin-script schools and it analyses the data provided by Transnistrian and Moldovan institutions. A special attention is given to graduates of Romanian language schools because their decision to migrate is influenced by a more diverse combination of push and pull factors.

Keywords: students, migration, the Transnistrian region, Romanian language schools, education.

Introduction

We live in a globalized world in which countries and societies from different corners of the globe are becoming more interdependent than ever. The development of transport infrastructure, visa liberalization policies and trans-border mobility initiatives have all contributed to the facilitation of the movement of people, goods and capital compared to previous centuries. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the former socialist bloc produced a significant rise in migration flows. As a result, countries that emerged in the post-Soviet space are source and transit states as well as destination countries. Moreover, the early 1990s were marked by migration within national territories due to violent conflicts, especially in countries such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova. For example, according to Mansoor and Quillin, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict generated around 576.000 displaced people by 2003 (Mansoor & Quillin 2007, 4), while the UNHCR report states that in 2009 the Azeri Government estimated 1 million people who still remained refugees and displaced persons in Azerbaijan (UNHCR 2009, 3). At the same time, it is essential to mention that the separatist states from the post-Soviet region have transformed into important source and transit zones for victims of human trafficking, including forced labour.

The collapse of the Soviet Union facilitated student mobility and generated an increase in the flow of migrant students (Ginnerskov-Dahlberg 2022, 6). It is estimated that migrant students from post-Soviet states constitute nearly 8% of the total number of international students (Chankseliani 2016). The post-Soviet youth generations have grown up with mobility projects and programmes for young people, open borders and freedom of movement, respectively. Migration represents both an attractive option and a necessity for young people and their families from Eastern European countries (Abbott et al. 2010, 591; Marcu 2015, 72). Previous studies present the mobility of students from different perspectives such as a privileged activity involving individuals who belong to the upper class (Ginnerskov-Dahlberg 2022, 2), the desire of young generations to explore and benefit from new experiences and life-styles (Abbott et al. 2010, 582; Manolova 2018, 64), but also a phenomenon driven by feelings

of disappointment concerning the socio-economic and the political context in source countries (Manolova 2018, 64).

Researchers have also reflected on the differences between migration patterns of students from Eastern Europe and Western Europe. Sandu, Toth & Tudor (2018) documented the mobility of young Romanians in terms of migration experiences and motivations. The authors argue that young people from Eastern Europe are primarily motivated to migrate because of job opportunities and welfare. In the case of young individuals from Western European countries, life-style factors represent the primary motivation behind migration.

Previous studies on student migration from Moldova (Abbott et al. 2010; Sintov & Cojocaru 2013), a post-Soviet country, emphasize the prevalence of economic factors behind this phenomenon. Nevertheless, as Ginnerskov-Dahlberg (2022, 10) states, different scholars underlined the idea that study-related migration cannot be reduced only to economic factors. In her study, Manolova (2018) stresses the idea that decision-making processes concerning migration are not exclusively led by a rational cost-benefit analysis, but also by personal aspirations, life stories and complex feelings. Another factor which favours the phenomenon of study-related migration is the possibility of family reunification (Marcu 2015, 72; Ostavania 2017). Some students perceive family reunification as a moral obligation, particularly when their parents become labour migrants to ensure their education abroad. At the same time, Sandu, Toth & Tudor (2018, 2) state that the key drivers of migration are strongly related to dissatisfactions in regard to different spheres of life or the desire of migrant students to improve certain aspects of their daily life.

White (2010, 578) introduced the concept of “socialised into migration,” which is relevant for the case of migrant students from Eastern European countries, including Moldova. In their research, White outlines the idea that young people from Poland have grown up with the intention to migrate, particularly because of mass migration from the country since 1989. The perception that life abroad is much better has been installed in students' minds since childhood (Ginnerskov-Dahlberg 2022, 11). Other studies (Vigh 2009; Salazar 2013) associated migration with an “act of imagination”. Migrant students tend to imagine their

destination countries and life abroad as being better than their life in the source countries. It has been argued that young migrants turned into migration with a particular vision of a more prosperous life through which they will be able to fulfill current expectations and desires (Manolova 2018, 65).

The phenomenon of study-related migration is characteristic for a wide range of Eastern European countries, both EU and non-EU member states (Ginnerskov-Dahlberg 2022, 9). The political and economic chaos which appeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union as well as the long transition to democracy and capitalism determined young people to experience a sense of insecurity about their prospects for fulfilling lives (Ibid., 9). In this context, migration from Eastern European states such as Moldova is perceived as a “necessity” by students. For example, Abbott et al. (2010, 591) in their study on youth mobility from Moldova suggest that young Moldovans “turned to migration as a solution”. The research findings of this study demonstrate that Moldovan students would prefer to live and work in Moldova if they had access to adequate working conditions and well-paid jobs. Furthermore, the researchers argue that most of Moldovan young migrants orientate toward EU member states, particularly to Western EU countries and Romania.

The Republic of Moldova is one of the former Soviet republics where the rate of population decline remains especially high. Massive outmigration from Moldova combined with other demographic factors such as low birth rates and high mortality has led to a rapid population decline in recent decades. The National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova in its statistical yearbook (2021) indicates that there are 155,322 migrants (based on border crossing data from 2019), while the IOM Moldova estimates that around 1 million Moldovan citizens live abroad, either as temporary or permanent migrants. Within this context, Moldova is referred to as one of the top countries with the fastest population decline in the world, with an average annual decline in population of 1.8% (UN Moldova 2020, 19). Moreover, the Republic of Moldova has had one of the highest rates of youth migration (130 young people per 1000 population) in Europe and Central Asia (UN & Government of the Republic of Moldova 2005, 21). According to the UN

Moldova (2020, 20), Moldovan young graduates emigrate for educational purposes, and the vast majority of them intend to settle permanently abroad. Additionally, it states that more than three quarters of young Moldovans think about leaving Moldova at some point. Another study (UNICEF 2019) underlines that young people from Moldova who have family members abroad are more likely to emigrate. The outmigration of young people contributes to a major loss of human capital and leads to a smaller economically active population (UN Moldova 2020, 20).

This study selected a specific region from Moldova for investigation: the Transnistrian region. There were several reasons behind this decision. First of all, the Transnistrian territory, which is a disputed land by Moldovan authorities and Transnistrian separatists supported by the Russian Federation, is one of the most affected regions of mass migration. Between 1998 and 2020, the total population of the Transnistrian region declined by 30%. Secondly, migration from a post-Soviet unrecognized state is a particularly interesting case study because of the complexity of factors behind this phenomenon. It can imply a wide range of distinct factors: the unresolved status issue of the separatist region, lack of access to certain goods and services which are common and ordinary in recognized states, geopolitical insecurity, strict control over public life by local “security services”, a strong anti-Western ideology which persists in the region, human rights issues and restrictions of fundamental liberties. It should be noted that all these aspects shape individuals' perceptions and views on migration as well as on their migration intentions.

