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In Search of Economic Security and Societal Security. The Experience of Economic Migrants from Transnistria and Gagauzia

Abstract

The main goal in this article is to explore the causes and nature of economic migration from the Republic of Moldova. The conceptual and analytical framework is based on the widening and deepening of meanings of security, as part of the transition from traditional, Cold War, state-centric understanding of security to the multisectorial approaches of security. Two relevant sectors of security are selected in this study, namely economic security and societal security, because they provide in-depth understanding of economic migration from Gagauzia and Transnistria. The methodology is based on interviews taken with migrant workers from the two regions and on interpretation and analysis of research findings. Before discussing the findings, we documented migration experiences of migrant workers who belong to different ethnic groups, tracing their pre-migration situations and post-migration life. Also, we documented how their economic aspirations and ethnic identity shaped their migration intentions and perceptions of different countries of destination.

Key words: economic migration, Gagauzia, Transnistria, economic security, societal security

Conceptual framework

The scholarly and academic field Security Studies underwent major conceptual revisiting and a diversification of approaches, due to the post-Cold War international order and new emerging global threats in the 1990s. Barry Buzan and his associates have analysed these transformations under the umbrella phrase

of „widening and deepening security”¹. The major shifts revealed the transition from a traditional (mainly Realist, state centric approach of security) to a non-traditional understanding and problematizing of security. The latter entailed that „insecurity should be understood first as the consequence of a wider range of threats (poverty, the environment, the global economy etc.) than that of military violence and second, contemplating a wider range of referents (individual, regions, and common humanity for example) than sovereign states”².

Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen emphasized the need to „deepen the referent object beyond the state” while also „widening the concept of security to include other sectors than the military”: in this framework, domestic and trans-border threats were assigned equal importance³. The widening and deepening of security meant an extension in various directions: downwards, from the security of states and nations to the security of groups, communities and individuals, upwards, from states and nations to the environment, sideways, by multiplying the sectors of security, from the prevailing military security to economic security, political security, environmental security, and societal security. Finally, the responsibility for providing security is in itself extended, since „is diffused in all directions from national states, including upwards to international institutions, downwards to regional or local government, and sideways to nongovernmental organizations, to public opinion and the press”⁴. Following all these shifts and debates, Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde developed a new framework of analysis for security, by fragmenting the „whole” of security into different sectors⁵. Ole Waever argued that considering the existence of other objects of reference, beside the state, was needed in order for a multisectorial approach to be valid and comprehensive⁶.

Two sectors are of utmost importance for our study, namely economic and societal security, because the goal of this research is to investigate causes and specificities of economic migration from two regions within the Republic of Moldova, Transnistria and Gagauzia. Barry Buzan defines the two sectors as follows:

¹ *International Security*. Volume II: *The Transition to the Post-Cold War Security Agenda*, eds. B. Buzan, L. Hansen, London 2007. See also: *International Security*. Volume III: *Widening Security*, eds. B. Buzan, L. Hansen, London 2007.

² K. Booth, N. Wheeler, *Uncertainty*, [in:] *Security Studies. An Introduction*, ed. P.D. Williams, London-New York 2013, p. 151.

³ B. Buzan, L. Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies*, Cambridge 2009, p. 188.

⁴ E. Rothschild, *What is security?*, [in:] *International Security*. Volume III...

⁵ B. Buzan, O. Waever, J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder 1998.

⁶ O. Waever, *Europe: Stability and Responsibility*, [in:] *Internationales Umfeld, Sicherheitsinteressen und nationale Planung der Bundesrepublik. Teil C: Unterstützende Einzelanalysen. Band 5. II.A Europäische Sicherheitskultur. I II.B Optionen für kollektive Verteidigung im Kontext sicherheitspolitischer Entwicklungen Dritter*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP-S, 383/5, Ebenhausen 1993, pp. 31-72.

[...] Economic security concerns access to the resources, finance and markets necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and state power. Societal security concerns the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture and religious and national identity and customs [...].⁷

The International Committee of the Red Cross defines economic security in terms of

ability of individuals, households or communities to cover their essential needs sustainably and with dignity. This can vary according to an individual's physical needs, the environment and prevailing cultural standards. Food, basic shelter, clothing and hygiene qualify as essential needs, as does the related expenditure; the essential assets needed to earn a living, and the costs associated with health care and education also qualify.⁸

Regarding migration, some conceptual clarifications should be included before we discuss the two case-studies. According to the International Convention on Protection of Rights of all Labour Migrants and their Families, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1990, the term *labour migrant* refers to a person who does not have the citizenship of the state he or she will be employed, is employed or was employed in for a paid activity⁹. In other words, *migrant workers* are persons engaged in remunerated activities in states of which they are not nationals¹⁰. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), „labour migrants are the persons who have been permitted to engage in an economic activity in the country other than the country of origin”¹¹. An *economic migrant* is „a person who leaves their country of origin for purely economic reasons that are not in any way related to the refugee, in order to seek material improvements in their livelihood”, as defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees¹². While economic migration reflects a temporary activity

⁷ B. Buzan, *People, States, and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Chapel Hill 1983, cited by: B. Buzan, O. Waeber, J. de Wilde, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

⁸ International Committee of the Red Cross, *What is Economic Security?*, 2015, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/introduction-economic-security>.

