



HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE TRANSNISTRIAN REGION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

2024 Retrospective | Report

Chisinau, 2025





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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIPA - Agency of Intervention and Payments in Agriculture

BPR - Bureau for Reintegration Policies

CPT - European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment

ECHR - European Convention on Human Rights

EU - European Union

ECtHR - European Court of Human Rights

GSIN - State Service of Execution of Punishments of the so-called "pmr" ("Госсудаарственная служба исполнений наказаний пмр")

JPF - Joint Peacekeeping Forces

MAFI - Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry

MC - Ministry of Culture

MER - Ministry of Education and Research

MLSP - Ministry of Labor and Social Protection

NHRAP - National Human Rights Action Plan

OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

pmr - "pridnestrovian moldavian republic"

PPR - Prison Population Rate

Promo-LEX - Promo-LEX Association

TDI - Temporary Detention Isolators (изоляторы временного содержания)

UCC - Unified Control Commission

UN - United Nations Organization

INTRODUCTION

The human rights situation in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova continues to be a matter of national and international concern, marked by a persistent legal vacuum and a vicious climate of impunity. Over the past decade, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has handed down a number of judgments highlighting structural violations in the region, particularly concerning the right to liberty and security of the person, the right to a fair trial, freedom of movement and the right to education. Despite the attention of international institutions and the efforts of civil society, remedial mechanisms have remained limited and representatives of the Tiraspol regime consistently reject any form of independent monitoring.

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of human rights violations in the Transnistrian region, relevant for the period January 1 to December 31, 2024, focusing on major developments, worsening practices and vulnerabilities that remain unaddressed by the constitutional authorities of the Republic of Moldova. Although this territory is outside Chisinau's effective control, constitutional and international obligations remain applicable and the responsibility to protect citizens' rights extends to all government institutions.

Background and timeliness of the report

The regional context, characterized by political tensions and deadlocks in the Transnistrian settlement negotiations, has perpetuated illegitimate structures and fostered impunity for human rights abuses. At the same time, recent economic and social hardships, along with geopolitical developments have further exacerbated the vulnerability of local communities, amplifying the impact of restrictions imposed on farmers, Romanian-language schools, and civil society groups. In this environment, independent documentation and regular reporting remain indispensable tools for exposing violations of fundamental rights and prompting reactions from policymakers, international bodies, and public opinion.

Purpose and scope

The main purpose of the report is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the serious violations that were perpetuated in 2024, focusing on four key areas: (1) the right to liberty and security, (2) the prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment, (3) freedom of movement, and (4) the right to education. Each chapter details the legislative framework, reveals structural loopholes, and illustrates the issues through case studies. The report also analyzes both the actions and practices of Transnistrian structures and the responses - or lack thereof - of the constitutional authorities.

Research methodology

In preparing the report, the authors combined qualitative and quantitative methods in line with international human rights research standards:

- ▶ Open-source data collection: press releases, local budgets, and "legislative" acts published in the region were analyzed, corroborated with limited reports from Transnistrian structures and data provided by the constitutional authorities.
- ▶ Formal requests for information: since December 2024, Promo-LEX has submitted requests to Transnistrian structures (e.g. "ministry of state security", "ministry of justice" and "state

service of execution of punishments”) as well as to Moldovan institutions (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry (MAFI), Bureau for Reintegration Policies (BPR)). While the requests to Tiraspol went unanswered, the responses from Moldovan authorities indicated some progress, yet also highlighted significant gaps in monitoring and intervention mechanisms.

- ▶ Interviews and testimonies of victims: semi-structured interviews were conducted with people who have suffered human rights violations (victims of ill-treatment, arbitrary detention, farmers affected by illegal taxes and parents of pupils in Romanian language schools). Each testimony was cross-checked to confirm the veracity of the facts and the extent of the alleged abuses.
- ▶ Field monitoring: the authors of the report carried out fact-finding visits to the Security Zone, investigating access to agricultural land and educational infrastructure, as well as discussions with local authorities.
- ▶ Comparative analysis: where possible, data and statistics regarding the situation on the left bank of the Nistru River were compared with those from the right bank, as well as with international standards such as the European Convention on Human Rights, the rules of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), and the UN Recommendations.

Limitations and challenges

The main limitation was the restricted access to the Transnistrian region, combined with the refusal of Transnistrian structures to provide relevant information. In addition, logistical constraints and security risks for monitors and victims made it difficult to conduct more extensive investigations. Therefore, although the report is based on verified sources and rigorous documentation methods, the true extent of human rights violations in the region may be significantly higher than reflected in the data presented.

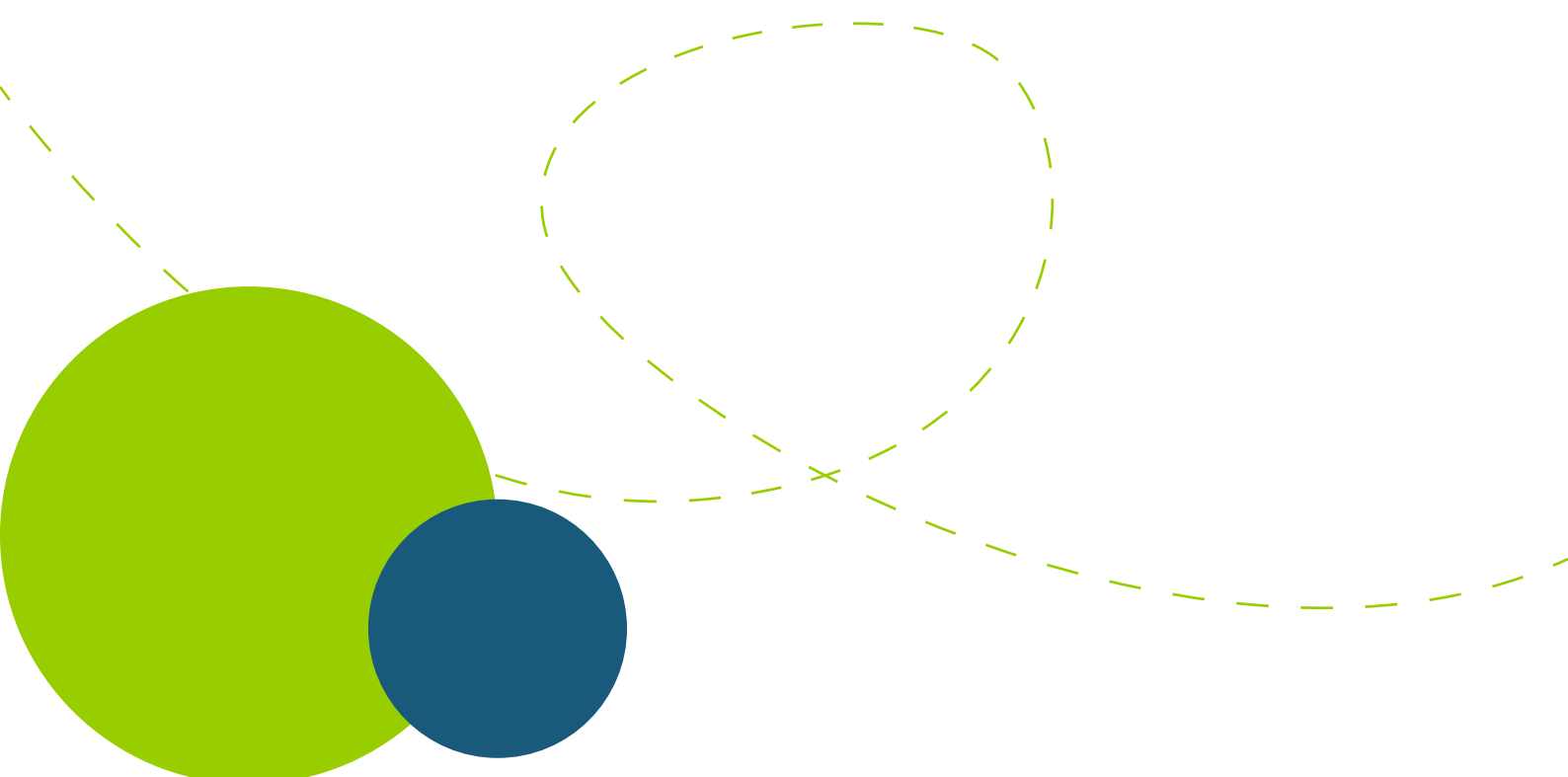
Structure of the report

The report is organized into four chapters, each addressing a distinct component:

- ▶ Chapter I analyzes the right to liberty and security, reflecting on unlawful and arbitrary detention, the lack of transparency in the “prison system” and overcrowding in places of detention;
- ▶ Chapter II examines the prohibition of torture and inhuman treatment, highlighting the poor conditions of detention, the impossibility of reporting abuses and the long-term effects on victims;
- ▶ Chapter III deals with the main violations of freedom of movement, illegal pressures and restrictions imposed on farmers in Dubăsari, abuses against media representatives, obstacles faced by teachers in Romanian-language schools, illegal vehicle checks and intimidation of drivers, as well as the network of illegal checkpoints in the context of the prolongation of the “terrorist alert code”;
- ▶ Chapter IV focuses on violations of the right to education, pressures on Romanian-language schools, practices of intimidation of parents, students and teachers, as well as deficiencies in the educational infrastructure, challenges related to the integration of non-native Romanian-speaking students and access to cultural products and services in Romanian. The chapter also documents the phenomenon of militarization of education and political indoctrination of children enrolled in schools subordinated to Tiraspol.
- ▶ The report includes conclusions for chapters I and II, respectively III and IV, as well as recommendations for the constitutional authorities of the Republic of Moldova and international partners. The ultimate goal is to reveal the extent of human rights violations in the Transnistrian region and to support national and international efforts to remedy the situation.

Note on terminology

The use in this report of terms such as “ministry”, “judge”, “prosecutor”, “minister”, “deputy”, “law” does not imply legitimization or *de jure* recognition of the Transnistrian structures, the functions within them and the decisions they issue. We have accepted the use of the exact names of the Transnistrian structures and the functions within them by way of exception, only in order to provide the most accurate identification of the structures or persons responsible for human rights violations. Terms referring to the specific names of the Transnistrian structures and the functions established within them are written in quotation marks (“...”), without initial capital letters.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Throughout 2024, the human rights situation in the Transnistrian region continued to be marked by illegal practices, institutionalized abuses and a significant lack of transparency, all of which are sustained by a chronic climate of impunity. The analysis revealed that the Tiraspol administration faces an alarmingly high incarceration rate, estimated at 391.67 prisoners per 100.000 inhabitants (compared to 235.01 on the right bank of the Nistru River and 116.2 on the European average). This discrepancy can be explained by arbitrary detention practices, as well as by the widespread application of “pre-trial detention”, which covers 21.4% of detainees on the left bank of the Nistru River, compared with 16.93% on the right bank. Moreover, Transnistrian structures systematically use “administrative detention” for punitive purposes, increasing overcrowding in illegal places of detention. The absence of procedural safeguards and independent national or international monitoring perpetuates a climate of abuse. The lack of information about detention conditions, coupled with the refusal of the Tiraspol administration to respond to inquiries, conceals potential serious violations which remain undocumented and only formally sanctioned. According to the few available data, the minimum space allocated per detainee is only 2 m², far below the standard of 4 m² recommended by the CPT. Additionally, the budget allocated for medical services (approximately 20.913 USD per year for 1.785 persons deprived of their liberty) reflects a disinterest in ensuring humane treatment. In contrast, the right bank of the Nistru River allocates approximately 148 USD per detainee annually, which reveals a significant difference in funding and confirms the lack of access to adequate medical care on the left bank.

As regards torture and ill-treatment, the persistence of intimidation and physical violence is underpinned by the systematic censorship of correspondence and the inability of detainees to complain directly to independent bodies. Local legal mechanisms, based on so-called Transnistrian “laws” and “codes”, require that any complaints must be channeled through the prison “administration”, which negates any chance of confidentiality. The justification offered by Transnistrian structures, according to which the absence of complaints from detainees would indicate the non-existence of torture, is a manipulation designed to conceal the lack of a safe and effective mechanism for reporting abuses and ill-treatment in the “penitentiary system”.

The BPR, which is supposed to monitor human rights in the region, lacks concrete tools and clear data collection procedures, responding in a reactive rather than proactive manner. In 2024, only 18 victims reported to the BPR, an alarmingly low number given the scale of serious human rights abuses and violations in the Transnistrian region. This situation reflects the existence of serious barriers to reporting and underlines the urgent need for effective communication and support tools for affected individuals.

In the sphere of freedom of movement, Transnistrian structures frequently use illegal barriers and an extensive network of illegal checkpoints, which reached 53 in 2024. The illegal checkpoints were consolidated under the pretext of the “terrorist alert code”. This network obstructs the movement of thousands of citizens, including farmers, economic agents, journalists, teachers and students from Romanian-language schools, as well as representatives of diplomatic missions. At the same time, farmers in the Dubăsari district were forced to pay new illegal “customs duties” for the production transported across the administrative line. The authorities have tried to mitigate the effects of these illegal costs through a compensation mechanism, allocating more than 3 million lei to 26 affected economic agents, but further measures are needed to support farmers in cases where they

are unable to honor their financial obligations due to the abusive actions of Transnistrian structures. At the same time, Tiraspol has introduced an additional “tax” for vehicles with Moldovan registration plates exceeding 18 tons and transporting certain categories of products, such as building materials and cereals.

Another alarming issue is the practice of declaring people from civil society, writers and journalists as “undesirables” in the Transnistrian region. The detention of journalists Viorica Tataru, Andrei Captarenco, Timofei Iliuşin, Octavian Lupăcescu and Ion Moroz, as well as the ban on access to the region for writers Maria Ivanov, Dumitru Crudu, Emilian Galaicu-Păun and Elvira Moroşan, underscores the ongoing intimidation of independent journalists, the consolidation of the information monopoly, and the constant surveillance of materials and publications distributed to Romanian-language schools.

