International Journal of Engineering & Technology, 7 (3.15) (2018) 226-229

International Journal of Engineering & Technology

Website: www.sciencepubco.com/index.php/IJET

Research paper

Migration Processes in the Trans-Dniester Region of the Republic of Moldova and Their Impact on the Socio-Economic Situation

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is revealing the content and causes of migration processes in Trans-Dniester Region and their impact on the socio-economic situation in the region. From this perspective the main objectives of the study consisted in disclosing the reasons of considerable population outflow over the past two decades, the study of the peculiarities of different forms of migration in Trans-Dniester Region, identifying trends in migration of population, regulation of the migration mechanism at the present stage, the assessment of the current system of migration flows accounting in Trans-Dniester Region and the definition of its optimization directions. Particular attention is paid to the consideration of the migration scale and the main areas of emigration. The loss of immigration attractiveness of the region and outflow of highly qualified young and active population from Trans-Dniester Region causes a steady reduction in the population, creates a significant imbalance in the demographic structure of the population (in terms of age and profession). Besides, the Trans-Dniester Region turned out to be actively involved in migration processes due to its relative geographical proximity to both Russia and the EU countries. Currently, the predominant role is played by labor migration.

Keywords: *Trans-Dniester Region, migration, international labor migration, educational migration, migration attractiveness, migration balance, migration mobility, depopulation, migration policy..*

1. Introduction

In the 90-ies, just before and after the collapse of the USSR, the former Soviet republics were characterized by grown nationalist tendencies that led to displacement of Russian-speaking population. The left-bank of Moldova (Trans-Dniester Region), formerly part of Ukraine, was more industrialized and opposed to the policy of the Moldovan authorities. Following Moldova's appeal to unite with Romania, the region seceded from Moldova in 1990. The Trans-Dniester Region of the Republic of Moldova is now referred to as the Trans-Dniester Moldavian Republic (TDMR), and is an unrecognized the self-proclaimed state in the post-Soviet space, which borders in the West with the Republic of Moldova, and in the East – with Ukraine [1, 2].

Until the early 90-ies of the XXth century the Trans-Dniester Region had a positive migration balance. The migration attractiveness of Trans-Dniester Region was conditioned by a relatively high standard of living, economic and political stability, and favorable natural conditions [3-5].

In 1990-1991, Trans-Dniester Region still maintained a positive migration balance. The collapse of the USSR, the military and political conflict of 1992 between the Region and Moldova, the lack of international political and legal status, many various economic crisis phenomena, external restrictions, the inability to fully exercise civil rights by persons with citizenship of countries with a higher level of development (Russia) caused the loss of migration attractiveness by Trans-Dniester Region and intensive emigration of the population from the Republic, as well as the narrowing of the immigration potential of the region [6, 7].

It is necessary to particularly distinguish the year of 1992, when owing to the military conflict, in all administrative-territorial units of the Republic, negative balance of population migration was recorded, which was the highest in the history of TDMR. In 1993, a positive migration balance was noted in the Republic, which was of compensatory nature after the military and political events of 1992. A certain flow of immigrants to Trans-Dniester Region was caused by ethnic policy in the Republic of Moldova, which caused a significant outflow of the Russian-speaking population, including to the Trans-Dniester Moldavian Republic. A significant exchange of migrants took place between Chisinau and Tiraspol: the Russian-speaking population moved from Chisinau to Tiraspol, while the ethnic Moldovans – moved from Tiraspol to Chisinau. These processes were especially noted among University academic staff. Since 1994, the annual number of departures (emigrants) has exceeded the number of arrivals (immigrants). Over the past three decades, the factors determining migration processes in Trans-Dniester Region have undergone significant changes – some of them have come to the fore, while others have lost their importance.

2. Methods

The study suggested the following order of consideration of issues:

- revealing factors determining the scope, structure and direction of migration flows;

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- determining the trends of population movements in Trans-Dniester Region and migration management mechanisms at the present stage;
- revealing and assessing the migration potential of the Trans-Dniester Region's population;
- assessing the existing system of migration flows accounting of in Trans-Dniester Region and defining its optimization directions.

To study migration, the following scientific approaches were applied: 1) demographic, 2) economic, 3) territorial, 4) legal, 5) sociological, 6) historical, 7) psychological, 8) situational, and 9) systemic. Absolute, relative and average statistical indicators were used to analyze the quantitative and structural parameters of the population, its dynamics and spatial displacement. The main source of data on population migration was state statistics, which included the current registration of migrants, as well as materials of population censuses. In addition, sample surveys, were used to study selected groups of migrants, during which certain specific characteristics of migrants were recorded. A significant part of the indicators characterizing migration were obtained as a result of calculations based on the primary registration of migrants. The following accounting and calculation indicators were used to analyze population migration: the number of outgoing people, including emigrants, the number of arrivals, including immigrants, gross migration, migration balances, and structural factors of migration.