⁹ B. Ghencea, I. Gudumac, *Labour Migration and Remittances in the Republic of Moldova*, March 2004, p. 8, http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00002327/01/Raport_Migration_Remittances_2.pdf.

¹⁰ International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, Article 2, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-protection-rights-all-migrant-workers>.

¹¹ International Labour Organization, cited by: B. Ghencea, I. Gudumac, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

¹² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Department of International Protection (DIP), Protection Information Section (PIS), June 2016, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/42ce7d444.html>.

in another country, *emigration* refers to the act of permanently leaving one's home country in order to settle or to relocate in another country.

Our case-studies are indicative of economic and societal causes for migration, but they are also illustrative in what concerns the process of turning economic migration into emigration.

Searching for economic and societal security: case-studies and methodological approach

This section investigates the migration experiences of migrant workers from two regions of the Republic of Moldova: the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region. We documented migration experiences of migrant workers who belong to different ethnic groups, tracing their pre-migration situations and post-migration life. Also, we documented how their economic aspirations and ethnic identity shaped their migration intentions and perceptions of different countries of destination.

The Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (hereafter ATU Gagauzia) and the Transnistrian region were selected for investigation for several reasons. First of all, ATU Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region represent two of the most impacted regions of mass migration of economically active workforce. According to the so-called Transnistrian Statistical Service, the population of the region declined by 30% in between 1998-2021. As a result, the economically active population of the Transnistrian region declined by nearly 96.3 thousand people in between 1996-2016. While the economically active population of the region had constantly declined, the proportion of economically inactive people had increased by nearly 29% in this period of time¹³. With regard to migration from Gagauzia, studies underline that the southern part of the country is the main sending region of economic migrants¹⁴. It is estimated that people who live in rural areas of Gagauzia have a 22.4% probability to emigrate for labour purposes¹⁵. Another study conducted by the Hamburg Institute of International Economics in 2004 revealed the magnitude of women's labour migration from Gagauz villages. It states that nearly 70% of women from Gagauz rural areas left the region in search of better-paid jobs in countries such as Turkey, Italy, and Spain. The vast

¹³ A. Ostvanaia, *Mapping Migration from Transnistria*, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Chisinau 2017, p. 25, <https://bit.ly/3AQa6MB>.

¹⁴ N. Vladicescu, M. Vremis, *Social Impact of Emigration and Rural-Urban Migration in Central and Eastern Europe. Final Country Report: Moldova*. European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2021, p. 11.

¹⁵ International Labour Organization, *Migrant Workers: The Case of Moldova*, Geneva 2017, <https://bit.ly/3QUn0yN>, p. 19.

majority of them emigrated in the early 2000s as domestic workers¹⁶. Secondly, labour migration from separatist regions or territorial units with secessionist tendencies implies a larger spectrum of push and pull factors. The migration motivations of labour migrants from separatist regions or autonomous territorial units can also be structured around political determinants, geopolitical insecurities, inter-ethnic tensions, marginalization, and historical cultural ties. Thirdly, little research has been conducted on economic migration from the Transnistrian region and Gagauzia. As a result, the migration trajectories, intentions and experiences of economic migrants from these regions are under-researched.

The Transnistrian region is a separatist territory and a post-Soviet unrecognized state located on the left bank of the Dniester River. In the early 1990s, Transnistrian pro-Russian forces proclaimed the independence of the region and created the so-called Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic. The first violent clashes between Moldova and the Transnistrian separatist forces escalated to an armed conflict which ended in 1992¹⁷. Since 1992, Moldova has had no control over its territorial units located on the left bank of the Dniester River. The Transnistrian region remains internationally isolated. As a result, people from this region do not have access to services and goods which individuals from recognized countries take for granted such as: international bank transfers or international clothing brands. The region has its own flag, emblem, anthem, legislation and currency. It has been controlled by an authoritarian regime and a business empire known as Sheriff. The Transnistrian region is populated primarily by Russian ethnics and Russian-speaking people, who tend to live in urban areas.

The Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia is located in the south of Moldova. Gagauzia proclaimed its independence from Moldova in 1990, but after several years of negotiations between Chisinau (the capital of Moldova) and Comrat (the capital of the unrecognized Gagauz Republic), it obtained a special judicial status with an increased level of autonomy¹⁸. Gagauzia is populated primarily by the Gagauz, a Turkic-speaking ethnic group and by individuals with Bulgarian origins, who share a similar language and traditions with Turkey and Bulgaria. It is important to emphasize that Gagauzia is also mainly populated by Russian-speaking people.