The Transnistrian region is a separatist state between the western part of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, situated on the left bank of the Dniester river. It is also known as the Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic (hereafter “PMR”). Moldova's breakaway territory declared its independence in 1990, a period characterized by major political turmoil, socio-economic instability and the national liberation movement. The hostilities between Moldovan authorities and separatist forces resulted in an armed conflict which ended in 1992, after a cease-fire agreement was signed (OSCE 1994). The agreement stipulated the creation of a buffer zone (also known as the Security Zone) between Moldovan government-controlled territories and the territories of the unrecognized state. The presence of Russian military forces during these three decades

as well as the inheritance of one of the largest ammunition depots in Europe have solidified the position of the pro-Russian separatist authorities. The Transnistrian region remained locked in a state of “frozen conflict” and it is not recognized as an independent state by the international community.

Throughout this study, the terms “right bank” and “left bank” territories refer to territorial units controlled by the Moldovan Government and the separatist authorities, respectively. Moreover, the term “Transnistrian region” is used instead of “Transnistria” because it does not imply the recognition of the so-called “PMR”.

Ostavnaia (2017) analyzed the phenomenon of migration from the Transnistrian region, including student migration, and concluded that ethnic Moldovans tend to pursue higher education in EU member states. In her research, the author indicates several factors which have contributed to this phenomenon. First of all, she emphasized a direct link between study-related migration and the unrecognized status of the Transnistrian region. Therefore, one of the most important motivations of young migrants is to receive higher education in line with international standards, in a country recognized by the international community. Another aspect stressed by her research is the importance of financial security when choosing the country of destination. Migrant students tend to choose destination countries which are perceived as affordable in terms of living expenses. Building on the empirical data of their studies, Ostavnaia (2016) and Fomenko (2019) argue that economic factors represent the key drivers of migration from the Transnistrian region. Moreover, Fomenko (2017) found that migrant students who benefit from the system of allocated quotas in Romanian, Ukrainian or Russian universities tend to express their desire to settle permanently abroad. The fact that migrant students prefer permanent migration over temporary migration is also outlined by other scholars (Guth & Gill 2008; Gherheș, Dragomir & Cernicova-Buca 2020, 10).

Despite the growing interest in conducting research on study-related migration, there is still a lack of literature dedicated to the mobility of students from post-Soviet countries (Ginnerskov-Dahlberg 2022, 4). Another clear gap in the literature is the lack of studies investigating student migration from post-Soviet frozen conflict areas: the Transnistrian region,

Donetsk, Lugansk, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh. Moreover, to my knowledge, no prior detailed studies have been conducted on study-related migration of Moldovan ethnics from the Transnistrian region. Therefore, this research aims to shed light on a niche topic in the academic literature and migration studies in general. Building on the empirical findings resulting from interviews conducted with Moldovan migrant students, this article aspires to reflect on different motivations, contradictory feelings, desires and intentions behind student migration from an unrecognized country.

This article is structured in three parts. First, after the introduction, I present the methodology and data collection procedures. Second, I briefly present the Transnistrian context relevant for understanding the background behind student migration. Third, after I briefly analyze the phenomenon of migration from the separatist territory and its magnitude, as well as the context in which the Moldovan-administered Latin-script schools have operated between 1990-2022 as a means to provide the larger background against which Moldovan migrant students lived and grew up, I present the empirical findings of this research.

Methodology and data collection

The methodology of this study centers on qualitative analysis, combining semi-structured interviews and documentary research. The lack of research on migration from the Transnistrian region in general, and on study-related migration of Moldovan ethnics in particular compelled me to opt for a qualitative approach. Qualitative inquiry is suited for this paper, as it aims to reveal individual migration experiences, the diversity of motivations, aspirations and perceptions (Manolova 2018, 64).

The empirical analysis is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 migrant students from the Transnistrian region and the Security Zone, who graduated from Moldovan-administered Latin-script schools. It includes migrant students who have studied in the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Netherlands, Germany, and France. The interviewed migrant students are Moldovan ethnics who lived and studied in a region populated primarily by Russian-speaking individuals, who identify themselves

with Russian or Ukrainian ethnic groups. The interviewees were identified through the snowball technique. In order to enhance the diversity of the study, the respondents were selected from different districts of the disputed territory: the city of Tiraspol (also known as the “capital” of the Transnistrian region), the city of Bender/Tighina, the city of Rybnitsa, Varnita village, Nezavertailovca village, and Blijinii Hutor village. Tiraspol and Bender are the two largest cities under the *de facto* control of Transnistrian separatist authorities. Literature review was conducted before carrying out interviews with migrant students. The information and data from reports and documents issued by international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (hereafter IOM), International Labour Organization (hereafter ILO), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (hereafter OSCE) were analysed. Furthermore, statistics provided by the regional statistical service were also investigated. Moldovan authorities exclude the Transnistrian region from its official statistics, as the disputed territory is not under the effective control of the central government. Therefore, the data and information presented in this article regarding the Transnistrian region refer to the statistics provided by the so-called Transnistrian Statistical Service.

The empirical data collected through semi-structured interviews allows for a more nuanced understanding of students' perceptions regarding migration from a post-Soviet separatist region. Based on the empirical findings collected, this study intends to cover the following aspects: Reasons for migration from the Transnistrian region and the context behind migration (life in a separatist region where anti-Western and anti-Romanian attitudes prevail, the experience of studying in Moldovan-administered Latin-script schools, pre-migration socio-economic situation); Main destination countries to identify the most preferred destinations for migration of Moldovan ethnics; Perceptions of young migrants regarding the political status of the Transnistrian region and everyday life in an unrecognized state; The experience of studying abroad and adaptation experiences in destination countries; Migration intentions and the plans of students after graduating from foreign universities.

These topics were addressed because of the complexity of study-related migration of Moldovan ethnics from the Transnistrian region. In

comparison with other case studies related to students' migration, this one documents the migration experiences of students from an unrecognized state, where the Russian military units are still present. This young generation of Moldovan ethnics struggled to have access to goods and services which young people from recognized states take for granted. As the world becomes more globalized, the Transnistrian region remains internationally isolated. Moreover, the interviewees studied in a hostile environment, where Moldovan-administered Latin-script schools were labeled by separatist authorities as "institutions which educate and train terrorists" (CU SENS 2022). Another aspect which should be considered is the fact that these migrant students who belong to the Moldovan ethnicity and speak Romanian as their mother tongue lived and studied in a region with a strong anti-Romanian ideology. The political context shaped students' sense of attachment and belonging to the place they lived and studied. In the separatist territory, many locals distrust Moldovan students as they are perceived as pro-Romanian and disloyal to local authorities, while in the Western part of Moldova they are considered "separatists".