Sources of information included theoretical works on demography, population geography, demographic statistics, national and regional management, materials of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS STAT), Federal Statistics Service of Russia, State Statistics Department of the Republic of Moldova, State Statistics Service of TDMR, materials of periodicals, as well as monographs on population geography and economy of TDMR [8].

3. Results

Political persecution of the Russian-speaking population of Moldova, military aggression of Moldova against TDMR, difficult social and economic situation in the region were among the leading factors of external migration in the early 1990-ies. The first of them caused a massive influx of Russian-speaking population from Moldova to Trans-Dniester Region. The rest led to mass emigration of the population outside the region.

To the major factor contributing to emigration i.e. a lack of international political and legal status of the Republic, we should add currently unstable operation of many enterprises, and not high enough wages in comparison with neighboring countries for similar types of activities. The average salary in the Republic is about 200 USD. Therefore, the search for higher-paying jobs and conditions for self-actualization also stimulates the outflow of population from the region.

Labor emigration is the most massive form of emigration from TDMR. It is influenced by a large range of economic and non-economic factors, among which we can distinguish the following:

- significant differences in the standard of living and remuneration for a labor similar in terms of quantity and quality, and the related desire to improve one's financial well-being within a short time (Russia, the European Union);
- the level of natural population growth and the state of the labor market, including the level of unemployment, the decline in demand for labor and its opportunities in other regions (Russia, the European Union);
- growth in demand for highly qualified specialists in the labor market in some countries and certain economy sectors;
- professional attitudes in the field of employment of labor resources in recipient countries: they largely determine the demand for labor and the distribution of migrants by industry sectors;
- the desire to raise qualification and to implement potential professional abilities.

As a rule, highly qualified specialists with the opportunity to find a higher-paid job in the specialty leave the region. The overwhelming majority of immigrants are able-bodied people, including a significant number of scientists and graduates of educational institutions (professional and general) possessing high intellectual potential. They show increased migration mobility, because the level of their knowledge and skills is an essential guarantee of employment (with higher salary) in other countries. As a consequence, many persons temporarily working in Russia show a stable tendency to relocate for permanent residence. Among the reasons for emigration one can identify the desire of a large part of the population to reunite with the historical Homeland (primarily with Russia, Israel, and Germany). The process of emigration of young people is facilitated by the seemingly well-founded (in terms of protecting the citizens' rights) mechanisms of quotas in higher education institutions of Russia (in 2016 Russia allocated 200 quotas for students) and Ukraine (until recently) for graduates from general education institutions of TDMR. Graduates, who use these benefits, exhibit increased migration propensity, and do not return back to the Republic after graduating from the higher education institution. Along with school leavers entering to universities according to the quotas, a significant number of secondary school leavers enter European universities on their own but also do not show a desire to return back to Trans-Dniester Region.

The Trans-Dniester Region turned out to be actively involved in migration processes due to its relative geographical proximity to both Russia and the European Union. Since the beginning of the 1990-ies, participation of Trans-Dniester Region in the international migration process has been carried out through the manifestation of several forms of migration (repatriation, forced migration, shuttle migration, and educational migration), but later and especially at present, it is labor migration that is dominant.

Migration and natural population decline caused a significant reduction in the population of the Republic. While according to the 1989 census, 680.9 thousand people lived in settlements, which are currently under the jurisdiction of the TDMR. For 2016, this figure amounted to about 400 thousand people. The greatest role of migration in the reduction of the population is characteristic of the cities of Tiraspol and Bendery.

The majority of emigrants are representatives of the most economically active and able-bodied group of citizens (25-40 years old). Young people leave Trans-Dniester Region predominantly irretrievably. The geography of emigration flows is wide enough (Fig.1) Migrational exchange is the most intensive with Russia, Moldova, Germany, Belarus, and Israel. In terms of emigration, the vast majority of Trans-Dniester population are oriented to Russia, the attractiveness of which as a country of emigration is associated with a common culture and language, education acquired in the region according to Russian standards, the availability of Russian citizenship, presence of relatives, friends and acquaintances, as well as with friendly attitude without discrimination and threats. The peculiarity of emigrants from Trans-Dniester Region is that they all possess at least one citizenship status of a foreign country. First of all, Trans-Dniester people are citizens of Russia, Moldova, and Ukraine. To a much lesser extent, they have citizenship of Belarus, Bulgaria, and Romania. According to the Constitution of TDMR, Russian, Moldovan, and Ukrainian languages are state languages, and citizens of TDMR can receive citizenship of either Russia, or Moldova, or Ukraine. Currently, about 200 thousand people in Trans-Dniester Region have Russian citizenship. Some Russian citizens have received second Moldavian citizenship to be able to travel visa-free to the countries of the European Union, as well as to have unhindered trips seaward to Odessa (which is located 100 km from Tiraspol, the capital of TDMR, in Ukraine). Part of Trans-Dniester population with Moldovan citizenship receives also Romanian citizenship with the help of their relatives living in the Republic of Moldova. After Moldova's accession to the European Union association, citizens