Considering that research questions concern individual migration experiences, one of the most important data sources of this study is the information collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with 10 individuals. It includes both men and women who had worked abroad at least once. All respondents

¹⁶ T. El-Cherkeh, E. Stirbu, S. Lazaroiu, D. Radu, *EU-Enlargement, Migration and Trafficking in Women: The Case of South Eastern Europe*, Hamburg Institute of International Economics 2004, p. 79, <https://bit.ly/3ThCLkX>.

¹⁷ Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), *Transdnistrian Conflict: Origins and Issues*, Vienna 1994, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/3/42308.pdf>.

¹⁸ G.P. Herd, J.D. Moroney, *Security Dynamics in the Former Soviet Bloc*, London 2013, p. 141.

emigrated for labour purposes in between 1995-2010. This was a period when Moldova faced its biggest migratory waves. With regard to demographic characteristics, 5 respondents are from Gagauzia and others 5 have lived in the Transnistrian region. All participants are Russian-speaking individuals, who have at least two citizenships. The interviewed migrants belong to different ethnic groups: Gagauz, Russian, and Bulgarian. The interviewees were identified through the snowball technique. It should be noted that this study separately treated each case in order to emphasize different migration stories and mobility patterns.

The Impact of Soviet federalism

In order to have a better understanding of the phenomenon of labour migration from these two regions, we should take into account several events which occurred in Moldova after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also to briefly analyse the nature of Soviet federalism.

Soviet ethno-federalism was meant to guarantee the control of the centre and foster counteraction against aspirations of the various ethnic groups. But, it also proved to be a corrosive factor. According to Cristoph Zürcher, „the equipping of the union republics with the prerequisites of statehood and the anchoring of their status as sovereign states in the Soviet constitution paved the way for the process of ‘sovereignization’ that began in 1988”¹⁹. Alongside with this attribute, other specificities of Soviet nationalism, especially the „unusual alliance between Russian nationalism and other nationalisms of other peoples of the USSR”²⁰ or the phenomenon coined by Ian Bremmer as „matryoshka nationalism”²¹, namely the existence of nations inside a larger nation which led to the following cumulative effect: the resurgence of Russian nationalism triggered the revitalization of other national movements and hence provided impetus for conflict. Referring to the Caucasus and to the analogy of the Russian painted doll *matryoshka*, René Does showed that „at the time the Soviet Union collapsed, the striving for greater sovereignty and even total independence was virulent in the autonomous formations lower in the federal hierarchy of the Soviet state as well”²². The ensuing situation was marked by a downward spiral of mistrust and rivalry.

¹⁹ C. Zürcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars. Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus*, New York-London 2007, p. 34.

²⁰ *Understanding Ethnic Conflict. The International Dimension*, eds. R.C. Taras, R. Ganguly, New York 2008, p. 119.

²¹ I. Bremmer, *Reasserting Soviet Nationalities Theory*, [in:] *Nations, Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, eds. I. Bremmer, R. Taras, Cambridge 1993, p. 22.

²² R. Does, *The Ethnic-Political Arrangement of the Peoples of the Caucasus*, [in:] *Exploring the Caucasus in the 21st Century. Essays on Culture, History and Politics in a Dynamic Context*, eds. F. Companjen, L. Marácz, L. Versteegh, Amsterdam 2010, p. 54.

Both the inhabitants of Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region lived in areas impacted by separatist movements and movements of resistance to the collapse of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1990, both regions proclaimed their independence and started a process of identity transformation. In both cases, Moldova did not recognize the independence of Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region. The situation of individuals from the Transnistrian region was particularly difficult, as they lived in a conflict area disputed between Moldovan authorities and separatist forces, supported militarily and financially by the Kremlin. The Transnistrian armed conflict and the political instability in southern Moldova exacerbated many socio-economic issues: high rates of unemployment, high inflation, underemployment, salary delays, unattractive working conditions, and lack of employment alternatives both for skilled and unskilled workers. In these regions, the collapse of the Soviet Union did not necessarily generate an ideological shift from socialism and a centrally planned economy to democracy and capitalism. Also, the political turmoil and socio-economic crises had implications on migrants' expectations regarding the post-Soviet period. For many of them, the collapse of the Soviet Union is not associated with days of great hope for a better future, but rather with violent clashes, economic and political insecurity, endemic poverty, and uncertainty.

The Causes of Economic Migration

In the following sections, we emphasize the complexity of push factors behind labour migration from these two regions. In addition, we reveal the diversity of pull factors for a better understanding of what has compelled the respondents to perceive their host countries as places where their life-time aspirations could become a reality.

When talking about the key reasons for migration from their region, migrant workers highlighted the difficulty of their pre-migration situation during the first two decades after the dissolution of the USSR. The vast majority of them described their pre-migration life as „a daily battle for survival”. As respondents emphasized, in the early 1990s and 2000s, it was highly problematic to cover their basic needs. The early 2000s is remembered by them as a period characterized by economic instability, high rates of unemployment, extremely low salaries, and uncertainty about the future. Even though the interviewed migrants were in paid activities or at least had a source of income, they could not receive their salaries for long periods of time. One female respondent explained the following: „My husband did not receive salaries for a long period, he received only several food products: oil, sugar, sausage, and buckwheat. We could not pay our utilities or buy clothing for our children”. Furthermore, becoming parents for the first time

in the middle of an armed conflict and endemic poverty had been particularly challenging.