By covering the first topic, I collected information about the pre-migration life of students, in order to determine the key drivers of migration. The particularities of study-related migration of Moldovan ethnics from the Transnistrian region were also identified based on the questions about reasons of migration and the background behind their migration experience. Besides the background of migration, it was important to identify some of the most preferred destination countries among students, with the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the pull factors and motivations behind migration. Moreover, the questions concerning destination countries allowed for the identification of students' perceptions regarding the main differences between the source region and their destinations.

Considering that Moldovan migrant students lived in an unrecognized state and a frozen conflict area which is highly militarized, I aimed to identify the importance of the geopolitical situation and security issues in the context of study-related migration. In addition, the interviews aimed to document how the experience of being part of an ethnic minority in a region with a strong anti-Romanian ideology

shaped students' decisions to migrate. Furthermore, the interviews included questions concerning students' migration intentions and plans aiming to shed light on the magnitude of migration of Moldovan ethnic students from the separatist region.

From an ethical perspective, the research is based on the principles of confidentiality, anonymity, mutual trust, and feedback from migrant students. All identifying details remain completely confidential and anonymous. All respondents read and signed an informed consent form. The participants were informed about the scope of this study. Moreover, they were informed about the possibility of withdrawing from the study by advising the interviewer. This study did not select respondents based on their social, economic and demographic background, and it separately treated each case.

The Transnistrian context

Demographics

The Transnistrian region has a population of nearly 465,800 persons. In 2020, out of the total number of inhabitants in the region, 328,400 people lived in urban areas, while 137,400 in rural zones. The active population of the Transnistrian region is only 244,600, while 18,700 are minors or retirees. Moreover, there are three major ethnic groups in the region: Moldovans (153,700), Russians (158,400), and Ukrainians (124,400) (Transnistrian Statistical Service 2021). Russians and Ukrainians together represent the majority of the population. Even though the so-called constitution of the "PMR" declared Russian, "Moldovan" and Ukrainian as the official languages of the country, the Russian language has been the lingua franca of the region. It is important to outline that the so-called Moldovan language in Cyrillic is used only in the Transnistrian region.

During the Soviet period, the disputed region represented the most industrialized area of the country, as it concentrated the biggest manufacturing plants, the largest power station of Moldova and the largest cement plants (World Bank 1998, 3). The economic system of the Transnistrian region has remained dependent on heavy industry. Since

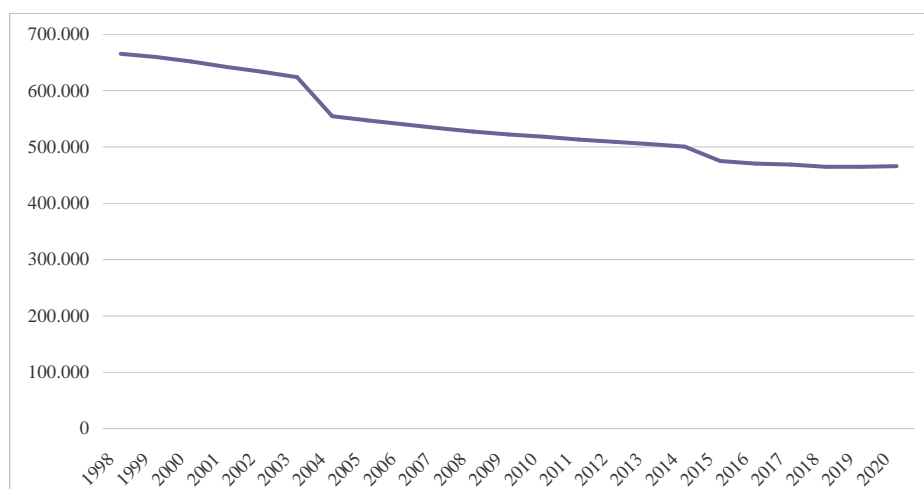
the end of the armed conflict, the region did not pursue the path to economic reforms and remained isolated to a large extent from the international economic system. Transnistria's exports are oriented mostly towards the CIS. Moreover, the Transnistrian region currently remains heavily dependent on financial and political support from the Russian Federation (Ibid.). In addition, the Transnistrian economy relies on cheap energy resources. In 2003, the gas debt of the region reached 900 million USD, which represents the GDP of the region for three years (CISR 2003, 8). The vast majority of Transnistria's economy is strictly controlled by Sheriff, a business conglomerate which also represents the economic face of the separatist regime. Due to the absence of antitrust legislation and the strong connection with state institutions and important political figures, Sheriff has succeeded in maintaining its unchallenged monopoly position on the market (Wesolowsky 2021). As a result, both small enterprises and the inhabitants of the region are deprived of the benefits of free and fair competition.

After the end of the war, in their fight for legitimacy, separatist forces concentrated on nation-building and the institution building processes. As a result, the disputed region has its own state institutions, law enforcement agencies, legislative framework, currency, flag, national anthem, and the so-called Transnistrian citizenship. The so-called Transnistrian citizenship does not grant the possibility to travel abroad with a recognized passport. As a result, the constitution of the "PMR" allows dual citizenship. Also, the inhabitants of unrecognized states do not have access to things which are considered ordinary in recognized countries: youth participation in Erasmus+ mobility programs, international bank transfers, international companies, foreign TV shows, etc (De Wall 2018, 7).

The United Nations Human Rights Council (Hammarberg 2018) and Freedom House (2021a) in their reports emphasize that besides poverty, the inhabitants of the Transnistrian region struggle with additional issues such as difficulties in accessing international development assistance, strong self-censorship and severe restrictions on freedom of expression and belief, property rights, civil and political rights. Freedom in the World report (2021) categorized the Transnistrian region as Not Free, in comparison with Moldova, which is Partly Free. The overall score awarded to the Transnistrian region

for civil rights is 14 out of 60 and the score awarded for political rights is 10 out of 40. In comparison, Moldova's score for political rights is 26 out of 40, while for civil rights is 35 out of 60 (Freedom House 2021b).

The estimated demographic trends in the Transnistrian region are presented in Figure 1. According to the statistical yearbooks of the regional Statistical Service, the population of the Transnistrian region accounted for nearly 665,700 in 1998 (Transnistrian Statistical Service 2003). After 22 years, the current population comprises an estimated 465,800 individuals. Over the last two decades, the population has decreased by almost 200,000 persons. Nevertheless, between 2019-2020, the demographic decline stabilized. In 2019 and 2020, the net migration rate was 3285 and 3820, respectively (Transnistrian Statistical Service 2021). These stabilization trends could be influenced by travel restrictions imposed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited particularly the mobility of the returned short-term migrants.