Romanian-language schools in the region continue to operate in a hostile climate and to be subjected to new abusive actions, including: a considerable increase in utility tariffs compared to those applied to Tiraspol-controlled schools; abusive inspections; threats against teachers at illegal checkpoints; intimidation and interrogation parents in order to force them to transfer their children to Tiraspol-controlled schools; and requesting lists of pupils for military registration by paramilitary structures. The fees charged to the 8 Romanian-language educational institutions are 4-5 times higher than those charged to Tiraspol’s subordinate schools. In this context, a significant part of the schools’ budgets has been used to cover utility costs. For example, the boarding school in Bender spent 44.8% of its available funds on utilities.

Despite these impediments, the number of students in these schools continues to grow steadily, with an average annual increase of about 5. During the 2024-2025 school year, at Roghi Gymnasium alone, the number of children increased by 20%. Additionally, the schools are attracting pupils from an increasingly diverse range of localities. To integrate more children and young people into the national education system, further budgetary resources are essential for expanding or restructuring buildings, improving learning conditions, opening new classrooms, and acquiring modern, adequately-sized transportation. Furthermore, alternative study spaces need to be identified. Currently, the budgetary resources allocated to these schools allow only minor repairs to be carried out. In some cases, the cost of regular maintenance work is covered by parents. Regarding transportation, there is a need for 11 modern and spacious vehicles to transport pupils, as well as 4 vehicles for administrative activities and the transportation of goods. At the same time, additional measures are needed to: (1) support the linguistic integration of the 186 Russian native speaker students, (2) promote the learning of the Romanian language among children and young people in the region, and (3) enhance pupils’ access to cultural services and products in Romanian.

Another alarming phenomenon, which represents a gross violation of children’s rights, is the militarization of education in Tiraspol-subordinated schools and the political indoctrination starting from preschool age. Over the past eight years, “military-patriotic education” has become a priority for Transnistrian structures. This is evidenced by (1) the inclusion of basic military education in the school curriculum, (2) the organization of more than 1,400 military-related events annually, (3) the recruitment of more than 500 children into “military schools”, (4) the inclusion of 25 schools in the “patronage program” of the “ministry of state security”, and (5) the organization of military training camps for hundreds of children. In 2024, paramilitary and force structures received 20% of the Transnistrian region’s budget, while the so-called “ministry of education” and the entire education system received only 7.51% of the budget. With a significant portion of the budget at their disposal, the paramilitary and security structures exercise considerable influence over the educational sphere through the so-called “school sponsorship programs”.

A special attention is given to the military education of children without parental care. These children, being excluded from society and deprived of direct parental influence, become vulnerable to forced recruitment into paramilitary structures in the region. As of January 1, 2024, the number of children left without parental care in the Transnistrian region was 2,742. In the absence of a documentation mechanism, children adopted through the decisions of so-called “judges” in the Transnistrian region cannot obtain Moldovan identity documents, which restricts their fundamental rights, such as freedom of movement, access to education and the right to special protection.

In conclusion, the report underlines that human rights violations in the Transnistrian region - from arbitrary detentions and inhumane detention conditions to illegal restrictions on farmers, intimidation of teachers and students in Romanian-language schools and the militarization of education - will not be addressed without coordinated national and international intervention. A reactive and piecemeal approach, without a unified plan, perpetuates impunity and further exposes citizens on the left bank of the Nistru River to vulnerability. Continuous monitoring of the human rights situation, strong diplomatic pressure, and the establishment of effective protection mechanisms are essential to preventing abuses and creating a conducive environment for a genuine reintegration process of the country.

CHAPTER 1

THE RIGHT TO LIBERTY AND SECURITY

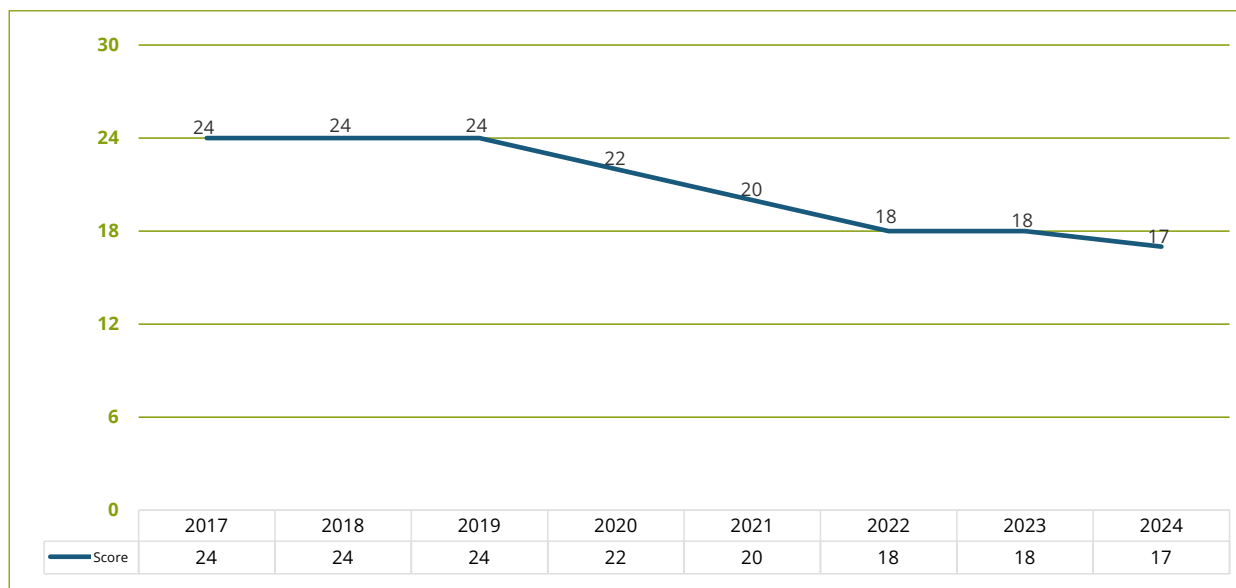
Freedom and security means the fundamental right to live without fear, without the risk of being illegally detained or falling victim to a non-transparent and repressive system. For the people of the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova, these rights are often just ideals, because the lack of transparency and the existence of an illegal prison system jeopardize their safety, as well as the physical and mental integrity of the people detained there.

According to the *Freedom in the World 2024* report¹, the Transnistrian region scores extremely low on political rights and civil liberties, highlighting the high level of authoritarian control and the frequency of violations of fundamental rights. The report underlines that unlawful detentions, lack of access to a fair trial and inhumane treatment in the illegitimate prison system are systemic problems directly affecting the safety and security of the inhabitants. This oppressive environment, combined with the impunity of Transnistrian structures, leaves the population vulnerable to abuse and perpetuates fear and insecurity. In such a context, freedom and security become elusive ideals rather than guaranteed rights.

This reality is confirmed by the **steady decline of the Freedom House score**, which in 2024 reached **17/100**, reflecting the intensifying repressive tendencies of the Tiraspol regime. The decline of this score in recent years underlines the increasingly severe restrictions on fundamental rights and the continued deterioration of the climate of freedom and security in the region.

Figure 1.1.

Evolution of the Freedom House score for the left bank of the Nistru River (2017-2024)



Source: Freedom House

The Transnistrian region is known for serious violations of fundamental human rights, including the use of illegal detention as a tool to intimidate² or eliminate political opposition³.

1 Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2024: Transnistria*, accessed February 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/transnistria/fr-and-edom-world/2024>.
 2 Radio Free Europe Moldova, "ECtHR Condemned Russia for Illegal Detention in Transnistria", accessed February 3, 2025, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/cedo-a-condamnat-rusia-pentru-detentie-ilegala-in-transnistria/32827753.html>.
 3 Promo-LEX, "Tiraspol opposition leader Oleg Horjan was killed under suspicious circumstances in his home in the Transnistrian region", accessed February 3, 2025, <https://promolex.md/liderul-opozitiei-de-la-tiraspol-oleg-horjan-a-fost-omorat-in-circumstante-suspecte-in-locuinta-sa-din-regiunea-transnistreana/>.

This chapter analyzes the situation of the right to liberty in the Transnistrian region, particularly on the left bank of the Nistru River, highlighting the problems caused by the lack of data and the absence of effective mechanisms to monitor the respect for human rights in illegal places of detention. The limited access to information on detention conditions and the functioning of the illegitimate “penitentiary system” underline serious violations of these fundamental rights.

Lack of transparency on “prison system” data

One of the biggest challenges in assessing the situation in the “penitentiaries” on the left bank of the Nistru River is the total lack of transparency. The absence of publicly accessible data and the constant refusal to provide relevant information about the conditions of detention and treatment of detainees raises serious suspicions of abusive practices. This deliberate attitude of an authoritarian regime not only prevents abuses from being documented, but also reinforces a system that defies international standards, conceals serious abuses and maintains a climate of fear and impunity.

On December 12, 2024, Promo-LEX Association addressed a request for access to information to the Transnistrian structures, requesting information on the organization and functioning of the “penitentiary system”. The request aimed to clarify some critical issues related to the respect of human rights in these illegal places of detention. The information requested included details about the capacity of the “penitentiaries”, the living conditions of the detainees and other relevant elements regarding the functioning of this illegal detention system.

More specifically, the request concerned the following aspects: a) *implementation of the recommendations of the UN expert Thomas Hammarberg and monitoring of the so-called “action plan”⁴*: progress in realizing the recommendations made by the UN expert and concrete measures taken under the plan, approved by E. Shevchuk by “Decree no. 523 of November 13, 2013 on the implementation of the recommendations”; b) *structure and functioning of the “penitentiary system”*: full list of “penitentiaries”, types of regimes applied, their location; c) *number and distribution of prisoners/conditions of detention*: maximum capacity of “penitentiaries”, distribution of prisoners by categories and conditions of detention (e.g. (d) *Mortality and morbidity*: data on deaths and cases of ill health among detainees; (e) *Monitoring and transparency mechanism*: existence of an independent structure for monitoring “penitentiaries” and reporting violations; (f) *Protection against torture and inhuman or degrading treatment*: existence of a system for recording and reporting cases.

The Transnistrian structures confirmed receipt of our request, assigning it a registration number - No. 92041 - on December 12, 2024. However, despite this formal gesture, the Transnistrian structures did not provide any response, demonstrating a total lack of transparency and a blatant disregard for the right to information. The situation is all the more serious as not even the repetition of our request has generated any response, reinforcing the image of a closed, non-transparent and deeply dysfunctional system.

The lack of transparency about the situation in the “penitentiaries” on the left bank of the Nistru River, the systematic refusal to provide information and the absence of independent monitoring mechanisms are essential elements of a system that conceals and tolerates serious human rights violations. The link between the strict control of information and the plight of persons in illegal detention becomes evident in the context of the deliberate concealment of the realities in these places of detention. In this context, the real extent of

4 Thomas Hammarberg, “Recommendations on Improving the Human Rights Situation in the Transnistrian Region,” later included in an action plan approved by a “Decree of the Transnistrian Leader” issued on November 13, 2013, accessed February 3, 2025, https://mid.gospmr.org/ru/x/PB_

violations is difficult to estimate and the reality may be even more serious than reflected in this report.

Harsh realities and lack of monitoring mechanisms

The refusal to publish essential data about the “penitentiaries” on the left bank of the Nistru River underlines the regime’s clear intention to hide systemic human rights violations. Unlike other Transnistrian structures, which annually publish extensive reports on their work, the “gsin” – «государственная служба исполнений наказаний пмр – гсин» and the “ministry of justice” in the region do not provide any transparency regarding the penitentiary system, which increases suspicions of serious abuses and inhuman conditions in these structures.

The absence of access to international organizations and civil society through independent monitoring mechanisms in these “prisons” allows abusive practices to perpetuate, remain undocumented and unpunished. Monitoring mechanisms are fundamental for the prevention of inhuman and degrading treatment, and their absence reinforces suspicions of systematic violations: places of detention become isolated spaces where the fundamental rights of detainees are ignored.

The regime’s information monopoly

The regime in Tiraspol exerts strict control over the flow of information, including by completely monopolizing the local media⁵. This rigid control eliminates any possibility for independent reporting to reach the public and for the voices of victims or human rights organizations to be heard. In this context, the lack of transparency becomes a deliberate strategy to perpetuate abuses and deny their existence, thus ensuring impunity for the regime. The information monopoly completely isolates the region from international monitoring and pressure, reinforcing a system that tolerates serious violations of fundamental rights and neglects any obligations towards the people detained in these “prisons”.

Analysis of the illegal “prison system” through open source data

The regime’s lack of transparency and refusal to provide access to essential information about these “prisons” makes it difficult to document the extent and seriousness of human rights problems in the region.

However, analyzing data available from open sources becomes a crucial tool to build a general picture of the size and conditions in the “penitentiaries” on the left bank of the Nistru River. Although limited and often incomplete, these data reveal important aspects about the capacity of the premises, the distribution of inmates and the conditions of detention.

This section presents an analysis of statistical data on incarceration rates, detention conditions and their impact on human rights. Comparing the situation on the left bank of the Nistru River with the situation on the right bank of the Nistru River, significant differences can be highlighted.

Some of the data used in this analysis comes from the report published in 2024 by the so-called “human rights proxy” in the Transnistrian region⁶, one of the few “official” sources of the regime and the only publicly available one that provides information on the number of people detained on the left bank of the Nistru River. This information is supplemented by

5 Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2024: Transnistria*, “The Transnistrian region lacks a free and independent press, scoring a minimum score of 0 out of 4 on this chapter”, accessed February 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/transnistria/freedom-world/2024>.

6 Reports published on the website of the “Transdnestrian Human Rights Commissioner”, accessed February 3, 2025, http://www.ombudsmanpmr.org/docla_d_y_upolnomochennogo.htm.

data extracted from the so-called “Law on the Republican Budget for 2024”⁷ and from the “Procurement Plan for Goods and Services of the Service for the Execution of Punishments” («государственная служба исполнения наказаний пмр – гсин»), approved in October 2024⁸. Although indirect, these sources provide valuable information for documenting such phenomena as severe underfunding of the “penitentiary system” and highlighting the real priorities of the regime. The analysis is reinforced by the cases documented and managed by the Promo-LEX Association, which provide a critical perspective on systematic violations of fundamental rights.