Another important aspect is that all participants stated that their decision to emigrate was highly motivated by economic problems and dissatisfaction with their pre-migration economic situation. This dissatisfaction was also caused by a feeling of professional nonfulfillment. More precisely, migrant workers consider that their potential could not be fully realized. In the late 1980s, our interviewees were young people with personal and professional aspirations. The outbreak of the Transnistrian armed conflict, the economic chaos, as well as the political and social turmoil led to a vicious circle of uncertainties. This harsh context determined many people to change their professional working field. In some cases, it meant that young qualified specialists turned to low-skilled or unskilled occupations. As a result, even though they possess a bachelor's degree and dreamed of working in their area of interest, they have worked as unskilled labourers in the informal economy for more than 20 years. One respondent, who worked as a history teacher in Gagauzia for two years, explained the following: „It was nonsense to devote so much energy and time for less than 20 euro per month. I liked being a teacher. I enjoyed it, but it was not worth the sacrifice. At that time, I had two new-born children and a long life ahead. I did not have enough time to wait for a better future”. Additionally, migrant workers emphasized that this radical change in their professional life was perceived as a fall in social status by those who surrounded them. Several respondents pointed to the fact that unskilled migrants are treated as inferior in host countries by local population and in the regions of origin by fellow nationals. This feeling of inferiority accompanied them throughout their lives abroad. This explains why during the discussion, respondents frequently told us: „We are like slaves”.

The root causes of migration from the Transnistrian region and Moldova are: poverty, lack of respect for human dignity and workers' rights. People are working really hard, but are not paid in accordance with their efforts and results.

Male, current destination: Russia

Economic Migration or Emigration?

The labour migration of the inhabitants of ATU Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region cannot be reduced to an 'economic reductionist approach', which is often applied in migration studies²³. The labour migration from these regions has

²³ P. Manolova, „Going to the West is My Last Chance to Get a Normal Life”: Bulgarian Would-Be Migrants' Imaginings of Life in the UK, „Central and Eastern European Migration Review” 2018, vol. 2, no. 8, p. 62.

not only emerged due to economic hardship. Economic migration is complex in nature and is influenced by a variety of processes, factors, and subjective dimensions: cultural, political, education, interpersonal relations, intimacy or sexuality, domestic violence, ethnic differences, and geopolitical tensions. All migrant workers have their own biographies and life stories beyond macro-level explanations, as Polina Manolova outlined in her research on the migration of Bulgarians to the United Kingdom²⁴. Furthermore, it is a phenomenon which embodies a plethora of motivations, contradictory feelings, aspirations, desires, and preoccupations. These range from feelings of security and belonging, liberation, and well-being to fears, disappointment, and distress.

Besides the importance of economic determinants, semi-structured interviews outlined other factors which have influenced respondents' decisions regarding migration such as: family relations, migration trajectories of their acquaintances and relatives, different narratives on labour migration, social expectations, knowledge of Russian language, and degrees of familiarity with the host countries.

The interviews revealed the importance of family relations in the decision-making processes concerning migration and countries of destination. Also, they showed that economic hardship has led to a process that restructures families and to long-lasting effects on individual and family wellbeing. This was particularly evident in the case of migrants who are married and have children. The discussion about family and children revealed that family separation has been a painful experience for both male and female migrants. Many of them have spent time with their family only during winter or summer holidays. This might explain why the general discussion about migration provoked straightforward answers such as: „Family means when spouses and children live together. Are we a family if we live apart? I live in Germany, my daughters in Copenhagen and my wife in Moldova. This is not a family”. Furthermore, according to the respondents, in the early 2000s, they communicated with children via telephone calls once every two weeks. As one female migrant woman said: „The discussion could last a few minutes, during which I could only hear how my daughter cried”. For many of them, internet access made them feel more present in children's lives. After long periods of separation, some respondents tried to find a common destination country for all family members. Such decisions have been often driven by their concern about the negative impact of separation on their family. Some of them felt a moral obligation to be close to their children, who might have experienced a sense of loss or abandonment. Therefore, they focused on countries which are perceived as immigration-friendly and which could offer well-paid jobs for their partner as well, education opportunities for children, and integration services for newly-arrived migrants.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

I promised my children that we would live together. I have always wanted to build a relationship based on confidence. I did not want them to feel the high costs of this better life. I sent them gifts which could be found only in Spain. Some children can perceive this as compensation for our absence and when they grow up they are dissatisfied with their childhood and with their family.