with Moldovan citizenship (often ethnic Moldovans) go for work to Italy, Spain and Portugal, which is explained by the similarity of languages (Roman group of languages).
In fact, residents of the Republic of Moldova receive also the citizenship of the EU countries (the Moldovans receive Romanian citizenship, the Bulgarians get Bulgarian citizenship) in order to go to work abroad. However, the actual number of migrant workers cannot be adequately accounted for both in the TDMR and in the Republic of Moldova [9, 10].

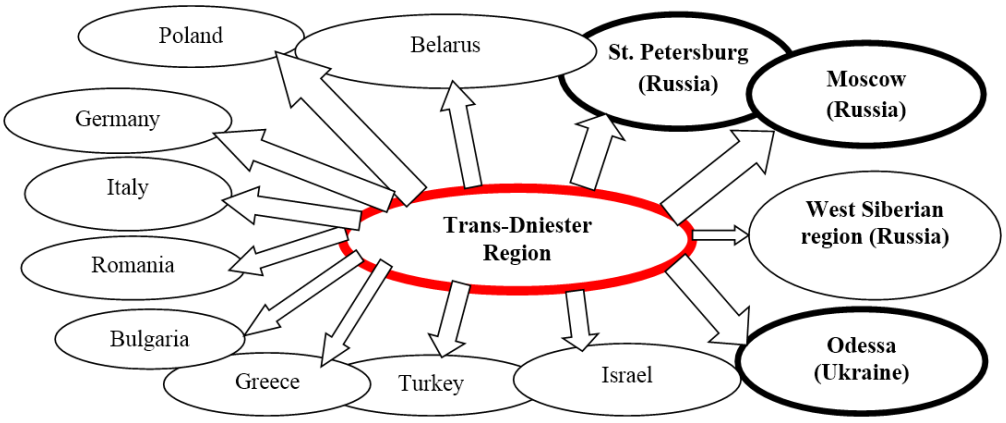


Fig.1. Geographical spread of emigration relationships of Trans-Dniester Region (thickness of arrows reflects the intensity of migration flows).

The analysis of the gender structure of migrants (since 1998 to 2016) indicates the absolute predominance of women. The proportion of women in the total number of emigrants during 1998-2016 accounted for 54.0%, while men – 46.0%.
The migration of young people from the country leads to a change in the age structure of the population towards increasing the older generation, as well as increases the demographic burden on the economically active population, and reduces the reproductive potential of the Trans-Dniester society. The predominance of women among emigrants is one of the causes of "social orphanhood ".
Both external and internal migration is traditionally focused on urban locations, predominantly large cities. Migration mobility of townspeople is much higher than that of rural residents. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the rural population plays a leading role in internal migration and in pendular movements of the population, while townspeople are dominated by external migration. Currently, there is a tendency in growth of migration of rural population and its role in migration flows.
The current negative demographic indicators of the population in the rural areas of Trans-Dniester Region are explained by the severe crisis of agricultural production and, as a consequence, the degradation of production and social infrastructure. Therefore, many villages have lost their productive function, retaining only consumer function [11].
Reduction in transport accessibility, economic and social ills of the Trans-Dniester Region village, and negative demographic situation allow drawing a conclusion that the role of large rural settlements as poles of migration attraction will increase. Among the administrative and territorial units, the leading role in migration processes is played by the cities of Tiraspol, Bendery, and Rybnitsa.
Demographic hazards of emigration are of depopulation nature. The demographic problems of TDMR caused by the negative migration balance have extremely negative economic consequences.
The main part of immigrants is able-bodied people, including a significant number of scientists and graduates of educational institutions possessing high intellectual potential. Graduates of general education institutions of TDMR exhibit increased migration propensity and do not return back to the Republic after graduating from the higher education institution.
A significant source for assessing the scale of labor migration and its geographical spread is the information received by the Trans-Dniester Regional Republican Bank on the flows of remittances coming to Trans-Dniester Region from abroad. Experts believe that, among personal transfers made by natural persons, a large part comes from the funds of migrant workers.
Thus, the total amount of transfers made from abroad through the systems of fast money transfers without opening an account is almost 20% of the GDP of Trans-Dniester Region. In addition, Russia provides significant humanitarian assistance [12, 13].
The number of able-bodied population decreases, while the proportion of retirement age people increases. The process of demographic ageing will be strengthening and will have major impact on the social security system. One of the main causes of labor migration is the lack of employment and affordable housing, especially for young people. Therefore, social housing for low-and middle-income people, including young people, families with many children, persons with disabilities and older persons without housing, is an important challenge to demographic security [14].
Another priority is attracting foreign investment and technologies as well as creating new jobs in the country. Even if these measures do not attract migrants, perhaps they will contribute to the reduction of emigration from Trans-Dniester Region.
Migration outflow, including that stimulated by the state through the system of quotas in higher education institutions of Russia (and until recently Ukraine), remains quite sustainable. In order to mitigate the negative consequences of the migration outflow of graduates from educational institutions of Trans-Dniester Region, mechanisms are needed to ensure at least partial return of specialists back to the country.
Thus, the migration situation in Trans-Dniester Region is developing towards reducing the population. There is long-term and steady influence of migrations on depopulation of the region. External migration flows are mainly directed to Russia (Moscow, Moscow Region, St.-Petersburg, and Western Siberia), until recently – to Ukraine (Odessa), Belarus and the countries of the European Union [15].
Since the TDMR has had a negative migration balance for two decades, the migration policy in Trans-Dniester Region should be radically different from the policy pursued by the recipient countries.
The growth of migration losses in Trans-Dniester Region, including the "brain drain", necessitates the development of a state migration policy aimed at neutralizing their negative depopulation consequences.