Analysis of the population incarceration rate (PPR) on the left and right bank of the Nistru River, according to the data available until 01.01.2024

The incarceration rate is a key indicator for assessing penal policies and respect for human rights in the “penitentiary system”. On the left bank of the Nistru River, detention is used as a tool of political control and to cultivate an atmosphere of fear in society, reflecting the authoritarian nature of the regime which operates outside the national and international legal framework.

The extremely high rate of detention in the region is the result of a repressive system in which deprivation of liberty measures are applied unlawfully under national and international law and arbitrarily, without respect for fundamental procedural criteria. The so-called “judicial system” on the left bank of the Nistru River is subordinated to the representatives of the structures of the Transnistrian power structures and other Transnistrian entities⁹, which allows and facilitates illegal and arbitrary detentions.

Comparison of incarceration rates (PPR) between the right and the left bank of the Nistru River, according to data available until 01.01.2024

Left Bank:

- ▷ Population: 455.741 inhabitants¹⁰
- ▷ Total detainees: 1785
- ▷ $PPR = (1785 / 455.741) \times 100.000 = 391.67$
- ▷ Incarceration rate: 391.67 prisoners per 100.000 inhabitants.

Right Bank:

- ▷ Population: 2.423.300 inhabitants¹¹
- ▷ Total detainees: 5.695
- ▷ $PPR = (5\ 695 / 2\ 423\ 300) \times 100\ 000 = 235.01$
- ▷ Incarceration rate: 235.01 prisoners per 100.000 inhabitants.

7 “Law” on the budget for 2024 published on the Transnistrian “legislative” portal. Accessed on February 3, 2025, https://vsprm.org/legislation/laws/zakonodateljniie-akti-pridnestrovskoy-_____m_____oldavskoy-respubliki-v-sfere-byudjetnogo-finansovogo-ekonomicheskogo-nalogovogo-zakonodateljstva/zakon-pridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki-o-respublikanskom-byudjete-na-2024-god-.html.

8 “Plan of procurement of goods, works and services for 2024 needs of the service for the execution of punishments of the so-called Ministry of Justice of the Transnistrian region”, published on the portal *gospmr.org*, accessed February 3, 2025, <https://cdn2.gospmr.org/76918>.

9 Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2024: Transnistria*, “Transnistrian Region Scores Zero for Independence of Justice and Fair Trial,” accessed February 3, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/transnistria/freedom-world/2024>. Also, some judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, such as *Mozer v. Moldova and Russia*, *Lypovchenko v. Moldova and Russia*, *Halabudenco et al. v. Moldova and Russia*, reconfirm this situation. Accessed February 3, 2025, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%2201-231078%22%5D%7D>.

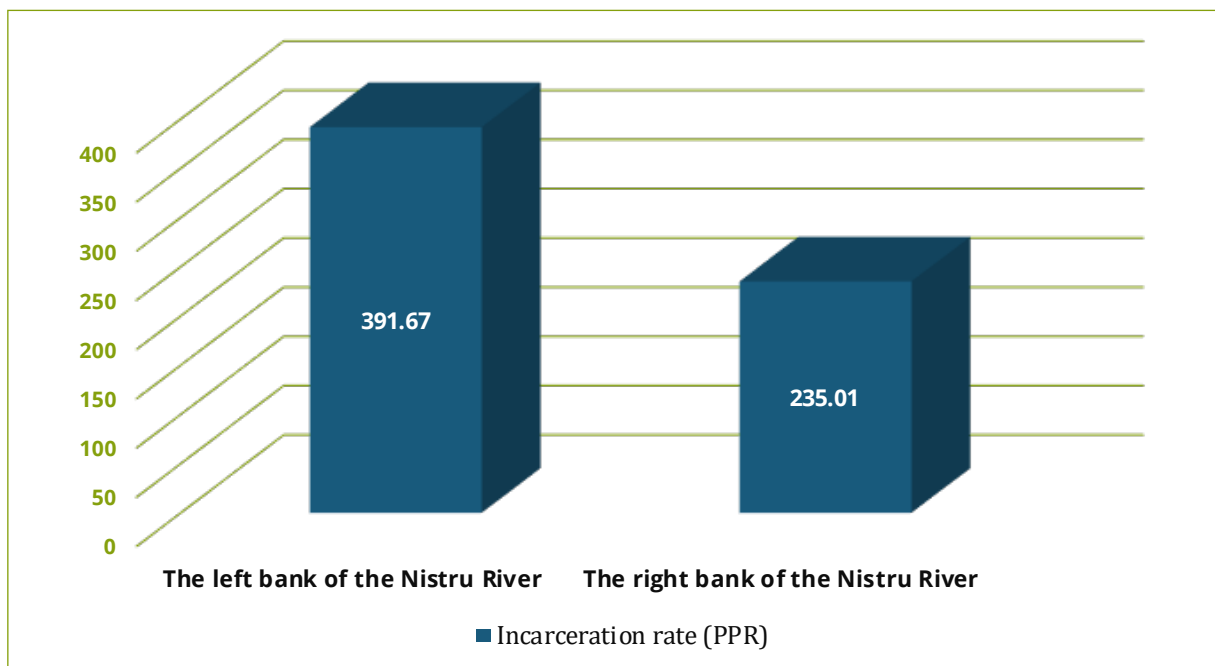
10 The estimated population for January 1, 2024 was presented by a representative of the Transnistrian structures, information published on the *Novosti PMR* portal, accessed on February 3, 2025, <https://no.vostipmr.com/ru/news/24-03-28/v-proshlom-godu-v-pridnestrove-na-svet-poyavilis-pochti-26>.

11 National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, “Number of population with usual residence as of January 1, 2024 (provisional data)”, accessed February 3, 2025, https://statistica.gov.md/ro/statistic_indicator_details/25.

Comparative analysis of incarceration rates reveals a significant discrepancy between the left and right bank of the Nistru River. The incarceration rate on the left bank of the Nistru River at 391.67 prisoners per 100.000 inhabitants, is approximately 1.67 times higher than on the right bank, at 235.01 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants. These data reflect a fundamental contrast between an authoritarian regime, operating outside any recognized legal framework, and a constitutional judicial system on the right bank of the Nistru River, in line with international standards.

Figure 1.2.

Population incarceration rate - comparison between the two banks of the Nistru River

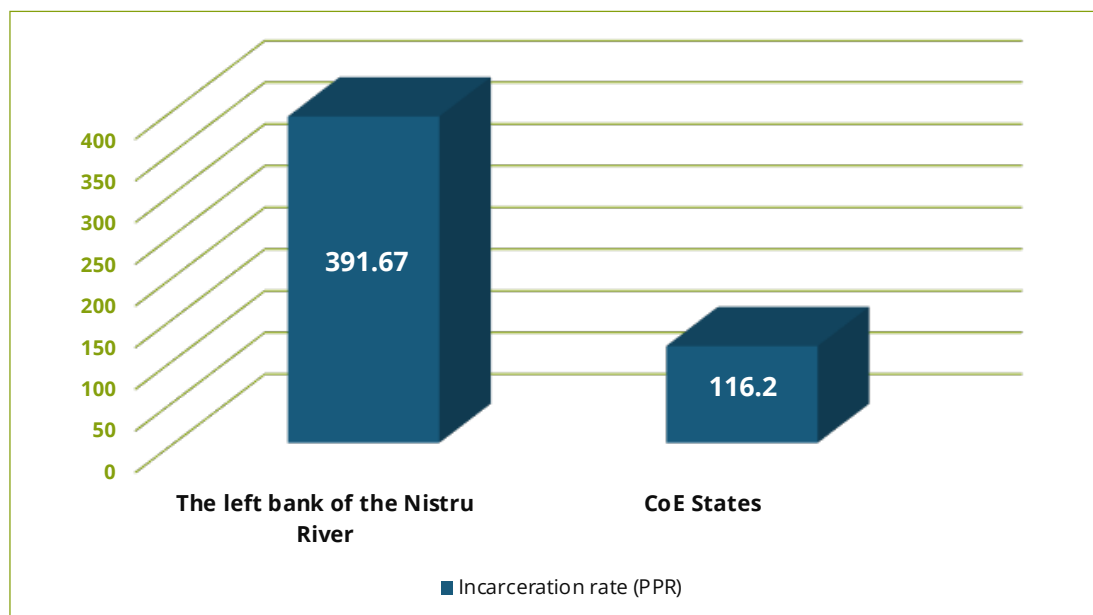


In addition, the incarceration rate on the left bank of the Nistru River is more than three times higher than the European average of 116.2 prisoners per 100.000 inhabitants, underlining the excessive nature of detention enforcement in this region¹². In contrast, although the rate on the right bank of the Nistru River is above the European average, it remains significantly lower than on the left bank. These discrepancies highlight the disproportionate and repressive nature of practices on the left bank of the Nistru River, where fundamental rights are systematically violated and detention is used as a tool of intimidation and political control.

12 Council of Europe, "Prison Overcrowding Remains a Problem in Europe - Council of Europe's Annual Penal Statistics for 2023", accessed February 3, 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/prison-overcrowding-remains-a-problem-in-europe-council-of-europe-s-annual-penal-statistics-for-2023>.

Figure 1.3.

Population incarceration rate - comparison between the left bank of the Nistru River and CoE States



Analysis of the rate of application of “pre-trial detention” on the left and right bank of the Nistru River, according to the data available until 01.01.2024

On the left bank of the Nistru River, the unlawful, excessive and arbitrary use of “pre-trial detention”, in the absence of any procedural safeguards, is a defining feature of the so-called “legal system” operating in the region. The measure is applied automatically, on the basis of generic grounds and by means of a template, through summarily drafted, one-page “decisions”, without individualized assessments or adequate grounds. Promo-LEX has consistently reported these practices in its annual reports¹³. Moreover, the persons concerned by these measures do not always receive the “decisions” ordering “pre-trial detention”, which severely limits their access to defense. Despite international condemnation of these practices, the situation remains unchanged and “pre-trial detention” continues to be used as a tool of pressure against persons uncomfortable with the regime or to suppress political opposition.

The documentation carried out by Promo-LEX, based on the cases presented by the victims, reveals that the hearings in which the “pre-trial detention” is ordered are sometimes held in the absence of the lawyer, although his name is formally recorded in the minutes, suggesting a fictitious participation. Complaints from relatives of persons “detained” and subsequently placed in “pre-trial detention”, documented by Promo-LEX, indicate that the measure is automatically extended without an individualized assessment of the circumstances of each case. Lawyers in these situations often adopt a passive stance for fear of reprisals from Transnistrian structures. These practices underline the perpetuation of a climate of systematic intimidation of defenders. This reality was signaled as early as 2018 by UN Special Rapporteur Michael Forst¹⁴, who highlighted the pressures exerted on

13 Promo-LEX, “Publications on Human Rights in the Transnistrian Region”, accessed February 3, 2025, <https://promolex.md/category/publicatii/drepturile-omului/human-rights-in-transnistrian-region/>.

14 United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova*, A/HRC/40/13/Add.2, 2019, accessed February 3, 2025, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g19/007/23/pdf/g1900723.pdf>.

activists and lawyers in the region. According to recent statements by victims assisted by Promo-LEX, such practices continue, reinforcing that hostile environment for the defense of fundamental rights.

Left Bank:

- ▷ Total prisoners (“sentenced + remand”): 1.785
- ▷ Persons in “pre-trial detention”: 382
- ▷ Share of persons “remanded in custody”: **21.4%**

Right Bank:

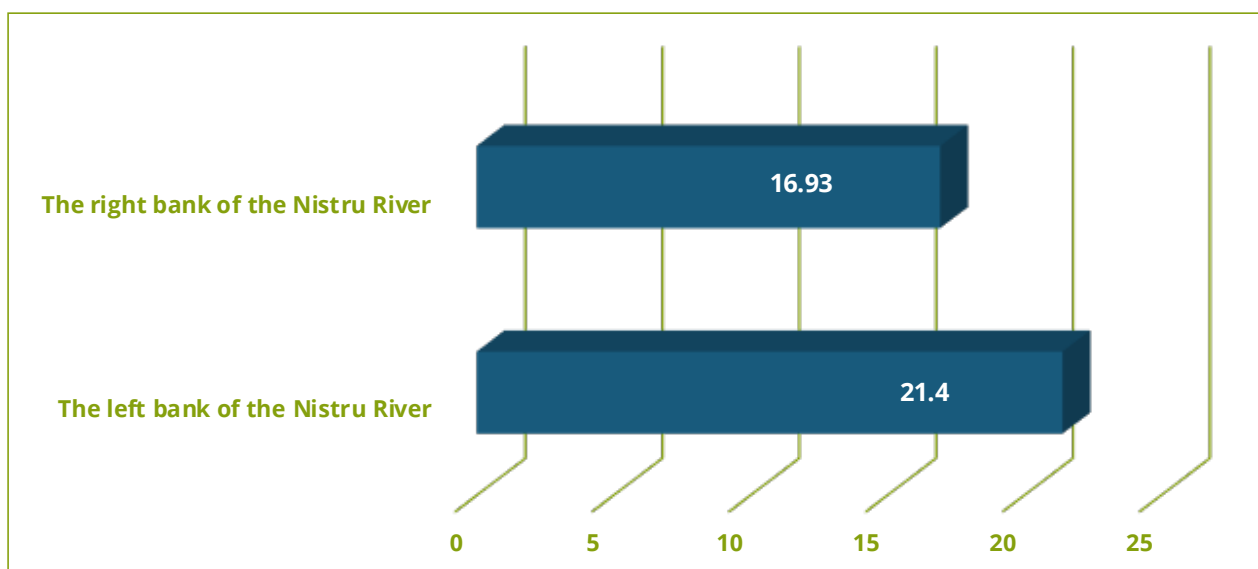
- ▷ Total prisoners (convicted + remand): 5.695
- ▷ Persons in pre-trial detention: 964
- ▷ Share of persons remanded in custody: **16.93%**

The proportion of people in “pre-trial detention” is **21.4%** of all detainees, an alarming percentage, which shows an over-reliance on this deprivation of liberty. The absence of international oversight of the so-called ‘judicial system’ on the left bank of the Nistru River increases the risk of abuses and violations of fundamental rights. Moreover, as mentioned in previous sections, local structures avoid publishing information about the dynamics of persons deprived of their liberty, as well as the exact number of persons *per* “penitentiary”, which suggests that the real situation could be much worse than the figures reported by the so-called “human rights commissioner” in the Transnistrian region.