Male, current destination country: Germany

I worked in several countries: Russia, Czech Republic, Italy, and the Netherlands. I worked together with my spouse only in two countries: Russia and the Netherlands. In Russia, we could find jobs for both of us, but then we decided to return to Moldova. We tried to live in Moldova for several years, but we struggled with financially difficult times. Then, my wife emigrated to Italy, while I moved to Czech Republic, where I worked in the construction industry. My parents took care of our children. It is difficult to think that a family can look like this. After several years of separation, we decided to choose a country where we could move with our children. Both of us agreed that Czech Republic is the most viable option.

Female, current destination country: Czech Republic

The vast majority of interviewed migrants did not live with their family in the destination country. In several cases, the spouses worked separately, in different host countries. As interviews revealed, this depended very much on how migrant men and women perceived different countries of destination. For example, Italy, Spain, and Turkey are considered as immigration-friendly countries particularly for female labour migrants. The expectation that certain countries are more suitable for migrant men than for women and vice versa has been formed during the first waves of massive outmigration from the Transnistrian region and ATU Gagauzia. As a result, migrant men and women followed the migration path of their female and male peers. According to migrant workers, the outmigration of their peers to certain destination countries created a feeling of security. Looking at the migration experiences of their acquaintances, friends and relatives, the respondents felt more secure about the success of their migration journey. Also, it should be noted that respondents relied on relatives and acquaintances to find job opportunities abroad and decent accommodation.

When I was young, I knew that women usually migrated to Italy, Israel, Turkey, and Spain. It is more complicated for men to find jobs in these countries. There are more jobs for women. Women from our country [Moldova] work as caregivers or housekeepers in Italy, Spain, and Israel. There is always a high demand for caregivers. In Turkey, women often work in trade or as domestic workers. Our women know that they can find jobs in market sales in Turkey, because many of them were engaged in bringing clothes from Turkey to Chisinau, Cahul or Comrat.

Female, current destination country: Turkey

If many people migrate to a certain country, it means that there is a high demand for workers, particularly for unskilled workers. Italians would not have worked as caregivers for their ageing population. That is why there is a constant demand for female unskilled workers from Eastern European countries.

Female, current destination: Italy

It is important to mention that gender is an important dimension of labour migration from Moldova considering the growing mobility of women for labour purposes. In the early 2000s, it was estimated that women represented 65% of the total number of Moldovan migrants²⁵. The prevalence of women among Moldovan migrants has persisted in the following years. Based on available border crossing data from 2018, 54% of the estimated number of Moldovan migrants were women. Moreover, the number of migrant women had exceeded the number of male migrants by 14% in 2018. Even though this topic is not specifically a primary analytical focus of this article, interviews conducted with migrant women outlined that their migration intentions were perceived with considerable reluctance by their husbands. Alexia Bloch, in her study on transnational mobility of post-Soviet women to Turkey, also outlined that Gagauz migrant women very often faced their reluctant husbands, who did not allow them to emigrate. Building on these empirical findings, she argued that Gagauz husbands want to see that women around them are dedicated housewives²⁶. This might be largely explained by the need of husbands to validate their role as heads of households, but also by the strain resulting from assuming more responsibilities. The feminisation of migration from these two regions generated a shift in traditional gender roles within households. Therefore, in the semi-permanent or permanent absence of women, men are responsible for their wife's role and duties. Another important factor in explaining husbands' attitudes toward women's migration is the perception that migration leads to higher autonomy and empowerment of their wives.

The way men experience wives' labour migration and their return to family is important to be considered because it can trigger a change in women's migration intentions. For example, the existing social pressure on men as providers within their households and additional responsibilities may contribute to family problems and tense relations. Thus, men might feel that their role as family providers is being undermined by female labour migration. In addition, the return of migrant women to their families might be problematic and disruptive both for

²⁵ T. El-Cherkeh et al., *EU-Enlargement, Migration and Trafficking in Women: The Case of South Eastern Europe*, Hamburg Institute of International Economics 2004, p. 79, <https://bit.ly/3ThCLkX>.

²⁶ A. Bloch, *Sex, Love, and Migration: Postsocialism, Modernity, and Intimacy from Istanbul to the Arctic*, Ithaca-New York 2017, pp. 87-88.

husbands and children. As R. Surtees²⁷ underlines in a report for IOM, children might not feel very comfortable in the presence of their returning parent. In this context, the autonomy and the sense of empowerment gained by migrant women as well as their intention to return or settle in the country of destination can be challenged.

It was difficult psychologically to migrate from my homeland. At that time, I could not see another solution. I decided to emigrate to Italy because I found a job there as a domestic worker. My husband stayed home and took care of our children and older relatives. Even though I sent money home, my husband and children did not feel my love. I felt that we became more distant. One of our children had been particularly angry because of my absence. When I returned, my husband insisted on permanent resettlement abroad. He said that my absence could lead to the breakdown of our marriage. Of course I could not migrate alone anymore. After one year, our entire family moved to Italy.