Source: Compiled by the author from statistical yearbooks (2003-2021) of the Transnistrian Statistical Service.

Fig. 1. Demographic trends in the Transnistrian region (2003-2021)

Between 1998-2020, the rate of natural increase in the Transnistrian region was always negative and had fluctuated over time between – 5,4 and 2,1. Moreover, the number of registered marriages decreased from 3929 in 1998

to 1797 in 2020, accounting for 1,8 marriages per 1,000 people (Transnistrian Statistical Service 2021). Additionally, since 1998, there has been a declining trend in the number of people who live in rural areas. Every year, hundreds of people leave the countryside and migrate towards urban centres, particularly to Tiraspol and Bender/Tighina. The number of rural communities in the Transnistrian region which are abandoned increases every year. For example, Pobeda village, located on the eastern bank of the Dniester river, had about 3 residents in 2019 (Grau 2019). This phenomenon of “ghost villages” is caused both by internal and international migration.

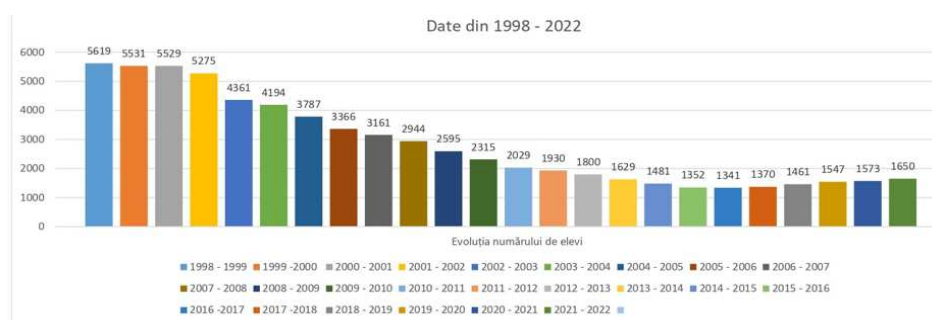
Massive migration of economically active workforce, including young people and highly skilled persons, represents one of the biggest challenges faced by the Transnistrian region. Transnistrian authorities do not provide information about the share of highly skilled migrants, age distribution of migrants and the share of young people in the total flow. However, the size of youth migration from the Transnistrian region is comparable to the estimated size of migration of young people out of the right bank territories of the Republic of Moldova. According to the IOM, Moldovan migrants younger than 39 years old represent 62% of the total number of migrants (Vlădicescu & Vremis 2012). Despite the existing similarities, the migration of young people from the disputed territory has also different dynamics, particularly in terms of root causes and main destinations. Youth migration from the Transnistrian region is determined by the political status of the region, human rights abuses, ethnic discrimination, economic, and political isolation, security challenges, etc. There are generations whose entire lives were shaped by the “Transnistrian frozen conflict”. Living in a constant state of uncertainty and insecurity leads to the normalization of this “life in quotation marks”, as observed in Bryant & Hatay (2020).

Education

The interviewed migrant students graduated from Moldovan-administered Latin-script schools in the Transnistrian region, which operated in a complicated environment between 1990-2022. There are currently 8 Latin-script schools (5 lyceums, 2 gymnasiums and one boarding school for

orphans) in the Transnistrian region, which are administered by the Moldovan Ministry of Education (OSCE HCNM 2012, 24). In Dubasari, Rybnitsa, Tiraspol, Grigoriopol, Bender/Tighina and Corjova, parents and teachers insisted on maintaining the schools despite constant intimidation. Since the end of the armed conflict, the teachers of these eight Romanian language schools reported different forms of pressure, illegal interrogations, the illegal closure of schools, blocking bank accounts, unlawful deprivation of liberty and other violations. One of these 8 Latin-script schools moved to Dorotcaia, a village which is under the control of Moldovan authorities. Between 1996 and 2002, the school was officially under the administration of the separatist *de facto* authorities, but it continued teaching Romanian in the Latin script based on the Moldovan curriculum. The decision to transfer the school was taken following the closure of the school and the arbitrary dismissal of the entire teaching staff (Ibid., 14).

Since 1998-1999, the total number of students enrolled in Romanian language schools has decreased by 70.7% (see Fig. 2 below). The 2004 crisis had an immediate impact on the total number of enrolled students. In 2004, the separatist authorities closed four Romanian language schools and persecuted parents and teachers, who tried to stop the closure of the schools. Moreover, the property and the infrastructure of these schools were destroyed (OSCE HCNM 2012, 22). In some cases, parents and teachers decided to blockade themselves inside the schools. The resistance of teachers was also represented by teaching Romanian and using Latin alphabet clandestinely (Ibid., 13).



Source: Government of the Republic of Moldova (2021)

Fig. 2. Total number of pupils enrolled in the Moldovan-administered Latin-script schools in the Transnistrian region between 1998-2022

Parents and teachers from different Romanian language schools filled applications to the European Court of Human Rights, claiming that their rights to education and freedom were infringed. According to the Promo LEX Association (2021), Romanian language schools in the Transnistrian region encounter several common issues, such as the lack of own buildings, inadequate infrastructure, the learning spaces are not designed for educational activities, the risk of forcing students to enlist in the armed forces of the “PMR”, restrictions on freedom of movement of persons and goods. The Gymnasium in Corjova and the Gymnasium in Roghi were subjected to additional impediments. For example, the opening ceremonies of the academic year were supervised by local “militia” forces and electricity was cut. Furthermore, it was prohibited to play the Moldovan national anthem and to raise the Moldovan flag during the ceremony (OSCE HCNM 2012, 18). It is noteworthy to outline that there are students who have to travel about 50 km every day from their villages to the Theoretical Lyceum “Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt” located in Grigoriopol (Promo-Lex 2021).

Main findings

This section investigates the information obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 students who graduated from Moldovan-administered Latin-script schools in the Transnistrian region and the Security Zone. The information will be presented around several main topics that offer a better understanding of the perceptions of young people and the root causes which motivate migration choices. Participants included students from the Theoretical Lyceum “Lucian Blaga” in Tiraspol, the Theoretical Lyceum “Alexandru cel Bun” in Bender/Tighina, the Boarding School for Orphans in Bender/Tighina and the Theoretical Lyceum in Varnita. Furthermore, the study includes interviews carried out with students who graduated Russian language gymnasiums and Romanian schools with Cyrillic script, but who continued their education in one of those eight schools which are under the administration of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova. Most respondents (13) were enrolled in a bachelor's degree program, a third of them were

enrolled in a master's program, while one of them already finished their studies. Slightly more than half of them (11) are studying in Romania, five of them are enrolled in Moldovan universities and four are studying in other states. Also, four of the respondents are graduates of both Moldovan and Romanian universities.