A comparison between the left and the right bank of the Nistru River reveals significant differences in the proportion of persons in “pre-trial detention”. While on the left bank of the Nistru River it is 21.4%, on the right bank it is 16.93%, 4.47 percentage points lower.

Figure 1.4.

Proportion of persons in “pre-trial detention”, (%)



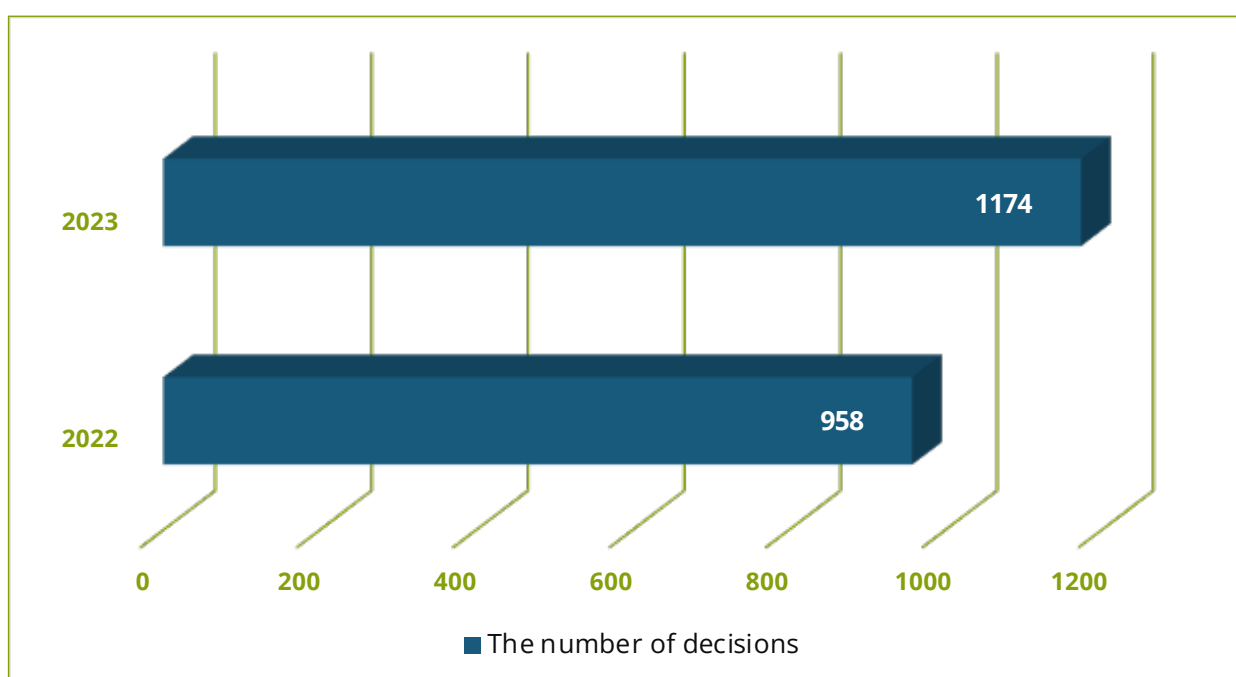
Although at first glance the difference may seem insignificant, it should be emphasized that in the context of an authoritarian and non-transparent regime such as the one on the left bank of the Nistru River, even a few percent are an alarming indicator of the excessive use of deprivation of liberty measures. In such a system, the lack of procedural safeguards and the frequent use of “pre-trial detention” as a tool of intimidation increase the vulnerability

of persons detained on the left bank of the Nistru River. The difference becomes all the more significant when analyzed in the context of a system that does not provide guaranteed defense and fair trials.

Another repressive tool that amplifies and extends abusive practices is “administrative arrest”

According to statistical data, this measure is applied systematically, affecting a significant number of people. The number of “decisions” ordering “administrative arrest” in 2023 (data as of 01.01.2024) amounted to **1.174**, compared to **958** registered in 2022, marking a percentage increase of **22.55%**. This increase indicates an increase in the use of “administrative arrest” as a sanctioning tool in the Transnistrian region.

Figure 1.5.
Evolution of “administrative arrest”



This practice directly leads to overcrowding in illegal places of detention, aggravates inhumane conditions and perpetuates an environment of abuse.

Role of the Bureau for Reintegration Policies in monitoring and ensuring the right to liberty and security

Unconstitutional structures in the Transnistrian region operate in a non-transparent environment, while the Russian Federation continues to deny effective control over the Tiraspol regime, contrary to repeated findings of the European Court of Human Rights confirming its involvement. This context has created a dangerous legal vacuum which has persisted for years and seriously undermines the protection of fundamental rights.

The responsibility of the constitutional authorities of the Republic of Moldova is crucial for monitoring and managing the situation in the Transnistrian region. Constant and systematic monitoring is important not only for documenting violations, but also for preventing and combating them. Without active involvement, including collecting and analyzing up-to-

date data, promptly investigating cases of violations and reporting them at national and international level, the Republic of Moldova risks contributing to the perpetuation of impunity and abuses committed in the region.

BPR has a fundamental role in the monitoring and protection of human rights in the Transnistrian region, in accordance with the tasks regulated by its normative framework, in particular the Regulation on the organization and functioning of the BPR of the State Chancellery¹⁵. Constant monitoring of respect for fundamental rights is an essential pillar for documenting abuses, preventing violations and combating them effectively. In this regard, the BPR must assume a central role, strengthening monitoring mechanisms by: creating standardized procedures and an up-to-date database documenting fundamental rights violations; developing victim-friendly tools such as a hotline, online platforms and dedicated protocols for handling complaints; publishing regular analytical reports highlighting systemic human rights trends and vulnerabilities, providing a solid basis for public policies and interventions.

For these efforts to produce tangible results, national institutions need to act proactively, moving beyond the reactive approach that has prevailed in the past. This implies developing functional and transparent data monitoring and data management mechanisms, an area where the BPR can play a key role. This paradigm shift would mean not only more effective protection of citizens' fundamental rights, but also a significant strengthening of the position of the Republic of Moldova on any future negotiating platform.

BPR's weak institutional capacity

Strengthening institutional capacities, either by restructuring the BPR or by creating a specialized entity, is an urgent priority in order to address the challenges in the Transnistrian region. This conclusion is based on an analysis of the current limitations, as evidenced both by the BPR's responses to the request for access to information and the lack of a constructive response to the systemic problems identified. In a context marked by systemic human rights violations and impunity, the current approach of the OPR fails to provide concrete and sustainable solutions.

On December 12, 2024, the Promo-LEX Association sent a request for access to information to the OPI, aiming to clarify its role and effectiveness in human rights monitoring. Among the topics addressed were: the preparation of regular or annual analytical reports identifying trends and highlighting systemic problems, mechanisms for victims to report violations and the types of support provided to persons released from illegal detention, as well as clear mechanisms for referrals to other organizations or institutions, the existence of official partnerships with international organizations or NGOs for the protection, reintegration of victims and their access to this information. The response provided by the BPR on December 24, 2024 was general, incomplete and, in some cases, evasive, redirecting to public sources without concretely addressing some of the questions raised.

It is important to note that the obligation to prepare analytical reports is not new. According to the 2018-2022 NHRAP 2018-2022, BPR was supposed to prepare such reports to analyze the human rights situation in the Transnistrian region. However, this activity was not carried out, citing "lack of access to the region", a justification that was criticized as unviable by

15 Government of the Republic of Moldova, *Regulation on Budget by Programs and Results 2024*, accessed February 3, 2025, https://gov.md/sites/default/files/users-media/media-23/BPR/Regulament%20BPR_2025.aprobat.pdf.

Promo-LEX¹⁶. The lack of such analysis would result in a missed opportunity to identify systemic problems and propose effective measures.

In terms of monitoring mechanisms, BPR provided evasive answers without detailing the existence of clear protocols or standardized procedures. The invocation of “analysis of referrals” and “awareness-raising appeals” on some cases or topics suggests a reactive approach lacking a well-defined strategy. Although the BPR refers to its annual activity reports, these do not provide a detailed analytical overview of the human rights situation in the Transnistrian region¹⁷. This gap underlines the urgent need to put in place functional monitoring mechanisms and to produce reports based on solid data, even in the face of physical inaccessibility on the left bank of the Nistru River.

One reason frequently cited by the BPR is the “lack of effective control” and the “separatist regime’s unwillingness to cooperate” as obstacles to human rights monitoring. While these problems are real, they do not justify the lack of innovative measures to document violations. International examples show that monitoring of areas controlled by illegitimate regimes is possible through alternative methods, such as collecting information from victims, witnesses or local organizations, information from open resources, etc.

The limited effectiveness of the BPR underlines the urgent need for institutional reforms. The Republic of Moldova must take a proactive role in documenting and combating violations in the Transnistrian region. This could involve either a significant restructuring of the BPR or the creation of a new entity with a clear mandate and the necessary resources.

Lack of a functioning victim reporting system

While BPR mentions the existence of reporting channels for victims of the Tiraspol regime, such as telephone, email, or written petitions, the lack of a clear protocol and a functioning mechanism - such as a dedicated call center or hotline - limits their accessibility. In 2024, only 18 victims reported to the BPR, an alarmingly low number in relation to the scale of serious human rights abuses and violations in the Transnistrian region. This situation reflects the existence of serious barriers to reporting and highlights the urgent need for effective communication and support tools for affected individuals.

Lack of access to critical information and limited reporting mechanisms favor the perpetuation of impunity and victims’ mistrust of constitutional authorities. The study “Information Support for Victims of Human Rights Violations in the Transnistrian Region”, elaborated by Promo-LEX, details these shortcomings, emphasizing the need to develop a centralized, accessible and effective system for information and support dedicated to the Transnistrian region¹⁸.

In this context, constantly invoking the obstacles created by the Tiraspol regime cannot serve as sufficient justification. A more proactive and innovative approach would allow not only a deeper understanding of the situation, but also a more solid positioning of the Republic of Moldova in the international dialogues on human rights in the Transnistrian region.

16 Promo-LEX, *Report: Implementation of the National Action Plan in the field of Human Rights for the years 2018–2022*, accessed on February 3, 2025, <https://promolex.md/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Raport-Implementarea-Planului-Na%C8%9Bional-de-Ac%C8%9Biuni-%C3%AEn-domeniul-Drepturilor-Omului-pentru-anii-2018-%E2%80%932022-1.pdf>.

17 Government of the Republic of Moldova, *Activity Report of the Bureau for Reintegration Policies for 2024*, accessed February 3, 2025, https://www.gov.md/sites/default/files/2025_01_10_raport_privind_pa_bpr_2024.pdf.

18 Promo-LEX, *Analytical Note: Information support for victims of human rights violations in the Transnistrian region*, 2023, accessed February 3, 2025, <https://promolex.md/analytical-note-informational-support-for-victims-of-human-rights-violations-in-the-transnistrian-region/>.

CHAPTER 2

THE RIGHT NOT TO BE SUBJECTED TO
TORTURE, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING
TREATMENT



The right not to be subjected to torture is an absolute right, guaranteed by the ECHR and other international instruments, without exceptions or derogations, whatever the circumstances. In the Transnistrian region, this fundamental right is being systematically violated by illegitimate structures operating outside any internationally recognized legal framework.

Despite the recommendations of international human rights experts, the situation regarding the prohibition of torture in the Transnistrian region remains alarming. These violations have been reported internationally since 2013 by UN expert Thomas Hammarberg, who emphasized the seriousness of the situation and recommended the development of an Action Plan to implement his recommendations. This plan was to be based on transparency and include regular monitoring mechanisms. Although the Tiraspol regime developed the so-called “Action Plan” approved by “Decree” No. 523 of November 13, 2013¹⁹, the lack of a follow-up report or public information on the progress made underlines the lack of real implementation. This situation continues to this day, in 2024, amplifying concerns about the regime’s refusal to comply with international standards and to provide a minimum of transparency in the monitoring process.

Ill-treatment of detainees, whether in militia stations or in so-called “penitentiaries”, is a systematic and widespread practice, the existence of which was confirmed in 2024. Victims who have sought assistance have reported episodes of torture and inhuman treatment, including ill-treatment orchestrated by the administration of these facilities. These accounts, some supported by photographic evidence and other victim testimonies, plus the lack of abuse reporting mechanisms for detainees, underline the seriousness of the violations and highlight the acute need for effective protection mechanisms. The censorship of correspondence and the lack of reporting mechanisms for ill-treatment in ‘prisons’ are addressed in more detail in the following chapters.

Inhumane detention conditions

Conditions in the so-called “penitentiaries” and “solitary confinement” in the Transnistrian region remain incompatible with international standards, providing an environment marked by inhuman and degrading treatment, lack of access to adequate medical care and exposure to serious risks to the health and physical integrity of detainees. These problems are compounded by the excessive and illegal use of ‘pre-trial detention’ as a tool of intimidation and political control, which increases the vulnerability of those deprived of their liberty.

The testimonies of the victims assisted by Promo-LEX until 2024, including those documented this year, provide a detailed and alarming picture of these realities. An eloquent example is the situation of a detainee who described the inhuman conditions in which he was held and the abusive treatment he was subjected to, confirming that the disastrous situation in the region’s “penitentiaries” remains unchanged. This reality perpetuates an environment incompatible with human dignity and flagrantly contravenes international human rights standards.