Female, current country of destination: Italy

The discussion with female respondents from Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region revealed that the labour migration of women has been perceived with suspicion in their communities, because „nobody actually knows what they are doing abroad”. In their communities, there is a tendency to think that women who go abroad alone might abandon their children and partners and engage in „immoral occupations”. Migrant women who lived in abusive environments were particularly perceived as untrustworthy by their husbands. These negative attitudes are much more pronounced in the case of women who emigrated to Italy and Turkey. The following interview excerpts shed light on people’s attitudes concerning female labour migration to Turkey and Italy.

Women emigrate because of economic difficulties. We want a better future for our children. Some people think that we live a „dolce vita” abroad. They think that we are looking for men, intimate adventures and love stories like in Turkish films. If a woman emigrates to Italy, people tend to think that she will end up marrying an old and rich man. There are situations when Moldovan women leave their husbands and marry Italian men, but these women are usually tired of their aggressive and alcoholic husbands.

Female, current destination: Italy

Women who live in rural areas and intend to emigrate very often hear about their „immoral intentions”. It is considered that women who go to Turkey can become victims of sexual exploitation. Also, people think that migrant women might leave

²⁷ R. Surtees, *Trafficking of Men – A Trend Less Considered: The Case of Belarus and Ukraine*, International Organization for Migration, Geneva 2008, p. 89.

their husbands, because Turkish men treat them differently. On the one hand, Turkish men are viewed as very conservative, because they are Muslim. On the other hand, Turkish movies show them from a different perspective: good-looking men who can treat a woman like a queen.

Female, current destination: Turkey

Migrants' perception of the host countries before departure is highly influenced by the narratives which are communicated to them by other migrants. Through these narratives, migrant workers imagine that living and working conditions in a certain country are better or worse than the ones experienced by them in Gagauzia or the Transnistrian region. Therefore, individuals emigrate with a particular point of view about their life abroad. According to respondents, they imagined their post-migration life as being both difficult and fulfilling. The difficulties consist in family separation, linguistic differences, lack of integration, the need to adapt to different types of jobs, while the fulfilment refers to economic gains. Furthermore, respondents imagined their lives abroad as being similar, to some extent, to the one in Gagauzia or the Transnistrian region. More precisely, one female respondent who currently works in Czech Republic imagined her life as being monotonous, working 6 or even 7 days per week. Nevertheless, she found a purpose in this monotony of work: the family's economic security.

I worked in a local factory in Moldova. In the 1990s, I did not receive my salary for longer periods. In the early 2000s, I received a very small salary. I remember how my children wanted to eat two ice-creams a day during the summer vacation, but I could not afford it. As a mother, it was heart-breaking. I did not expect miracles when I came to Czech Republic. I knew that I would have to work many hours, even 7 days per week. The difference is that here I see the results of my work. I am satisfied with my salary, and my children can enjoy many things. For example, I can ensure good education for my children and summer vacations in Turkey.

Another factor which has shaped their perception is the differences between migrant workers and individuals who remained in Gagauzia or the Transnistrian region. According to respondents, there is a strong belief in their regions that labour migrants can afford more goods and more favourable living conditions. Moreover, they observed how remittances sent by migrants from their communities improved the livelihoods of their families.

Those who emigrate and send money home can build a house and can buy a car for example. They do not think about basic needs. People who are abroad have the most beautiful houses in our village.

Female, current destination: Russia

Besides the above-mentioned information, the respondents' perception of different host countries has been shaped by intergenerational historical memories and foreign films. For instance, Germany has not been a preferred destination country by several respondents because of war-related memories. Moreover, Turkish and Russian cinematography represented an important source of information about migrants' work and life in Moscow or Istanbul. Some respondents reflected on their life and work in Turkey or Russia based on films which usually portray the life of migrants from small communities who move to metropolitan cities. These aspects are illustrated in the interview excerpts below:

I did not want to emigrate to Germany. I grew up with a certain reluctance to this country because of Nazi atrocities and the war they started against our countries.

Female, current country of destination: the Netherlands

I consider that Russia and Turkey have dynamic economies and labour markets. I always watch Turkish and Russian movies. These films show that there is always something to do. Life in Moscow or Istanbul is full of events, opportunities. There are a lot of migrants who go to these big cities.

Female, current country of destination: Turkey

The interviewed migrants mentioned the historical past of the Russian Federation and Turkey, referring particularly to their influence in the region, their economic power, and the long-term relationship between these two countries and their regions of origin. They described these countries as great powers („velikiye derzhavy”), which have large labour markets. In contrast, several respondents referred to Western EU countries and the United States of America as countries where people have „too many rights and too much freedom”.

The interviews revealed a correlation between the ethnic background and the chosen destination countries. More precisely, the interviews showed that Turkey and the Russian Federation represent prominent destinations for Gagauz and Russian ethnics. Moreover, the interviewed migrants mentioned that the vast majority of their acquaintances emigrated either temporarily or permanently to Russia or Turkey. It should be noted that all respondents are Russian-speaking individuals, who lived in communities largely formed by Russian ethnics. Russia and Turkey are perceived as familiar and close to their hearts (*rodnoe*). Even though they lived in Moldova, they were very familiar with Russian films and TV shows, socio-political events, certain traditions and holidays. For instance, migrant workers from the Transnistrian region are more familiar with the Russian political scene than with the Moldovan one. In this context, understandably, the interviewed migrants have experienced a sense of belonging to Russia and Turkey.