Push and pull factors

This research considered several push and pull factors such as socio-economic factors, education, political and institutional determinants. The semi-structured interviews with migrant students from the Transnistrian region revealed that the socio-economic determinants represented the most important push and pull factors of migration. In a publication for IOM, Poalelungi & Mazur (2017, 10), who investigated the migration profile of the Republic of Moldova, also underline that the main push factors behind migration from Moldova continue to be economic determinants. Socio-economic factors refer to low earnings, lack of employment opportunities, high levels of poverty and unemployment, the need to improve the existing economic situation and living conditions, the search for job prospects and decent working conditions. Since the collapse of the USSR, the Transnistrian region has continued to face serious socio-economic implications due to the lack of economic reforms, high rates of unemployment, endemic corruption, weak social services, and economic isolation from international markets (Wolff 2012, 14). The socio-economic factors are also related to other significant determinants: the status of an unrecognized state, socio-economic and political isolation, low-quality democracy, and high levels of corruption. Besides the prevalence of socio-economic factors, interviews with migrant students highlighted a complex combination of push and pull factors, as illustrated by the following interview extract:

“Studying in a higher education institution in the Transnistrian region was not an option for me. I am a graduate of a Romanian school in Tiraspol and I could not continue my higher education in Romanian. Also, if I was studying in the region, my diploma

would not be recognized by a lot of countries. But my decision was not influenced only by this factor. In the Transnistrian region, I was discriminated against because I am Moldovan. I have to speak Russian everywhere, but for me it is important to have the right to speak in my mother tongue. In addition, it is difficult to find well-paid jobs in the Transnistrian region. I am specialized in interior design and I am sure I cannot find any job there. Because I live in Romania, I have more opportunities. I can travel everywhere, I can study abroad with Erasmus+, I can buy everything I want. I do not feel that my liberties are restricted. People here are much happier and they can claim their rights. In the Transnistrian region, people associate European countries with negative things. The propaganda machine has a huge impact. That is why it was difficult for me to live there.” (Migrant student, destination country: Romania)

Even though most respondents were not directly affected by endemic poverty, they perceived the regional socio-economic environment as an impediment to development. The interviewed students mentioned that life satisfaction is low in the Transnistrian region, while in their destination countries, people have a higher level of happiness. Furthermore, some students mentioned that the economy of the region is strictly controlled and completely monopolized by the Sheriff Corporation. The Sheriff holding company was formed in 1993 by Ilya Kazmaly and Victor Gushan, who are two former members of the Transnistrian “security services”. As a result, businesses owned by their families could not compete on the regional market (Wolff 2012, 11). The monopoly of the Sheriff holding company and its enormous influence on the political class forced many small businesses to move to right bank territories. Besides socio-economic issues, corruption is one of the strongest push factors invoked by participants. They perceived the phenomenon of corruption as one of the main causes of endemic poverty and low quality of life in the region.

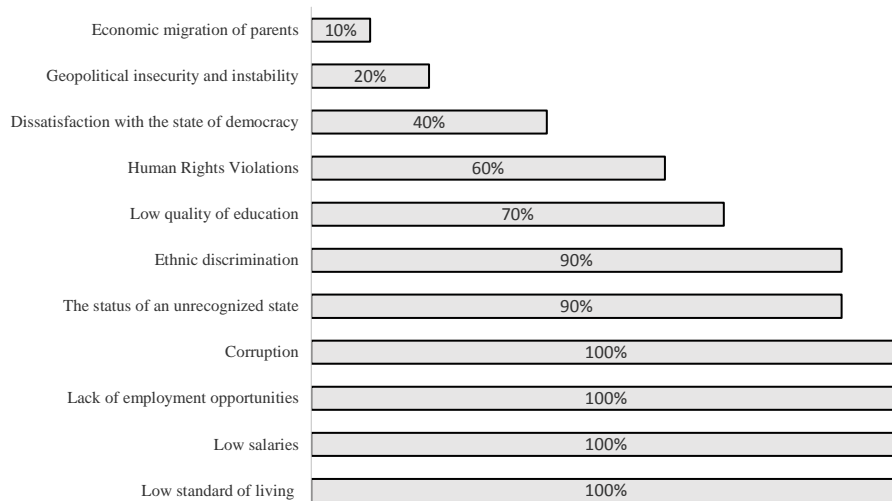


Fig. 3. Push factors overview

The interviews with Moldovan students sought out information about the perceived impact of Moldova's frozen conflict in the Transnistrian region on their decision to migrate. For that reason, the participants were asked whether the frozen conflict in the Transnistrian region and the unresolved status issue served as push factors. A minority claimed that their decision to migrate was influenced by the unresolved conflict and a feeling of insecurity related to the risk of re-emergence of an armed conflict in the Transnistrian region. This might be explained by the fact that virtually no violent confrontations took place in the region since the end of the armed conflict in 1992 (De Wall 2018, 35). However, due to the region's close proximity to the conflict zone, the interviewed migrant students are concerned about whether the Republic of Moldova will be Russia's next target. According to them, the Transnistrian region can represent an important source of instability due to the possibility of involving the armed forces of the "PMR" and Russian troops stationed on the left bank of the Dniester river in Russia's war against Ukraine.

Migrant students manifested their dissatisfaction in regard to the political life in the Transnistrian region, which is associated with human rights issues, authoritarianism, and the absence of the rule of law. This

aspect was also highlighted in Abbott et al. (2010, 586) in their research on the mobility of students from post-Soviet Moldova. According to their empirical findings, the largest part of young respondents surveyed were not satisfied with the activity of local and central state institutions. Moreover, the vast majority of them did not trust public institutions and political organizations. As observed in Abbott et al. (2010, 586), these perceptions generated “disengagement from political citizenship” or from the process of integration in the political life of the community. According to the Moldovan ethnics interviewed, democratic principles and respect for human rights are particularly now more important matters in their lives. This might be explained by the fact that their psychological frames of reference are currently more rooted in their migration experiences and their lives in democratic countries. Furthermore, the interviews outlined that migration and the possibility to live in developed and democratic countries raise awareness of the importance of human rights. At the same time, it is important to mention that the experience of being exposed to systematic discrimination based on national identity, political views and linguistic differences, determined some respondents to perceive these violations of human rights as “normal” and part of their daily life. The following interview excerpt illustrates the perception of interviewed migrant students:

“When I decided to study abroad, I was not thinking about living in a more democratic country. I was only 18 years old. Nowadays, for me it is very important to live in a country where I can enjoy all my rights and liberties. After two years in Germany, I understand the differences.” (Migrant student, destination country: Germany)

According to respondents, freedom of expression, right to education, right to property, and freedom of movement are the most frequently violated rights in the Transnistrian region. Some migrant students mentioned that due to travel restrictions imposed by separatist authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic, they could not visit their relatives. Moreover, all migrant students mentioned that ethnic Moldovans are always denied their freedom of expression, as they cannot speak their mother tongue in public places and public institutions. Among other issues,

their access to public services, education and work is restricted if they do not speak Russian. The interviewed students are strongly convinced that they do not have the possibility to claim and exercise their rights, due to oppression and the hostile attitude of the Transnistrian *de facto* authorities.