Held in an isolated cell without adequate light and heating, he was later transferred to an overcrowded cell, sharing 8 square meters with 12 other people. In this cell, he was forced to coexist with an open TB patient without access to adequate medical care. The unsanitary conditions included infestation with bedbugs, cockroaches, mold and mice, and access to hygiene was extremely limited, with the prisoner having to wash himself

19 “Plan for Implementation of Recommendations”, published on the *Novosti PMR* portal, accessed February 3, 2025, https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/13-11-13/prezident-pridnest-r-ovya-utverdil-plan-realizacii-rekomendaciy_

with water heated in a cup, even in winter. The food provided was of questionable quality, smelling of diesel and nutritionally insufficient. The detainee was deprived of contact with his family, and reprisals and threats against loved ones were used as methods of intimidation. (Testimony of an illegal detainee)

This testimony, far from being an isolated case, reflects the general conditions and methods of treatment applied in these institutions, confirming the systematic violations of fundamental rights, including the right to health, physical integrity and human dignity. The situation underlines the urgency of international intervention to address these abuses and prevent the perpetuation of this oppressive system.

“Transnistrian standard” of detention: 2 square meters per detainee

The sanitary standards set by Transnistrian structures for the minimum space given to persons detained in “penitentiaries” underline the seriousness of detention conditions in the region. According to Article 122 of the so-called “Enforcement Code”, the minimum space norm per detainee in “penitentiaries” is only **2 square meters**. For minors who are detained in so-called “correctional colonies” the standard is slightly higher, but equally inadequate - only **2.5 square meters**, according to Article 59 of the same “law”²⁰. These standards flagrantly contravene international standards, which recommend a minimum of 4 square meters per detainee in collective cells and 6 square meters in individual cells, as set by the CPT.

The situation is equally alarming for prisoners in “pre-trial detention”. According to Article 23 of the so-called “Law on remanding in custody of persons suspected or accused of committing crimes” (edition updated on April 30, 2024)²¹, the minimum sanitary norm of space for this category is only 2 square meters. These provisions show not only an acute crisis in detention conditions, but also a blatant lack of will to respect minimum human rights standards in the region.

In a document from October 2021, at the initiative of some so-called “deputies” of the “Supreme Soviet of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic”, a proposal was presented to amend the minimum sanitary norm of 2 square meters per detainee in “pre-trial custody”²². This initiative was rejected, which is confirmed by the maintenance of the current norm in Article 23 of the “Law on Detention under Arrest of Persons Suspected or Accused of Committing Crimes” (updated edition as of April 30, 2024). In the opinion issued by the so-called “government” on the draft “law” on amending and supplementing this “law”, the Transnistrian regime explicitly recognizes the following:

- ▶ **Current overcrowding:** “penitentiaries” are already operating at maximum capacity, according to the minimum standard of 2 square meters per inmate. Implementing a higher standard of 4 square meters would drastically reduce the capacity of these institutions, making it impossible to accommodate all “arrested” persons. The regime recognizes that these minimum standards could not be enforced due to the limitations of the existing infrastructure.

20 “criminal code of the Transnistrian Region” published on the [vspmr.org](https://vspmr.org/legislation/laws/zakonodateljnie-akti-v-sfere-ugolovnogo-tamojnogo-administrativnogo-prava/ugolovno-ispolniteljny-kodeks-pridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki.html) portal, accessed February 3, 2025, <https://vspmr.org/legislation/laws/zakonodateljnie-akti-v-sfere-ugolovnogo-tamojnogo-administrativnogo-prava/ugolovno-ispolniteljny-kodeks-pridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki.html>.

21 “law” on the Arrest of Persons Suspected or Accused of Committing Crimes, updated edition as of April 30, 2024, published on [vspmr.org](https://vspmr.org/legislation/laws/zakonodateljnie-akti-v-sfere-ugolovnogo-tamojnogo-administrativnogo-prava/zakon-p_r_idnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki-o-soderzhanii-pod-strajey-podozrevaemih-i-obvinyaemih-v-sovershenii-prestupleniy.html), accessed February 3, 2025, https://vspmr.org/legislation/laws/zakonodateljnie-akti-v-sfere-ugolovnogo-tamojnogo-administrativnogo-prava/zakon-p_r_idnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki-o-soderzhanii-pod-strajey-podozrevaemih-i-obvinyaemih-v-sovershenii-prestupleniy.html.

22 Decree No. 1028-r, issued in 2021 by the Transnistrian structures, published on the portal government.gospmr.org, accessed February 3, 2025, [https://government.gospmr.org/ c https://government.gospmr.org/ontent/documents/2021/1028r.pdf](https://government.gospmr.org/c https://government.gospmr.org/ontent/documents/2021/1028r.pdf).

- ▶ **Lack of financial allocations:** the document points out that the implementation of the international standard of 4 square meters per detainee would require additional financial investments, which are not budgeted for. Instead of proposing step-by-step solutions to remedy the situation, the regime completely rejects the increase of the minimum space, thus perpetuating an inhuman detention system incompatible with international standards.

Overcrowding resulting from the lack of minimum adequate space has devastating consequences on the physical and mental health of prisoners. Associated risks include the rapid spread of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, respiratory problems and general deterioration of health. In addition, the lack of personal space exacerbates psychological tensions, anxiety and conflicts between prisoners, creating an environment in which abuse and ill-treatment become almost inevitable. The ECtHR ruled in *Muršić v. Croatia* (2016) that the provision of less than 3 square meters per detainee constitutes a violation of Article 3 of the ECHR, which prohibits torture and inhuman or degrading treatment. **In this context, the 2 square meter norms applied in the Transnistrian region blatantly violate international standards and constitute degrading treatment in itself.**

In the absence of direct access to these illegal places of detention, an analysis of the “legislation” and other “regulatory acts” issued by Transnistrian structures provides sufficient clues to paint a clear picture of a deeply dysfunctional system that perpetuates degrading conditions and treatment incompatible with respect for human dignity.

Underfunding of the “prison system”

The disastrous situation of the conditions in which people are held in these illegal places of detention is also confirmed by the budget analysis, which reveals chronic underfunding of the so-called “penitentiary system” in the Transnistrian region. Insufficient allocation of resources to improve detention conditions demonstrates a lack of prioritization of fundamental rights and a systematic neglect of the basic needs of persons deprived of their liberty. This approach underlines the perpetuation of practices that flagrantly contravene international standards, amplifying the vulnerability of detainees and ignoring the need for conditions of detention in accordance with human dignity.

In the absence of real transparency and direct access to information about the situation in the “penitentiaries” on the left bank of the Nistru River, the budget analysis and the testimonies of victims become essential sources for understanding the seriousness of the systemic problems. It is important to emphasize that the budget does not always reflect the reality of actual expenditure. In an authoritarian system, where resources are frequently diverted to purposes other than those officially stated, budget figures may not represent the situation on the ground. In addition, the annual budget does not provide details on the exact distribution of resources between prisons or on specific categories of expenditure. This lack of detail and transparency increases the risk that the real situation is much worse than the official data indicate. Nevertheless, although limited, the budget analysis remains an indispensable tool for monitoring, providing a starting point for documenting violations.

Thus, an analysis of the “legislation” and budget documents issued by the Transnistrian regime paints a bleak picture of a dysfunctional “penitentiary system”, incompatible with international standards on the treatment of prisoners. The lack of resources to ensure essential needs, such as access to medicines, medical services, decent conditions of detention, is compounded by the lack of investment in prison infrastructure. Instead, the funds allocated are almost exclusively focused on repairs and capital construction of administrative buildings, a decision which reflects a blatant disregard for the critical situation in detention facilities.

Financial resources allocated to medicines, medical services and other expenditure

According to the “Republican Budget Law” of 2024²³, **716.844 rubles** (equivalent to approximately **44.523 USD**²⁴) are planned to be allocated for medicines and other medical expenses, including treatment. This budget category is essential for the health of prisoners, given their medical vulnerabilities and the need for appropriate care. However, according to the “Procurement Plan” of the “State Service for the Execution of Punishments” («государственная служба исполнений наказаний пмр – гсин»), approved in October 2024²⁵, the amount actually spent was considerably lower than originally planned in the annual budget, reducing to **336.709 rubles** (equivalent to approximately **USD 20.913**).

This amount includes:

- ▶ **316.844 rubles** allocated from the “republican budget”;
- ▶ **19.865 rubles** from other sources.

A comparison of the amounts spent on medicines and medical services on the right bank of the Nistru River in relation to the number of detainees gives a clearer perspective on the gravity of the situation. The results accurately demonstrate the inability of the Transnistrian regime to provide even primary health care, let alone specialized medical treatment for persons illegally deprived of their liberty.

- ▶ On the right bank of the Nistru River²⁶, expenditures made for the health of prisoners in 2023 included **9.199.600 lei** for medicines (sanitary materials) and **6.813.200 lei** for medical services, totaling **16.012.800 lei**. This represents about **US\$ 843.831**²⁷ annually, and the amount spent per inmate per year is about 2,811 lei (equivalent to **US\$ 148**).
- ▶ In contrast, on the left bank of the Nistru River, the amount planned for the purchase of medicines and medical services and other expenses in 2024 was only **336.709 rubles**, equivalent to **20.910 USD**.

*In relation to the total number of 1.785 detainees, this represents an annual allocation of about **189 rubles per detainee**, equivalent to **11.74 USD** per year (about **205 lei per year**).*

The differences between the two banks of the Nistru River are significant, which underlines a considerable underfunding of the “penitentiary system” on the left bank of the Nistru River. In addition, the extremely low amount allocated per detainee for medical services, medicines and other medical expenses indicates the impossibility to provide minimum medical care and gives a clear insight into the gravity of the situation, demonstrating the

23 “Law” on the republican budget for 2024, adopted by the Transnistrian structures, published on the *vspmr.org* portal, accessed February 3, 2025, https://vspmr.org/legislation/law_s_/zakonodateljniie-akti-pridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respublikiy-v-sfere-byudjetnogo-finansovogo-ekonomicheskogo-nalagovogo-zakonodateljstva/zakon-pridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki-0-respublikanskom-byudjete-na-2024-god-.html.

24 Exchange rate set by the Transnistrian structures on January 16, 2025, published on *cbpmr.net* portal, accessed on February 3, 2025, https://www.cbpmr.net/kursval.php?lang=en&utm_source=chatgpt.com.https://www.cbpmr.net/.

25 “Plan of procurement of goods, works and services for the 2024 needs of the service for the execution of punishments of the so-called “ministry of justice” of the Transnistrian region”, published on the portal *gospmr.org*, accessed February 3, 2025, <https://cdn2.gos.pmr.org/76918>.

26 Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Moldova, National Administration of Penitentiaries, *Report on the Activity of the Penitentiary Administration System for the Year 2023*, accessed February 3, 2025, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Vyn8BydVUcPz2pkvO_IWbSwzUGHAj9Yvw/view.

27 National Bank of the Republic of Moldova, “Exchange rate set on January 16, 2025”, accessed February 3, 2025, <https://bnm.md/ro/content/ratele-de-schimb>.

regime's inability to provide an adequate health care system for persons in detention.

These realities are confirmed by the victims' statements, which emphasize the regime's inability to provide even primary health care. The situation becomes even more serious in the context of the recognition by Transnistrian structures of the major problems related to medical treatment in the "penitentiary system", as was underlined during a coordination meeting organized by the so-called "prosecutor's office" on the left bank of the Nistru River on 4 April 2024²⁸.

The press release issued after the meeting recognizes a critical situation regarding access to medical treatment for detainees, with a particular focus on those undergoing forced treatment for drug, alcohol or other behavioral disorders. According to the communiqué, institutions in the "prison system" have an obligation to provide adequate medical care for these categories, but this responsibility is completely ignored. According to the "prosecutor's office", due to the prolonged absence of psychiatrists (narcologists) in these institutions, the necessary treatments are not prescribed and applied. Moreover, the absence of qualified staff makes it impossible to assess the state of health of persons subjected to forced treatment and to draw up the medical reports needed to initiate the procedures for the termination of coercive measures. The press release also states that there is no clear plan for hiring medical staff or allocating the necessary resources, thus perpetuating an environment that blatantly violates fundamental rights.