Nevertheless, the ethnic background cannot explain the entire complexity of mobility patterns. This was particularly evident in the case of migrants with Bul-

garian origins, for whom Bulgaria has not represented an important destination country. One respondent from Gagauzia, who has Bulgarian origins and Bulgarian citizenship, explained the following: „There is not much difference between Moldova or Bulgaria. Bulgaria also struggles with poverty and different economic issues”. Therefore, many ethnic Bulgarians from ATU Gagauzia found work in Western EU countries. As individuals who hold the nationality of Bulgaria, they can enjoy a large spectrum of rights and benefits which derive from EU legislation.

People from the Transnistrian region migrate to Russia, because it is easier to go there. We have Russian citizenship, the majority of us are Russians and, obviously, the language is not a barrier. We have similar traditions, lifestyle, and mentality. We feel at home in Russia. Only a few of us could obtain Romanian citizenship. That is why we migrated to the European Union, but generally, people from the region are not looking in the direction of the EU.

Male, current destination: the Netherlands

The interview excerpt above highlights that citizenship is also a deciding factor. According to interviewed migrants, those who can obtain EU citizenship tend to emigrate to Western Europe, where they have access to well-paid jobs and more adequate working and living conditions. Otherwise, without proper documents, they can find jobs in the informal economy, which is little regulated and exposes them to various risks: exploitative conditions, human rights abuses, retention of identity documents, and withholding of wages. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that Gagauz and Russian ethnics, who have been eligible for Romanian citizenship, applied for it. Nevertheless, obtaining Romanian or Bulgarian citizenship did not mean that they would emigrate for labour purposes to Western Europe. For some of them, EU citizenship gives them a sense of security, particularly in times of crisis. As one respondent stated, those who have EU citizenship could easily move around Europe after 24 II 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine. Additionally, EU citizenship provides a variety of benefits for their children, who reflect on studying abroad.

I am Bulgarian, so I obtained Bulgarian citizenship. Even though I have Bulgarian citizenship, I decided to work in Russia for several years. It was much easier to find a job there because of my social network and the absence of language barriers. I worked there for several years, but then I moved to Germany for a higher salary.

Male, current destination: Germany

Even though I have lived in the Transnistrian region, I could obtain Romanian citizenship. It is difficult for me to understand Romanian language and the Western mentality, but it is always good to have EU citizenship. For example, if the war expands to our country, I will emigrate with my entire family somewhere in Europe.

Male, current destination: the Netherlands

Language has also played a major role. The importance of the Russian language has been highlighted by all respondents. The knowledge of Russian helped them to build social networks and to integrate into foreign communities. The interviews revealed that our interviewees depended on social networks, as they gained all sorts of information about work and life abroad through these informal channels. In the early 2000s, many of them migrated for the first time abroad. Therefore, thanks to their knowledge of Russian, they could emigrate without fear of the unknown. From another perspective, as Russian-speaking people, some of them have been discriminated against in certain host countries, as it is outlined in the interview excerpt below:

I worked one year in Poland, in a fish factory. Some workers treated us badly because we always spoke to them in Russian. Our supervisor organized a meeting and explained to them that we are not Russians. He said that we came from Moldova, but we speak Russian because we lived in the Soviet Union. Maybe they were afraid that we would take their jobs.

Female, current country of destination: the Netherlands

The interviews also showed that the ethnic background and linguistic similarities do not represent the only way to understand what determined migrant workers to choose certain host countries. Indeed, individuals from ATU Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region have been more prone to migrate to Russia or Turkey. Nevertheless, according to respondents, the migration patterns have changed since the Russian financial crisis (2014-2016). One male respondent stated: „I emigrated because I want to buy an apartment in Tiraspol, which is why I did not stay in Russia after 2014. I have friends who live there with their family. They do not think about returning home, so their salaries are enough for having a decent life in Russia. I do not want to move abroad permanently”.

The Russian financial crisis (2014-2016) changed respondents' migration intentions and plans. Many of them have worked only in the Russian Federation and their entire life abroad was strongly connected with this country. In 2014, due to the country's economic decline, several interviewed migrants started to look for jobs in EU countries. For some of them, this was a radical change, as they did not have social connections in EU countries and had not visited any EU country before 2014. Nevertheless, this radical change was motivated by economic needs and personal aspirations such as buying an apartment in their region of origin. As one male respondent emphasized, Russia turned into an unattractive destination for temporary migrants, because they could not fulfill their need to purchase valuables and real estate properties.

In 2003 I went to Russia in search of money and because I am from Transnistria, I have Russian citizenship. Almost everyone here has Russian citizenship, so it

is very easy for us to travel to Russia and work there. We have the same rights as people who live in Russia. In 2015, after the economic crisis in Russia, I was not satisfied with my salary and I wanted to work in the European Union. I decided to obtain Romanian citizenship. I also have Moldovan citizenship, but I wanted to work legally in Europe.