“I know that my rights were violated, especially freedom of expression and freedom of movement. These situations occurred so frequently, that it became something natural and normal. I lived in the Transnistrian region, not in the Netherlands. I tried to avoid local authorities, that is why I was silent. Also, I do not know if people in the region think about their rights. They are concerned about essential things such as food and salaries. If you have enough financial resources, you can afford to think about human rights.” (Migrant student, destination country: the Netherlands)

“During the pandemic, I could not visit my grandparents who live in a village controlled by Moldovan authorities, because freedom of movement was drastically restricted. It was permitted to cross the border only for emergency situations. It is strange that we live in the same country, but cannot see each other due to illegal checkpoints.” (Migrant student, destination country: Romania)

“I do not recognize this ghost country as an independent territory. My right to speak in my mother tongue has been breached by separatist authorities. During all my 12 years of school, I did not have access to TV shows in Romanian, Romanian books, and magazines. Transnistrian libraries do not have books in Romanian. I spoke Romanian only at school and at home.” (Migrant student, destination country: Romania)

The mobility of students from the Transnistrian region was strongly shaped by the total absence of Romanian-taught degrees. Transnistrian higher education institutions offer a limited number of programmes taught in Romanian in the Cyrillic script. For example, Transnistrian State University named after T. Shevchenko offers only one master's degree in pedagogy taught entirely in Romanian in Cyrillic script.

Furthermore, the interviewed migrant students mentioned that people with higher education diplomas issued by Transnistrian universities have limited access to foreign labour markets (except the Russian Federation). This push factor is directly correlated with the unresolved status issue. In this context, all respondents consider their destination countries more attractive because of the possibility to get academic diplomas recognised in EU member states and non-EU countries.

Besides the above-mentioned information, according to several respondents, the school curriculum and the educational offer of Transnistrian higher education institutions are not adjusted to labour market requirements. Moreover, the respondents outlined that their decision to study abroad was strongly influenced by the shortage of job opportunities in certain fields such as Information and Communication Technologies, interior design, environmental protection, and biotechnologies. Also, all respondents claimed that their aim is to perform work activities in the field of their formal education. In this context, migrant students perceived the educational offer of foreign universities as an attractive prospect.

“I study IT in Bucharest and here I have many job opportunities. In Romania, I can work in local or international companies, while in the Transnistrian region, we do not have IT companies.” (Migrant student, destination country: Romania)

In order to understand the perception of migrant students about their life in the Transnistrian region, they were asked what it means to live in an unrecognized state and whether there are differences between their destination country and the region of origin. The interviewed migrant students mentioned that even though the Transnistrian region looks like a functioning state with a separate educational and health system, police forces and national symbols, its political status and economic isolation have repercussions on their daily life. For example, the respondents mentioned several issues: the impossibility to use Transnistrian rubles abroad; the non-recognition of documents issued by Transnistrian authorities; the need to have dual citizenship; lack of access to international brands and foreign media outlets; lack of access to international mobility projects for students; limited access to financial assistance.

The interviews revealed the impact of ethnic discrimination and isolation on students' sense of community belonging. Due to discrimination, the refusal to recognize the Transnistrian region as an independent country, the restricted freedom to speak their mother tongue and to celebrate Moldovan national holidays, the respondents feel that they do not fully belong to their communities and the so-called Transnistrian national identity. Furthermore, some respondents feel disconnected from Moldovan communities due to the lack of familiarity with everyday life in Moldova as well as the lack of connection with students from the right bank territories. Also, during the interviews, several students mentioned that they did not feel protected by both the Transnistrian *de facto* authorities and Moldovan institutions. This context determined them to perceive themselves as second class citizens.

"I was treated badly by both children and adults because I am of a different nationality. I was discriminated against in public institutions, in local shops, in sports schools. You just feel that you do not belong to those communities. I am different. I speak Romanian, I listen to different news programmes, I read different books. I think that I am more open-minded. At the same time, when I participated in several youth events in Chisinau, I felt like people perceived me as a 'separatist'." (Migrant student, destination country: the Netherlands)

"It was obvious that we were different from the rest of society. For example, all Russian language schools take a day off and celebrate the Republic Day, while we go to school. We do not recognize the independence of the Transnistrian region, that is why we do not celebrate these holidays." (Migrant student, destination country: Moldova, Chisinau)

The interviews revealed that mass migration of young people from the Transnistrian region during the last three decades has led to the normalization of this phenomenon. Massive depopulation, abandoned homes and the decline in the share of young people have significantly impacted the perception of migrant students and have given birth to a sense of dissatisfaction with the local context. The respondents perceive

study-related migration as a “necessity” in the context of growing youth migration. Moreover, students perceive their destination countries as being less affected by depopulation and demographic aging.

“Many young people from the Transnistrian region think: Why should I stay here?. If I had stayed in the region, I think that many of my colleagues would not have understood me. All my friends left the region. Migration is a common thing, and it is not a choice, it is a strong necessity. I did not ask myself whether this is correct or incorrect. Also, my parents lived and worked in Italy. They know that living in a European country is better. For them, my studies in an EU country are a guarantee that I will not work like them, in unskilled jobs.” (Migrant student, destination country: France)

The most predominant pull factors are related to the possibility to receive higher salaries, to enjoy more educational opportunities, and to improve the quality of life. Migrant students perceive the level of democracy and respect for human life to be greater in destination countries. Half of the respondents stated that the level of security and safety influenced their decision to study abroad. This factor was particularly mentioned by male migrant students, who were concerned about forced military obligation, which is promoted aggressively by the separatist authorities. All male respondents voluntarily gave up their “Transnistrian citizenship” and obtained permanent residence in territories controlled by Moldovan authorities. As a result, every time they enter the region, they are obliged to fill in a migration card. After this procedure, they are allowed to stay on the territory of the Transnistrian region for only 45 days.