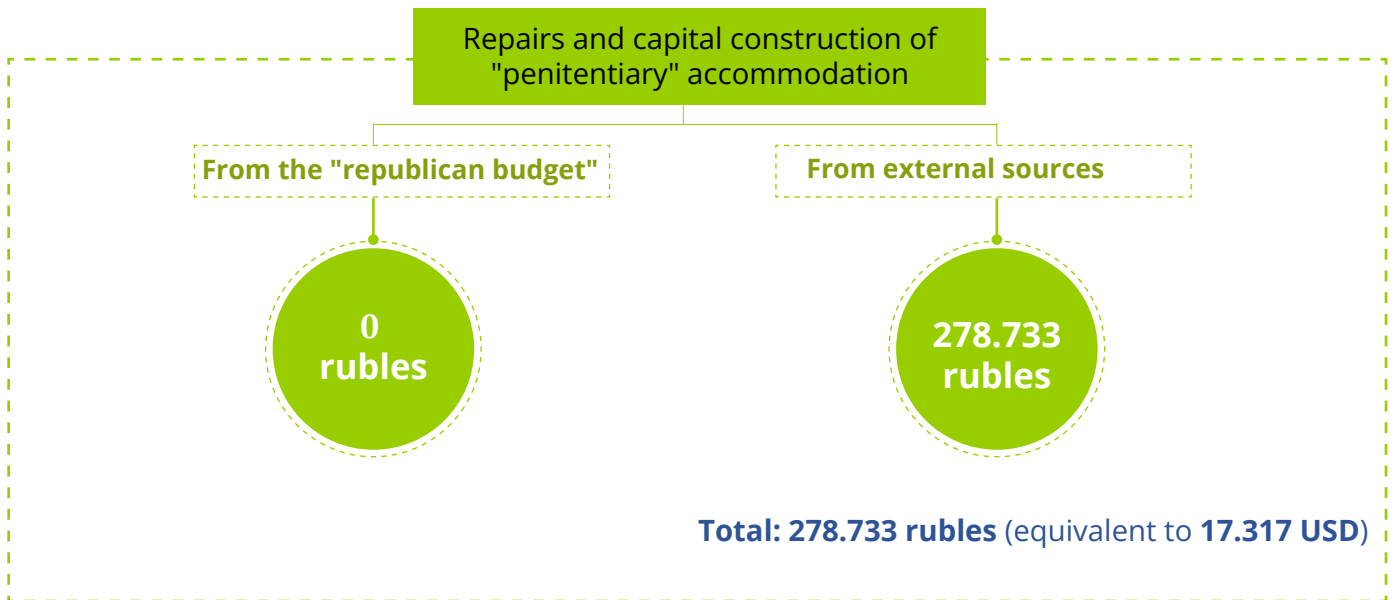
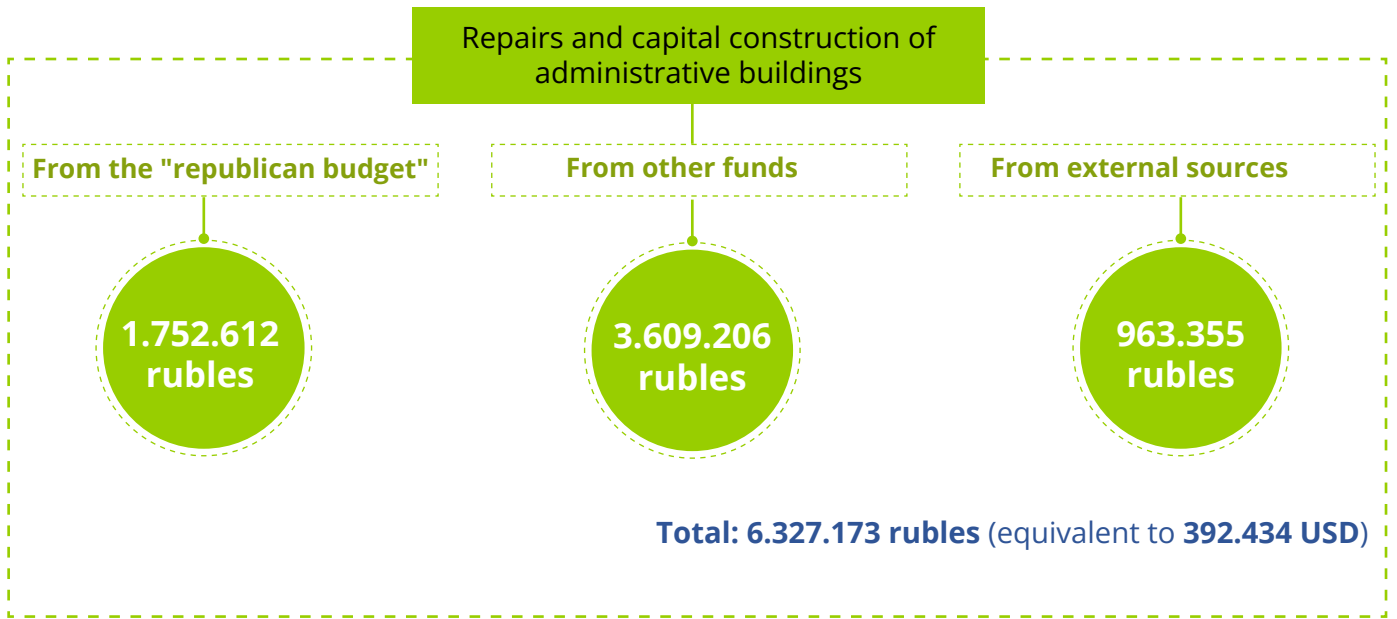
This situation highlights the extreme vulnerability of detainees, especially those subjected to forced treatment, whose mental and physical health is severely affected due to the lack of proper medical treatment. The repressive environment, characterized by abuse and ill-treatment, is maintained, although the regime acknowledges the existing deficiencies, the refusal to take concrete measures reflecting a deliberate disregard for fundamental human dignity obligations. The chronic under-funding of the so-called "prison system", the inefficient management of resources and the reduction of allocations for medicines and medical services confirm a systematic neglect of the basic needs of people in detention.

Financial resources allocated to capital repairs and construction

The analysis of budget allocations for capital repairs confirms the deplorable state of material conditions in places of detention on the left bank of the Nistru River and highlights a clear lack of interest in improving them. An analysis of the amount allocated for capital repairs in the so-called "penitentiary system" on the left bank of the Nistru River reveals a number of critical problems related to the management of funds and prioritization of essential needs. According to the "procurement plan" of the "state service for the execution of punishments" («государственная служба исполнения наказаний пмр – гсин»), approved in October 2024²⁹, derisory funds have been earmarked for capital repairs of the buildings where persons illegally deprived of their liberty are held. Instead, huge funds are directed exclusively to capital repairs of administrative blocks.

28 "Information on a coordination meeting organized by Transnistrian structures", published on the *prokuror-pmr.org* portal, accessed February 3, 2025, <https://prokuror-pmr.org/v-prokurature-respubliki-proshlo-koordinaczionnoe-soveshhanie/>.

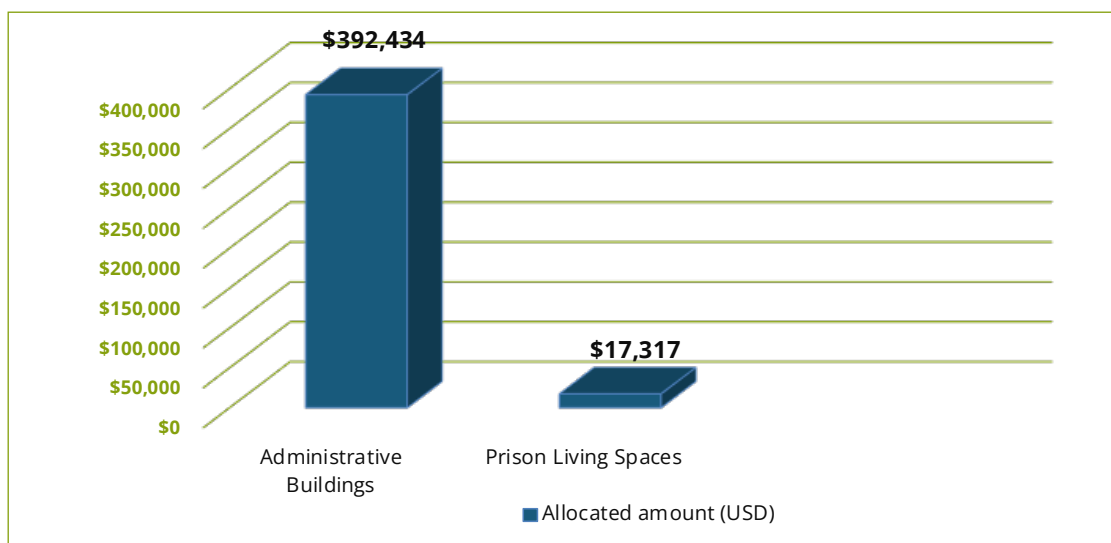
29 "Plan of procurement of goods, works and services for 2024 needs of the service for the execution of punishments of the so-called ministry of justice of the Transnistrian region", published on the portal *gospmr.org*, accessed February 3, 2025, https://cdn2.gospmr.org/76_9_18.



Comparing the total amount allocated for the administrative blocks (**6.327.173 rubles**, equivalent to about **392.434 USD**) with the modest amount of **278.733 rubles** (about **17.317 USD**) allocated for capital repairs in "penitentiaries", an unbalanced approach is evident.

Figure 2.1.

Planned funds for repair and construction: Administrative Building vs. Prison Living Spaces



Since there is no clear breakdown of how the amount of **278.733 rubles** (approximately **17.317 USD**) is distributed among the five “penitentiaries” in the region³⁰, we are forced to make a general calculation, which, although simplified, clearly emphasizes the insufficiency of the allocated funds. If we relate the total amount to the five “penitentiaries”, we get an average of **55.746 rubles** (about **3.463 USD**) per institution. This amount is extremely modest and cannot be considered sufficient to cover at least the necessary current repairs, especially given the already deteriorated infrastructure and poor conditions of detention, as even the local authorities themselves recognize.

The massive investments in administrative buildings reflect a prioritization of institutional needs, while critical conditions in places of detention are completely ignored. By comparison, it is clear that investment in administrative buildings exceeds by almost **23 times** the resources allocated to places of detention. This pattern of budget allocation perpetuates an inequitable system and underlines the lack of real commitment to international standards on conditions of detention. While resources are mobilized to support the administrative infrastructure, “prisons” remain in a critical state, affecting the health and dignity of detainees.

The lack of adequate space in “detention facilities” on the left bank of the Nistru River significantly worsens detention conditions, affecting both respect for human dignity and the protection of vulnerable groups. The lack of space not only makes it difficult to ensure adequate treatment, but also justifies other problematic practices, such as detaining minors together with adults in cases considered as “exceptional”. Such measures, taken under the pretext of logistical constraints, expose vulnerable persons to serious risks, undermining the principles of protection and standards set by international law.

According to the so-called local legislation, Article 33 of the so-called “law on the detention of persons suspected and accused of committing crimes” (updated edition as of April 30, 2024) allows, in exceptional cases, the detention of minors together with adults, provided that this measure is approved by written consent of the prosecutor. Adults who can be placed in the same cell with minors must meet certain criteria, such as a “positive characterization”, be involved for the first time in criminal responsibility and not be charged with serious or

30 “Information on the structure of the so-called “penitentiary system” in the Transnistrian region”, published on the portal *justice.idknet.com*, accessed February 3, 2025, <http://justice.idknet.com/web.nsf/all/%D0%93%D0%A1%D0%98%D0%9D>.

particularly serious crimes. This provision blatantly contravenes established international standards, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires the clear separation of minors from adults in all cases of detention without exception. The Mandela Rules and the Beijing Rules also specify that minors must be protected from the negative influences and abuses that may result from cohabitation with adults. Allowing minors to be placed with adults, even under the conditions set out above, undermines these principles, exposing minors to significant risks, both physical and psychological. The psychological and social impact of such a practice is particularly serious. Cohabitation with adults, even for a short period of time, can adversely affect the mental health and emotional development of minors.

Moreover, these conditions are aggravated by provisions that allow severe punitive measures, including solitary confinement in disciplinary cells. According to Article 38 of the so-called “law on the detention of persons suspected and accused of committing crimes” (updated edition as of April 30, 2024), solitary confinement may be used as a disciplinary measure for suspected or accused detainees, for up to 10 days for adults and up to 5 days even for minors. This practice raises serious questions about compliance with international standards, which prohibit degrading or disproportionate disciplinary measures, especially for minors.

Thus, in the context of lack of space, inadequate infrastructure and underfunding, these punitive practices and the joint detention of minors with adults under the pretext of logistical constraints directly undermine the principles of fundamental rights protection.

“Temporary detention isolators (TDI)” in the Transnistrian region are a subject marked by a lack of transparency, as there is no precise public data on the number of these isolators or their exact locations, many of them being located in the basements of the “militia”. In his report published in 2022³¹, the so-called “human rights commissioner” of the region recognized major problems with respect to the observance of even their own “local legislation” in relation to the conditions of detention in these places, stating that only the “isolator” in Râbnița was fully equipped with individual sleeping places, while in the other isolators only the rooms for persons under “administrative arrest” were partially equipped. There is also no mention in subsequent reports that these problems had been remedied. The situation was constantly justified by the lack of funding, a reason often given to avoid taking concrete measures: “the work carried out in this area is limited due to financial constraints”.

According to Transnistrian regulations, the so-called “legislation” allows detaining persons in “TDI” for an initial period of up to 72 hours. Subsequently, if the measure of detention is changed from “detention” to “pre-trial detention”, the person should normally be transferred to a “pre-trial detention isolator (СИИЗО)”. However, local “legislation” allows for the continued detention of such persons in militia “isolators” for periods of up to 10 days each month, a practice that undermines international standards and exacerbates the risks of abuse³². This raises serious questions about compliance with international standards on the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty. Conditions in militia “solitary confinement” are often poorer than in “pre-trial detention isolators” or “prisons”.

The situation in militia “isolators” is often much worse than in “pre-trial detention isolators” or “prisons”. Some of these “isolators” continue to be located in basements, where the

31 Reports published on the website of the “Transnistrian Human Rights Commissioner”, accessed February 3, 2025, http://www.ombudsmanpmr.org/doclady_upolnomochennogo.htm.

32 “Law” on Arrest of Persons Suspected or Accused of Committing Criminal Offenses, Article 13, updated edition as of April 30, 2024, published on [vspmr.org](https://vspmr.org/legislation/laws/zakonodatel_j_nie-akti-v-sfere-ugolovnogogo-tamojennogo-administrativnogo-prava/zakon-privdndnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki-o-soderjanii-pod-strajey-strajey-podozrevaemih-i-obvinyaemih-v-sovershenii-prestupleniy.html), accessed February 3, 2025, https://vspmr.org/legislation/laws/zakonodatel_j_nie-akti-v-sfere-ugolovnogogo-tamojennogo-administrativnogo-prava/zakon-privdndnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki-o-soderjanii-pod-strajey-strajey-podozrevaemih-i-obvinyaemih-v-sovershenii-prestupleniy.html

environment is extremely unsuitable, exposing people to unsanitary conditions which are in flagrant contravention of international standards on the fundamental rights of persons deprived of their liberty. The infrastructure of these isolators lacks essential facilities such as individual sleeping spaces, adequate toilets or access to basic medical services.

An eloquent example is the testimony of journalist Timofei Iliushin of the independent publication SOTAvision, who was detained by employees of the so-called "security ministry" and describes the inhuman conditions in the Bender militia "isolator" (or «ОВД - органы внутренних дел»): "For two days I didn't get food. I was kept in unsanitary conditions, and in the cell there was only a cauldron to satisfy my physiological needs. It was placed right in the cell, not separated by a wall. In the same cell I was kept together with several other people. For two days I was given neither water nor access to a toilet, and my work phone was confiscated. They put me under psychological pressure, threatened me with sexual violence and told me that I would never be released if I did not disclose my identity to the supposed 'curators'"³³.

Lack of a mechanism for reporting ill-treatment

Another problematic aspect of detention in the region's 'penitentiaries' is the excessive restrictions and controls imposed on the mechanisms for prisoners to lodge complaints. The provisions of Article 21 of the so-called "Law on Detention under Arrest of Persons Suspected or Accused of Committing Crimes" (updated edition as of April 30, 2024) demonstrate an automatic and strict control by the administration over detainees' access to complaint mechanisms.