4. Discussion

It should be emphasized that government agencies of the Trans-Dniester Region do not have certain opportunities to influence the

level of migration. It is also impossible to increase childbirth figures in any way. As long as in the world there is uneven development of countries, the process of emigration is inevitable. Migration outflow from Trans-Dniester Region still remains very sustainable [16, 17]. In order to mitigate negative effects of migration, mechanisms are needed to ensure at least a partial return of specialists. Migration policy is necessary as an integral and indispensable part of the state demographic policy. The TDMR has had a negative migration balance for two decades. Therefore, migration policy in Trans-Dniester Region should be radically different from the policy pursued by the recipient countries.

The growth of migration losses in Trans-Dniester Region, including the "brain drain", necessitates the development of a state migration policy aimed at neutralizing the negative depopulation consequences.

The following main provisions should be implemented in the development of migration policy in the Region:

a) regulation of migration processes in the Republic;

b) ensuring respect for the rights and legitimate interests of migrants;

c) ensuring the social protection of migrants;

d) ensuring the state security, safety of the state border at checkpoints of TDMR and observance of state interests in the context of migration process development;

e) ensuring control over migration processes at checkpoints of TDMR and compliance with the regulations on the rules of stay of foreign citizens and stateless persons in the territory of TDMR;

e) preventing and combating irregular migration.

g) simplifying the regime of immigrants' stay in the territory of Trans-Dniester Region.

In order to limit emigration trends, it is necessary to create new jobs, significantly increase the income of the population, and ensure conditions for long-term mortgage lending to housing, especially for young families. To restrict the intensity of population's outflow from the depressed areas, it is necessary to create preferential regimes for business development. Attracting immigrants is possible when creating the most attractive investment climate in the region and a system of state guarantees for foreign entrepreneurs – potential investors. And, of course, the primary prerequisite for the implementation of these proposals, one way or another, is the solution of political issues, because for nearly a quarter of a century, the internationally unrecognized status of TDMR, as well as the economic blockades, initiated by both Moldova and Ukraine, still remain in force. The uncertainty of the political and economic situation is now the main pushing reason for potential emigrants [18-22].

5. Conclusion

The loss of immigration attractiveness by the region and outflow from Trans-Dniester Region of highly qualified young and active part of the population causes a steady reduction in the population, including able-bodied population of reproductive age, creates significant imbalances in the age and gender, professional, ethnic, confessional, social structure, as well as in the system of displacement of population.

The main reason for emigration is the uncertainty of the political status of the Region and jobs, and as a result, the lack of clear socio-economic prospects for local population. The number of able-bodied population is decreasing, while the proportion of retirement age people is increasing. The process of demographic ageing is increasing and has major impact on the social security system. To solve the migration outflow problems, it is necessary to improve the socio-economic situation as well as gain certainty in the political status of Trans-Dniester Region.

Acknowledgements

The authors express their gratitude to the leading researchers of the Pridnestrovian State University, Candidates of Geographical Sciences M.P. Burla and V.G. Fomenko for valuable advice and provision of some primary statistical materials when preparing this article.

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