The extent to which the decision of respondents to study abroad was influenced by the political status of the Transnistrian region. Three quarters of the respondents consider that their decision was influenced to a very large extent by the political status of the region. Only 15% of the respondents believe that the unresolved status issue influenced them to a large extent, while 10% claimed that their decision was influenced by this issue only to a moderate extent and none believe that the problematic status of the region represented a determining factor to a small or a very small extent



Fig. 4. Pull factors overview

The interviews revealed the importance of ethnic diasporas during the adaptation period. The interviewed migrant students mentioned the support of Moldovan student diaspora, represented by youth organizations, which was very important during the period spent abroad. Observing trends in Romania, Moldovan students tend to migrate in cities which have ethnic concentrations of Moldovan citizens and where their integration in local communities is facilitated by ethnic youth groups.

“My integration in Romania was easier because a youth organization called “Organizația Studenților Basarabeni din Constanța” helped me. The majority of my friends are part of this organization. We organize different events. For example, our organization is mobilizing now to help Ukrainian refugees. In this way, I feel that I am part of a community.” (Migrant student, destination country: Romania)

Also, the results of the interviews indicated the large impact that parents' migration experiences have on students' decision to leave the region and study abroad. Migrant students mentioned that labour migration has

changed parents' expectations regarding their children's standard of living. Their aspirations for better career options and a different quality of life are perceived to be possible via study-related migration.

“My parents have worked in Italy. They encouraged me to leave the region and study abroad. They know that people who live in European countries have a different life, higher salaries and more opportunities.” (Migrant student, destination country: Romania)

Migration intentions and destinations

Transnistrian authorities do not keep records about the share of returnee students to the Transnistrian region after graduation. For that reason, the interviewed migrant students were asked about their migration intentions after graduation from foreign universities. Two thirds of the respondents intend to migrate to other EU countries. This is the most preferred destination countries after graduation because the area is perceived as including countries with more opportunities. The intention to stay in the destination country exist also in a third of the cases. The variant *undecided* was chosen only by one student and none said they intended to return to the Republic of Moldova or to the Transnistrian region. This trend confirms a previous ILO study (Sintov & Cojocaru 2013) which identified that the share of Moldovan students who intended to go abroad again after graduation is increasing. Similar to semi-structured interviews held with migrant students from the Transnistrian region, the Focus Group Discussions conducted by ILO showed that the percentage of parents who express their wish for their children to remain abroad is high.

Moreover, the semi-structured interviews included a question regarding students' perceptions of the most preferred destination countries for migration for young people from the Transnistrian region. The general evaluation of the preferences of their generation showed that migration trends depend on the ethnic background and financial potential. The correlation between the ethnic factor and migration patterns is also indicated by sociological studies conducted by IOM in

Moldova (Vlădicescu & Vremis 2012, 11). Romania represents the first option for Moldovan ethnics, followed by other EU countries and the Republic of Moldova. The Russian Federation and Ukraine are the most preferred destination countries for Russian and Ukrainian ethnics. Since the early 1990s, Romania has proved to be the main destination country for Moldovan young people. The interviewed students chose Romania as an emigration destination because of their knowledge of the Romanian language, low emigration costs, geographical proximity, and cultural similarities. At the same time, some students mentioned that Romania is known as immigration-friendly for Moldovan students due to special scholarships and free accommodation. The interviews outlined that Romania is a preferred destination country mostly for studies. For that reason, the respondents perceived their studies in Romania as an intermediate stage of their migration route to Western European states. The interview excerpts below reflect the opinion of interviewed students about the main destination countries for young people from the Transnistrian region:

“I think that students who speak Romanian prefer to study in Romania. It is easier for us to live and to study in Romania. It is easier to make friends and find a job because we speak the same language. As a Moldovan ethnic in Romania, I have important benefits: financial support, free accommodation, and free higher education. Students who speak Russian or Ukrainian choose to migrate to Russia or Ukraine. Many of them have Russian or Ukrainian citizenship, their parents and relatives work there. From my perspective, young people decide to study in the Transnistrian region or in Moldova in two cases: when they want to live together with their parents or closer to their home or when they cannot afford the costs of migration. Also, many of my colleagues wanted to study in other EU countries, but it is too expensive for their families.” (Migrant student, destination country: Romania)

“Romania was my best option for studies. I can study here in my mother tongue and the cost of living is lower here. But Romania will not be my final destination. I received a job offer in a German

IT company and I will move to Germany. Western EU countries are a better option for permanent residence.” (Migrant student, destination country: Romania)

The experience of learning in Moldovan-administered Latin-script schools in the Transnistrian region

All respondents considered that studying in Moldovan-administered schools in the Transnistrian region was problematic. The interviewed migrant students emphasized several important issues which can be classified in two main categories:

(1) Property issues and school building conditions

All respondents mentioned that separatist authorities did not provide appropriate buildings to Moldovan-administered schools. Furthermore, students who graduated from the Theoretical Lyceum “Alexandru cel Bun” and the Boarding School for Orphans in Bender/Tighina outlined that their parents and teachers tried to prevent the closure of their schools. Also, students who graduated from the Theoretical High School “Lucian Blaga” in Tiraspol said that the Transnistrian “militia” destroyed school furniture and confiscated textbooks and other properties. Romanian Latin-Script schools in the Transnistrian region are obliged to rent premises from separatist authorities. According to respondents, this vulnerability factor is used by local authorities as an instrument of abuse. Furthermore, students compared the conditions of their school buildings with the facilities of Russian educational institutions, as shown in the quote below:

“Children who are enrolled in Russian schools have access to different outdoor and indoor sport facilities, swimming pools. When I was a child, I wanted to have access to similar facilities. My school does not have its own buildings. It rents two buildings which are not appropriate for educational activities. Transnistrian authorities have blocked access to adequate premises. Also, the

cost of public utilities was higher for Romanian schools, compared to Russian institutions. Despite these challenges, I am proud that my parents enrolled me in a Romanian school." (Migrant student, destination country: the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau)

(2) *Human rights abuses*

Human rights abuses experienced by students enrolled in Latin-script schools imply a number of different elements: psychological constraints, threats, pressure on teachers and parents; restricted freedom of movement; violation of the right to freedom from discrimination; refusal to recognize documents issued by the administration of the school in order to restrict the right to postpone mandatory military service; limitation of the right to freedom of expression and education in your own mother tongue; holding public events related to Romanian identity or Moldovan national holidays are banned, etc.