According to paragraph 1 of this article, "complaints, proposals and requests addressed to central authorities, local authorities and public organizations shall be transmitted exclusively through the administration of the place of detention". This requirement removes any possibility for detainees to report violations directly, thus reinforcing their dependence on the administration of the place of detention.

More seriously, paragraph 3 of the same article states that "complaints addressed to other public organizations or to the defender must be examined by the administration of the place of detention and forwarded to the addressees no later than 3 (three) days from the date of their submission". This control over the content of complaints creates a huge risk of reprisals against detainees who denounce abuses or inhuman conditions. These "legal" provisions also allow for an exception, stipulating that complaints addressed to "the public prosecutor, the courts or other bodies authorized to supervise places of detention" are not subject to censorship and must be sent on the working day immediately following their submission. However, this provision does not compensate for the general limitations, as other types of complaints remain under the direct control of the administration.

This system of control over complaints is deeply incompatible with international standards. The Nelson Mandela Rules (The Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners) provide that prisoners must have confidential and unrestricted access to complaints mechanisms, and any administrative control over their content is inadmissible.

33 *NewsMaker*, «Говорили: хочешь, мы тебе дубинку в ж... засунем». Как журналиста из России держали в МГБ Приднестровья - интервью NM», accessed February 3, 2025, <https://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/video-govorili-hochesh-my-tebe-dubinku-v-zhasunem-k-a-k-zhurnalista-iz-rossii-derzhali-v-mgb-pridnestrovya-intervyu-nm/>; *Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)*, «Российского журналиста Тимофея Илюшина задержали в Приднестровье», accessed February 3, 2025, <https://cpj.org/ru/2024/07/1%201%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE-%D0%B6%D1%83%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0-%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%BE%D1%84%D0%B5%D1%8F-%D0%B8%D0%BB%D1%8E%D1%88/>.

Moreover, the ECtHR has emphasized, in cases such as *Petra v. Romania*³⁴ and *Cotlet v. Romania*³⁵, that effective access to complaints mechanisms is essential to prevent abuses and protect fundamental rights. In the case of the Transnistrian region, this practice not only violates ECHR standards, but also facilitates impunity by discouraging detainees from reporting ill-treatment.

The reports published in 2022, 2023 and 2024 by the so-called “human rights commissioner” in the Transnistrian region³⁶ claim that the lack of complaints from detainees would reflect a significant improvement in detention conditions and the absence of torture in “penitentiaries”. Conclusions of “improvement” are based solely on the lack of complaints from detainees, with its report published in 2024 stating that “during the period under review, no complaints were lodged about detention conditions, which is a positive factor”. This assessment, based solely on the absence of complaints, does not reflect the reality on the ground and favors the perpetuation of impunity and the concealment of systemic abuses. The existing mechanisms for detainees to lodge complaints are marred by administrative constraints, creating an environment that not only discourages reporting abuses, but effectively prevents it.

The fact that complaints are examined in advance by the administration of the places of detention, in accordance with the provisions of Article 21 of the local ‘legislation’, eliminates any chance of confidentiality or protection against reprisals. This practice gives the “prison” administration the possibility to intercept and filter any complaint that could incriminate it, thus perpetuating a system of impunity. Prisoners are deprived not only of the proper means to voice their grievances, but also of the security to do so without fear of direct consequences.

The findings of the ‘proxy’ reports are not only unsubstantiated, but also contribute to a distorted picture of the situation in detention. These reports, which rely on the absence of complaints as the sole indicator of improved conditions, ignore the fact that detainees face a complete lack of practical means to lodge complaints, to send letters, either because of strict control by the administration or because of reprisals.

Moreover, this situation demonstrates not only the lack of progress, but also the existence of a system built to mask serious violations of fundamental rights. Censorship and filtering of complaints prevents any form of independent monitoring, creating an environment conducive to torture, inhuman and degrading treatment. Instead of reflecting an improvement, the absence of complaints signals a culture of fear, where detainees are deprived of any protection or tool of justice.

This combination of optimistic ‘proxy’ reports and flawed complaints mechanisms reveals a deeply worrying reality. The current system not only prevents the reporting of abuses, but also perpetuates impunity and the suppression of prisoners’ fundamental rights.

34 ECtHR, *Case of Petra v. Romania*, Judgment of September 23, 1998, accessed February 3, 2025, [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/#{%22itemid%22:\[%22001-58244%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/#{%22itemid%22:[%22001-58244%22]).

35 ECtHR, *Case Cotlet v. Romania*, Judgment of June 3, 2003, accessed February 3, 2025, [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/#{%22itemid%22:\[%22001-65680%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/#{%22itemid%22:[%22001-65680%22]).

36 “Reports of the so-called Ombudsman of the Transnistrian region”. Portal *ombudsmanpmr.org*. Accessed February 3, 2025, http://ombudsmanpmr.org/doclady_upolnomochennogo.htm.

Censorship of correspondence and complaints

The systematic and automatic censorship of prisoners' correspondence in the Transnistrian region is a serious problem, highlighted by the monitoring, in flagrant violation of international standards on respect for fundamental rights.

According to the provisions of Article 20 of the "Law on remand in custody of persons suspected or accused of committing crimes" (edition updated on April 30, 2024), the correspondence of persons "detained" or "remanded in custody" is strictly controlled by the administration of the place of detention and, in certain cases, by the body conducting the criminal investigation. According to paragraph 2, *"the correspondence of suspects and accused persons shall be conducted exclusively through the administration of the place of detention and shall be subject to censorship. The censorship shall be carried out by the administration of the place of detention and, if necessary, by the person or body prosecuting the criminal case"*.

Practices such as the systematic censorship of correspondence, the extreme isolation of detainees and the lack of access to independent complaints mechanisms create an environment conducive to the perpetuation of torture and inhuman treatment. The application of these "legal" provisions in practice is confirmed by the testimonies of victims who have turned to Promo-LEX to report such abuses. These victims pointed out that the lack of effective contact with their family, lawyers or human rights protection organizations increases their vulnerability. In such a context, the automatic restriction of correspondence not only aggravates isolation, but becomes a tool through which abuses are hidden and impunity is perpetuated.

CHAPTER 3

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT



Respecting and guaranteeing the freedom of movement of persons, goods and means of transportation to and from the Transnistrian region remained some of the main challenges in the area of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In 2024, there were cases of illegal detentions, intimidation of journalists, the issuance of new “undesirability” declarations, forced stops of transportation and residents of the Security Zone, illegal collection of customs duties and travel taxes on roads in the Transnistrian region, as well as the imposition of quantitative restrictions on various categories of goods, affecting economic operators, Moldovan farmers and Romanian-language schools.

Tiraspol’s illegal actions have intensified with the entry into force of the new Customs Code of the Republic of Moldova, which aims to facilitate the economic reintegration of the Transnistrian region into the legal framework of the country. These abuses have particularly targeted farmers in the Dubăsari district, whose vulnerability is exploited by Tiraspol, especially in times of crisis. At the same time, the network of illegal checkpoints and other types of barriers continues to be a major impediment for residents and economic operators in the Transnistrian region and the Security Zone. Under these circumstances, it is noteworthy that the serious and systematic violation of the right to freedom of movement during 2024 remains a direct result of the persistent climate of impunity.

Systematic pressure and illegal restrictions imposed on farmers in Dubăsari

Illegal customs duties

After the new provisions of the Customs Code of the Republic of Moldova came into force on January 1, 2024, which stipulate that economic agents from the Transnistrian region must pay customs duties to the national budget like all companies in the country, Transnistrian structures introduced illegal customs duties for Moldovan farmers who own land beyond the Râbnîța-Tiraspol road³⁷. On January 31, 2024, the leader of the Transnistrian region, Vadim Krasnoselski, signed the “law” on the amendment of the “Transnistrian customs code”, which establishes the abolition of the “preferential regime” for farmers from the Dubăsari district³⁸. Previously, under this “preferential regime”, Moldovan farmers could pass through illegal checkpoints by paying an illegal fee for traveling on Transnistrian roads, which amounted to approximately 11 US dollars for each vehicle exceeding 18 tons.

Farmers are forced to pay \$15/tonnes of sunflower, \$7/tonnes of wheat, \$10/tonnes of corn and 0.03% of the total cost of production transported across the administrative line³⁹. As a solution, the authorities proposed to partially compensate the expenses incurred by the owners of agricultural land from the budget of the Program of Reintegration Activities for 2024⁴⁰. In May 2024, 2 million lei were allocated to the Dubăsari District Council, which was responsible for distributing the compensation to farmers⁴¹. Later, in December 2024, an additional amount of 2.6 million lei was allocated for the compensation mechanism⁴². The amount initially envisaged was 61.5% of the total illegal customs duties paid by farmers

37 “supreme soviet of the pmr”, “changes in the customs code,” 2024, accessed November 15, 2024, <https://www.vspmr.org/news/supreme-council/izmeneniya-v-tamojennom-kodekse.html>.

38 “president of the pmr”, “law of the pmr on amending the customs code of the pmr”, 2024, accessed November 15, 2024, <https://president.gospmr.org/pravovye-akty/zakoni/zakon-pridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki-3o-vnesenii-izmeneniy-v-tamojennyi-kodeks-pridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki.html>.

39 Radio Free Europe Moldova, “I’d rather leave it, but I don’t register in Transnistria”. The Story of a Farmer Who Owns Land Beyond the Ribnita-Tiraspol Road”, 2024, accessed November 15, 2024, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/mai-bine-l-las-dar-nu-ma-inregistrez-in-transnistria-povestea-unui-agricultor-care-are-pamant-pestre-traseul-rabnita-tiraspol/32906069.html>.

40 Response of the Bureau for Reintegration Policies No. 23-78-14223 of December 24, 2024 to Promo-LEX’s request for access to information of public interest.

41 Government of the Republic of Moldova, Decision No. 341 of 15.05.2024 on the Approval of the Program of Reintegration Activities of the Country for 2024, accessed 15 November 2024, https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=143222&lang=ro.

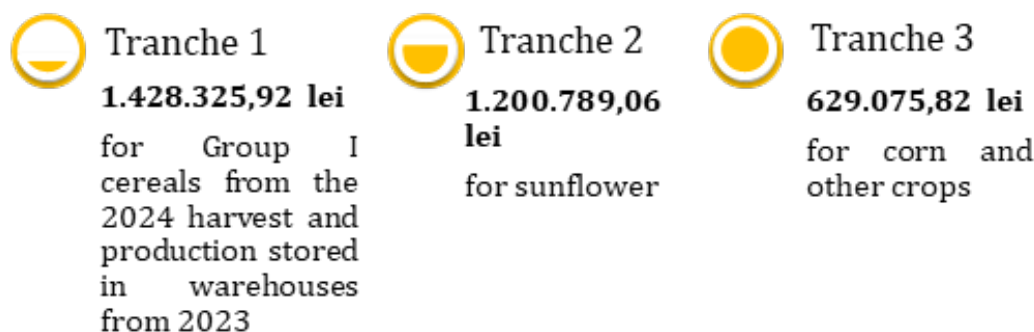
42 Government of the Republic of Moldova, “The Government allocated an additional 2.6 million lei to compensate the expenses incurred by farmers in the Dubăsari district”, 2024, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://gov.md/en/node/55199>.

during 2024. However, following the amendments made, the total expenditure incurred by farmers amounting to 3,252,731.91 lei has been fully compensated.⁴³

For compensation of expenses, 78 applications were submitted by 26 economic operators, all of which were approved. The compensation covered: illegal customs duty, which varies according to the agricultural crop; additional customs duty of 0.3%; customs broker services and the illegal fee for the use of roads in the region⁴⁴.

Figure 3.1.

Value of payments made in tranches under the compensation mechanism



Source: elaborated by the authors based on the response of the Dubăsari District Council no. 05 of 10.01.2024 to the request for access to information of public interest formulated by Promo-LEX.

The allocation of compensation from the 2024 the Program of Reintegration Activities budget has reduced the possibility to fund other activities. The amount allocated for compensation of expenses incurred by farmers is over 25% of the total program budget. The current compensation mechanism is temporary, valid only for 2024. So far, Transnistrian structures have not indicated that illegal customs duties would be eliminated. For 2025, it is unclear whether the current mechanism will be maintained or whether the funds will be allocated directly from the state budget. According to BPR, the decision on the type of compensation mechanism is to be taken by the Ministry of Finance and MAFI⁴⁵.

Access to land and warehouses with agricultural production

Access to land and warehouses was restricted in January-February 2024. In January 2024, 15 economic agents in Dubăsari district had 957 tons of corn, 776 tons of sunflowers, 766 tons of wheat and 50 tons of barley stored in warehouses located beyond the Râbnița-Tiraspol road⁴⁶. Some farmers only managed to transport production to the right bank in April 2024. According to the Department of Agriculture and Cadastre of the Dubăsari District Council, as of April, about 2,500 tons of grain from the 2023 harvest remained in the warehouses⁴⁷. At the same time, in the context of these restrictions, the application of fertilizers and other

43 Response of the Dubăsari District Council No. 05 of 10.01.2024 to the request for access to information of public interest formulated by Promo-LEX.

44 *Ibid.*

45 Response of the Bureau for Reintegration Policies No. 23-78-14223 of December 24, 2024 to Promo-LEX's request for access to information of public interest.

46 Government of the Republic of Moldova, "Tiraspol has been notified to cease its intention to force farmers in the Dubăsari district to allegedly pay illegal customs payments", 2024, accessed November 17, 2024, <https://gov.md/ro/content/tiraspolul-fost-notificat-sa-renunte-la-intentia-de-obliga-fermierii-din-raionul-dubasari-la>.

47 Radio Free Europe Moldova, "Two million lei compensation for illegal taxes paid by farmers who own land beyond the Râbnița-Tiraspol road", 2024, accessed November 17, 2024, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/doua-milioane-de-lei-compensatii-pentru-taxele-ile-ilegale-achitate-de-fermiers-with-land-over-the-rabnita-tiraspol-route/32927735.html>.

agricultural works were carried out late, which resulted in additional losses. As a result of these impediments, farmers encountered major difficulties in managing their financial obligations towards the state budget, credit institutions, suppliers, partners and employees. According to the latest information published by the so-called “government of the pmr”, access to land for farmers in Dubăsari will be ensured by May 1, 2025⁴⁸. This fact highlights the uncertainties systematically faced by farmers in Dubăsari.