Male, current destination: Germany

Moreover, despite their familiarity with the Russian labour market and Russian culture, several respondents left Russia for better working and living conditions in EU member states. One male respondent who worked in the construction and forestry sectors in Russia mentioned that he faced difficulties particularly related to accommodation, as he usually lived in vans or on the worksite. Another respondent emphasized that she worked an excessive number of hours per week in order to have a decent salary. Additionally, some of them mentioned that free weekends were the exception, rather than the rule.

My brother-in-law, who is a truck driver, told me that working in Germany is very different. Germans have strict rules. For example, you cannot drive 18 hours. Obviously, in Germany he has adequate living conditions and a good salary. I also worked as a truck driver in Russia. I did not have such a high salary and such conditions. Our employer did not care about our health and needs. Sometimes, I had to drive 16 or even 18 hours to receive higher salaries. Even though I was familiar with everything in Russia, I decided to move to Germany. My mother tongue is Russian, and some of my classmates live there, but I do not regret this decision.

Male, current destination: Germany

Conclusion

The interviews with migrant workers from Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region revealed the complexity of factors behind labour migration. Their decision to emigrate was predominantly motivated by economic needs and financial responsibility for their dependent children and elderly parents. However, their migration journey has been influenced by a spectrum of factors such as: family relations, economic crises, predictability of life, migration stories, ethnicity, and citizenship. The above paragraphs highlight that our respondents emigrated in search of economic prosperity, dignity and respectability for their work, but also in search of a better future for their children. The poverty and uncertainty experienced in Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region determined them to perceive labour migration as a solution and necessity. After several years abroad, our respondents gained more control and a sense of security in their personal and family life.

Furthermore, the above sections underline that migrant workers tend to emigrate to those countries which are perceived or known as immigration-friendly. Considering that Gagauz and Russian ethnics share with Russia and Turkey a related/common language, traditions and culture, it is understandable why our respondents reflected first of all on migration to these specific host countries. The knowledge of Russian or Turkish as well as the access to Russian/Turkish cinematography, TV shows and social media platforms determined our respondents to have a greater degree of cultural familiarity with these countries in contrast with EU member states. It should be noted that this high degree of familiarity offered them a sense of security and trust in the success of their migration journey. Moreover, the existence of a large Gagauz/Bulgarian/Russian/Moldovan diaspora in their host country offered reassurance that their integration in the local labour market would be successful. Nevertheless, as the interviews outlined, labour migration of temporary migrant workers is more strongly influenced by economic determinants. This explains why after the 2014 Russian financial crisis, several participants who are Russian ethnics moved to Western EU member states, or why respondents with Bulgarian origins did not think of Bulgaria as a country of destination.

There are two main observations regarding economic migration from Gagauzia and Transnistria. First of all, many economic migrants are women. As previously mentioned, available border crossing data from 2018 indicate that 54% of the estimated number of Moldovan migrants were women. This leads to the feminisation of migration from the two regions, which also reveals dramatic changes and perceptions in their home communities and families (children miss their mothers, they are raised by their grandparents, women are suspected of searching for new husbands etc.). Secondly, given all the turmoil, disruption of everyday life, families torn apart, and sorrow brought about by economic migration, economic migrants feel that bringing their families in the host countries would provide a sense of normalcy and predictability in their future, hence turning economic migration into emigration.

Abstrakt

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W poszukiwaniu bezpieczeństwa ekonomicznego i społecznego. Doświadczenia migrantów ekonomicznych z Naddniestrza i Gagauzji

Głównym celem niniejszego artykułu jest zbadanie przyczyn i charakteru migracji zarobkowej z Republiki Mołdawii. Ramy koncepcyjne i analityczne opierają się na poszerzaniu i pogłębianiu znaczenia terminu „bezpieczeństwo” w ramach

przejścia od tradycyjnego, zimnowojennego, państwocentrycznego rozumienia do podejścia wielosektorowego. W pracy wybrano dwa istotne sektory bezpieczeństwa, a mianowicie bezpieczeństwo ekonomiczne i bezpieczeństwo społeczne, ponieważ zapewniają one dogłębne zrozumienie migracji ekonomicznej z Gagauzji i Naddniestrza. Metodologia opiera się na wywiadach przeprowadzonych z pracownikami migrującymi z obu regionów oraz na interpretacji i analizie wyników badań. Przed omówieniem wyników zostały udokumentowane doświadczenia migracyjne pracowników migrujących należących do różnych grup etnicznych, przyglądając się ich sytuacji przed i po migracji. Ponadto zbadano również, w jaki sposób aspiracje ekonomiczne i tożsamość etniczna migrantów kształtowały ich intencje migracyjne i postrzeganie różnych krajów docelowych.

Słowa kluczowe: migracje ekonomiczne, Gagauzja, Naddniestrze, bezpieczeństwo ekonomiczne, bezpieczeństwo społeczne

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