All respondents consider that the most prevalent human rights abuses are related to academic freedom, freedom of movement, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly. Even though the enrolment in the Moldovan-administered Latin-script schools is still permitted, the educational process is frequently disrupted by the "militia". Some interviewed migrant students stated that their access to international and Moldovan student competitions, forums and other competitions (such as "olimpiade" / science olympics) is restricted. In addition, students could not attend academic and non-academic events organized by the so-called Transnistrian Ministry of Education or other Transnistrian institutions because they were dedicated exclusively to Russian-speaking pupils and Russian language schools. Therefore, migrant participants felt that they could not enjoy the full potential of education and that their interests as young people were not represented. Furthermore, separatist authorities do not allow them to hold meetings and manifestations. The interviewed students reported that during special ceremonies such as 1 September ("First Bell") and 31 May ("Last Bell"), electricity was cut by Transnistrian "security services". As a result, students could not listen to the national anthem of Moldova or to other patriotic songs of Ion and Doina Aldea-Teodorovici. Also, students

mentioned cases of intimidation during special events or national holidays when they wore Moldovan flag lapel pins or ribbons.

In this context, it is important to mention that the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation have made important commitments concerning the right to education under international and national legal instruments. According to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “everyone has the right to education”. The article outlines the importance of education in promoting tolerance and friendship among different ethnic and religious groups. The Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation have ratified the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education 1960. It requires State Parties to guarantee equality of treatment in education and to recognize “the right of members of national minorities to carry on their own educational activities, including the maintenance of schools and, depending on the educational policy of each State, the use or the teaching of their own language [...]” (Art.5 (c)). According to Article 35 of the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, children from linguistic minorities should have access to education in their mother tongue. Moreover, Article 41 of the so-called Constitution of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic states that “everybody has the right to education” and Article 42 stipulates that “everybody has the right to use his mother tongue and to choose a language of communication”.

The role of the Transnistrian authorities in managing migration

Since 1992, the issue of mass migration has not been a priority for Transnistrian authorities. For that reason, migrant students were asked whether they consider the political perspective has changed in recent years. With no exception, all respondents consider that the Transnistrian authorities have no intention to implement specific policies, legislative initiatives or action plans to reduce the key drivers of migration. Quotations from the interviewed migrant students highlight this point of view:

“Transnistrian authorities do not implement concrete measures or strategies to improve our life in the region. They do not consult

with young people on important public policy issues. They do not know the challenges young people face in their daily life. 2021 has been declared the year of youth, but I did not notice any changes.”
(Migrant student, destination country: France)

The interviewed students stated that separatist authorities perceive migration as a marginal phenomenon. For that reason, I analyzed how the local mass-media documents and presents the phenomenon of migration from the Transnistrian region. The mass-media generally promotes the idea that neighbouring countries face serious demographic crises, while in the Transnistrian region, the current migration situation is much better. For example, in August 2019, an article entitled “There is no catastrophic migration from the Transnistrian region” stated that according to Vadim Krasnoselski, the so-called president of the “PMR”, the migration situation is more favourable in the Transnistrian region in contrast with Moldova and Ukraine, because of higher living standards in urban and rural areas of the region. Another article published in December 2019 states that the so-called president of the “PMR” mentioned that many residents of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine decide to move to the Transnistrian region. Moreover, another article outlines the migration of retired persons from right bank territories to the Transnistrian region. According to this article, the welfare situation of retired people in the region is more favourable, as authorities secure access to all essential services and an adequate pension (TRNA 2018; 2019a; 2019b)

Conclusions

The study outlined that a plethora of root causes should be considered in the context of migrant students from the Transnistrian region. The motivations behind migration in the context of Moldovan ethnics from the separatist territory are more complex compared to the ones of students from independent and recognized countries. The decision to study abroad is influenced both by neediness and opportunities. The respondents have spent most of their lives in an isolated region,

controlled by an authoritarian regime and the Sheriff Holding Company. Moreover, they graduated from Moldovan-administered Latin-script schools, which struggled with serious issues in maintaining their activity and existence. Additionally, they lived and grew up in a region with strong anti-Western and anti-Romanian ideologies, where their rights as Moldovan ethnics and Romanian-speaking persons had been violated. Also, their pre-migration experiences are distinct from their post-migration situation because they do not feel anymore like second-class world citizens who do not have access to ordinary goods and services. The living standards and employment opportunities in their destination countries are perceived as much more advantageous in comparison with living conditions in the Transnistrian region. Migrant students perceive their homeland as a region populated primarily by older people, who do not have an adequate standard of living and whose issues are neglected by separatist authorities. This context generates dissatisfaction with the existing standards of living in the region.

Additionally, the research emphasized the particularities of study-related migration in the context of students who graduated from Romanian language schools. The respondents lived in a hostile environment, where they could not enjoy fundamental rights and liberties. Moldovan ethnics continue to face marginalization and intolerable treatment. As a result, students' opportunities in terms of academic life, non-academic events, career development, international mobility projects, volunteering and extracurricular activities are limited. At the same time, interviews revealed that systematic discrimination and breaches of human rights generated the acceptance of these abuses as immutable parts of everyday life. Nevertheless, the perceptions of migrant students about the importance of democratic principles and respect for human rights have changed in the post-migration context. Democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental freedoms are perceived as more important matters since they have lived in democratic countries.

Besides the above mentioned information, it should be reiterated that the educational system and the labour market in the Transnistrian region do not offer opportunities for Romanian-speaking people. At the same time, another key issue is the lack of a variety of occupations. Foreign labour markets have adjusted to new forms of work, new technologies and working standards, while the Transnistrian labour

market remains locked in traditional forms of work and occupations. The results of semi-structured interviews indicate that students consider that foreign labour markets give them the opportunity to reach their full potential and access new types of occupations.

The data and information analyzed in this study highlight the unavoidable brain drain and the high loss in the active population. Correlated with official statistics, the interviews allowed me to gain a better understanding of the size of migration. The question related to respondents' intentions after graduation led to the following responses: about two thirds of the respondents intend to migrate to other EU countries and more than a third of the interviewed students intend to stay in the destination country, only one is undecided and none of them intends to return to the Transnistrian region. These results suggest that mass migration of the young and active population will continue to represent a pervasive issue.

The study analyzed statistics provided by the so-called Transnistrian Statistical Service. Even though the data veracity is questionable, the documents and reports issued by these institutions represent the only source of information concerning migration from the Transnistrian region. This illustrates that further research is needed for understanding the magnitude and the characteristics of this phenomenon from the perspective of the Transnistrian region and unrecognized states in general. Moreover, this study is based only on interviews conducted with migrant students who graduated from Latin-script schools in the Transnistrian region and the Security Zone. These interviews deepen the understanding of the main determinants, perceptions, and attitudes. However, more studies are needed to understand how migrant students who graduated from Russian schools perceive the phenomenon of migration and their lives in an unrecognized state.

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