At the beginning of 2024, during meetings with farmers from Coşnița and Cocieri, MAFI representatives expressed their intention to hold discussions with various private and state institutions in order to find solutions to alleviate the difficult financial situation of farmers. In spite of these proposals, farmers have not benefited from moratoriums, rescheduling of loans or temporary exemption from penalties.

Currently, the legislation does not provide adequate protection for farmers in the Dubăsari district in situations where they are unable to meet their financial obligations due to the abusive actions of Transnistrian structures. Law No. 39 of 2006 on the introduction of additional measures to support entrepreneurial activity in the localities on the left bank of the Nistru River in the Dubăsari district provides, in the event of restricted access to agricultural land located beyond the Râbnița-Tiraspol road, exemptions from land tax payments, compulsory state social security contributions, and compulsory health insurance premiums. Additionally, it offers unemployment benefits or allowances for integration and reintegration into employment⁴⁹. While these exemptions are beneficial, they do not provide comprehensive protection tailored to the needs and challenges faced by farmers. Their difficulties are not limited to issues of freedom of movement. Also, as the term “limited access to land” is not clearly defined, farmers do not always benefit from these support measures. In addition, it is important to point out that even in periods of improvement, access for farmers in Dubăsari remains only apparently free, due to illegal checkpoints, unauthorized fees, limitations on the length of time agricultural production can be kept in warehouses, restrictions on land processing and abusive inspections. The situation is also complicated by the limited access of constitutional law authorities beyond the Râbnița-Tiraspol road to investigate these abuses⁵⁰. Therefore, a recommended measure to support farmers more effectively would be to revise and improve Law No. 39 of 02.03.2006.

Another aspect that needs improvement in order to effectively address the problems of farmers in Dubăsari is strengthening inter-institutional cooperation and clarifying the attributions between responsible institutions. On February 16, 2024, Promo-LEX requested MAFI to provide information on the measures planned to support farmers in Dubăsari district and to clarify whether it is engaged in a dialogue with other authorities and the private sector, including banks, to identify solutions tailored to their needs. Although support to farmers falls under the competence of MAFI, the institution has transmitted that this issue should be managed through BPR⁵¹.

In this context, on December 12, 2024, Promo-LEX sent a request to BPR on December 12, 2024, inquiring whether meetings and discussions had taken place with representatives of

48 “government of the pmr”, “On amending the decision of the pmr government No. 12 of January 8, 2024 on regulating land use issues in the Dubăsari district”, 2025, accessed January 26, 2025, <https://government.gospmr.org/o-vnesenii-izmeneniya-v-postano-vlenie-pravitelstva-pridnestrovskoj-moldavskoj-respubliki-ot-8-yanvarya-2024-goda-%E2%84%96%12-ob-uregulirovanii-vo-prosov-zemlepolzovaniya-v-dubossarskom-rajone-2/>.

49 Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, Law No. 39 of 02.03.2006 on the introduction of additional measures to support entrepreneurial activity in the localities on the left bank of the Nistru River of the Dubăsari district, accessed November 21, 2024, https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=1398_1_3&lang=en#.

50 Government of the Republic of Moldova, “Some Difficulties Encountered by Farmers in the Dubăsari District have been brought back to Tiraspol’s attention”, 2023, accessed November 21, 2024, <https://gov.md/ro/content/unele-dificultati-intampinate-de-fermierii-din-raionul-dubasari-au-fost-readuse-vizorul>.

51 Response of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry of the Republic of Moldova No. 08.07/689 of 06.03.2024 to the request for access to information of public interest formulated by Promo-LEX.

banks, the AIPA, and other relevant institutions regarding additional support measures for farmers in Dubăsari. In its response, the BPR stated that, given its functional attributions, it has no right to interfere in the decision-making process of other institutions or to influence the work of the competent authorities. The same explanation was given to farmers during field visits and working sessions organized with the involvement of representatives of BPR and MAFI⁵².

These responses highlight the following points:

- ▶ The referral to the BPR reveals a diffuse responsibility for addressing the problems affecting residents and economic agents in the Security Zone and the Transnistrian region. The management of these problems is not the exclusive prerogative of the BPR, which, as a subdivision of the State Chancellery, does not have the resources and means to fully address these complex challenges. According to the BPR, its role is rather to maintain a dialogue with Tiraspol with the aim of urging it to cease illegal practices;
- ▶ Inter-institutional coordination is deficient, caused, among other things, by the absence of a permanent governmental platform that regularly brings together representatives of the authorities to discuss issues in the Transnistrian region in a coordinated manner;
- ▶ there is no consolidated institution with the necessary powers, capacities, levers and resources to manage the complex challenges in the Security Zone and the Transnistrian region and to implement sectoral policies. Under these circumstances, problems are often managed in a fragmented, insufficient, ad hoc and reactive manner.

Conditions imposed on farmers

During 2024, as in previous years, farmers in Dubăsari faced multiple forms of surveillance and control by Transnistrian structures. They were obliged to regularly submit detailed information on their harvest and agricultural works. The transport of seed materials, fertilizers, and diesel fuel was strictly monitored and recorded by the so-called “states customs committee of the pmr”. Also, the transportation of agricultural equipment was allowed only on the basis of approved lists, which had to include information about the equipment and the personnel servicing them⁵³. In addition, farmers were periodically inspected by mobile teams of the unconstitutional administration of Dubăsari and the “ministry of agriculture and natural resources of the pmr”. Moreover, there were cases of illegal searches and detentions of landowner employees.

In addition to these abusive actions, Moldovan farmers are compelled to register their businesses in the Transnistrian region, open bank accounts in “Transnistrian rubles” at unauthorized banks in the region, and interact with Transnistrian structures outside the legal framework of the country. On January 8, 2024, the so-called “government of pmr” published a “decree” stipulating that both the cultivation of agricultural land by farmers in Dubăsari and the transportation of production, diesel, seed material and fertilizers across the administrative line will be carried out on the basis of a “land user” certificate in the Transnistrian region⁵⁴. The “decree”, signed by Aleksandr Rosenberg, the so-called “prime minister of pmr”, is valid until May 1, 2025⁵⁵.

52 Response of the Bureau for Reintegration Policies No. 23-78-14223 of December 24, 2024 to Promo-LEX’s request for access to information of public interest.

53 Response of the Dubăsari District Council No. 05 of 10.01.2024 to the request for access to information of public interest formulated by Promo-LEX.

54 “government of the pmr”, “On the regulation of land use issues in the Dubăsari district”, 2024, accessed November 23, 2024, <https://government.gospmr.org/ob-uregulirovanii-voprosov-zemlepolzovaniya-v-dubossarskom-rajone-2/>.

55 “government of the pmr”, “On amending the decision of the Government of the pmr No. 12 of January 8, 2024 on regulating land use issues in the Dubăsari district”, 2025, accessed January 26, 2025, https://government.gospmr.org/o-vnesenii-izmene-niya-v-postanovlenie-pravitelstva-pridnestrovskoj-moldavskoj-respubliki-ot-8-yanvarya-2024-g_oda-%E2%84%96%-12-ob-uregulirovanii-voprosov-zemlepolzovaniya-v-dubossarskom-rajone-2/.

Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration Oleg Serebrian said that the Government discourages direct dialog between farmers and Transnistrian structures, stressing that the issue should be addressed only in agreed negotiation formats⁵⁶. In 2024, three meetings were held in the 1+1 format, where the subject of illegal customs duties imposed on farmers was also discussed^{57, 58}. Also, the BPR submitted eight requests to the Tiraspol representative to organize meetings of working groups on agriculture and environment, but these were often ignored or rejected⁵⁹. Nevertheless, farmers' difficulties were addressed at the meeting of the working group on the economy on February 16, which was also attended by farmers, a practice that should be continued to ensure transparency and their involvement in the decision-making process that directly concerns them.

However, on the same day, the "ministry of foreign affairs of the pmr", headed by Vitali Ignatiev, issued a statement reiterating Tiraspol's position, saying that the activity of Moldovan farmers in the Dubăsari district "must be carried out in strict compliance with the customs and other legislation of the pmr"⁶⁰. This statement confirms that, despite the negotiation efforts and steps initiated by Chisinau, farmers continue to be subject to pressures and constraints imposed by Transnistrian structures, without having any real leverage to avoid interaction with them.

The use of roads in the Transnistrian region

The free movement of goods and means of transport throughout the internationally recognized territory of the Republic of Moldova is being violated by the application of illegal tariff barriers by Transnistrian structures. For several years, Transnistrian structures have been charging an illegal fee for the entry and circulation on the roads of the Transnistrian region of all vehicles with Moldovan registration plates, which have a mass of more than 18 tons. This fee can be paid for a single trip, for one month or for one year, the rates are as follows: approximately 11 dollars for a single trip, 14 dollars for 30 days and 112 dollars for one year⁶¹. According to data provided by the "government of pmr", in 2023, Transnistrian structures collected about 1,240,000 dollars from illegal fees charged for traveling on the region's roads⁶². Tiraspol justifies this illegal fee by the need to collect funds for the repair of roads in the region.

However, as of January 1, 2024, an additional tax has been introduced for vehicles with Moldovan license plates whose mass exceeds 18 tons and carrying certain categories of goods, based on a "decree" signed by Aleksandr Rosenberg and "amendments" to the "law of the pmr on road fund" proposed by Sergei Obolonik^{63, 64}. In specific terms, the illegal

56 Radio Free Europe Moldova, "Chisinau discourages private talks between farmers in Dubăsari and separatist authorities", 2024, accessed November 23, 2024, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/chisinaul-descurajeaza-discutiile-private-dintre-fermierii-din-dubasari-si-autoritatile-separatiste/32809360.html>.

57 Government of the Republic of Moldova, "The First Working Session of the Political Representatives in the Transnistrian Settlement Negotiation Process in the Year 2024," 2024, accessed November 23, 2024, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/chisinaul-descurajeaza-discutiile-private-dintre-fermierii-din-dubasari-si-autoritatile-separatiste/32809360.html>.

58 Government of the Republic of Moldova, "The second working meeting of the year of the political representatives in the Transnistrian settlement negotiation process took place in Bender", 2024, accessed November 23, 2024, <https://gov.md/ro/content/primasedintele-lucru-din-anul-2024-reprezentantilor-politici-procesul-de-negocieri-pentru>.

59 Response of the Bureau for Reintegration Policies No. 23-78-14223 of December 24, 2024 to Promo-LEX's request for access to information of public interest.

60 "ministry of foreign affairs of the pmr", "statement on the expert group meeting on economic issues", 2024, accessed November 23, 2024, https://mid.gospmr.org/r_u/n_o_de/9609.

61 "ministry of economic development of the pmr", "law of the pmr on road fund", 2024, accessed November 24, 2024, <https://mer.gospmr.org/zakoni/zakon-pmr-o-dorozhnhnom-fnde-o>.

62 "government of the pmr", "Government meeting: main topics discussed", 2024, accessed November 24, 2024, <https://government.gospmr.org/zasedanie-pravitelstva-osnovnye-temy/>.

63 Novosti Pridnestrovia, "From 2024 a fee is introduced for the passage of foreign trucks on Transnistrian roads", 2023, accessed November 24, 2024, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/23-10-04/s-2024-goda-vvoditsya-sbor-za-proezd-inostrannyh-gruzovikov-po>.

64 Novosti Pridnestrovia, "Customs Service explained details on payment of fee for passage of foreign trucks," 2024, accessed November 24, 2024, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-01-18/gtk-razyasnil-nyuansy-uplaty-sbora-za-proezd-inostrannyh>.

additional tax applies to vehicles transporting (1) construction materials, (2) grain, agricultural crops and oilseeds, (3) ferrous and non-ferrous scrap and waste, (4) cement, and (5) slag macadam or similar industrial waste⁶⁵. Thus, among those affected by this abusive measure are farmers in Dubăsari district and grain buyers. It is important to note that the farmers were able to recover these expenses through the compensation mechanism, an advantage that other categories of economic agents did not benefit from.

The new illegal tax is a one-entry, one-use fee, with the right to travel on Transnistrian roads for one month⁶⁶. The amount of the tax levied on vehicles carrying construction materials is 23 dollars, and for the transportation of other categories of goods, such as grain, it is almost 13 dollars⁶⁷. If the period of stay in the Transnistrian region is exceeded, a “penalty” of 74 dollars is imposed⁶⁸. On December 23, 2024, Sergei Obolonik, the alleged “first deputy prime minister of the pmr”, stated that the amount of the tax would remain unchanged in 2025⁶⁹.

The introduction of an additional tax for vehicles over 18 tons is a continuation of a series of illegal tariffs imposed by Transnistrian structures over several years, such as vehicle tax for temporary introduction of means of transport for personal use, motor liability insurance, import and export customs duties. As of 2024, Transnistrian structures collected about 57 million dollars in the form of excise taxes and import and export customs duties, as well as more than 300 thousand dollars from the enforcement of illegal fines and penalties⁷⁰.

Another abusive action implemented by the Transnistrian structures in 2024, in reaction to the entry into force of the new Customs Code of the Republic of Moldova, is the imposition of a “vignette tax” on residents of the village of Doroțcaia in the Dubăsari district for the “temporary introduction” of means of transportation with Moldovan license plates⁷¹. Previously, the means of transportation from the village of Doroțcaia, registered by the constitutional authorities, were included in the list of goods exempted from this tax⁷². The amount of the “vignette-tax” varies according to the length of stay: for 7 days - 5 dollars; 15 days - 10 dollars; 30 days - 15 dollars; 90 days - 25 dollars; 180 days - 45 dollars; 365 days - 80 dollars⁷³.

In connection with the illegal fees imposed for the use of roads in the Transnistrian region, the BPR reported in October 2023 that it had urged the political representative of Tiraspol to abandon this illegal initiative and to be aware of “the effects of legal responsibility for

65 “government of the pmr”, “On establishing the amount of the fee for the passage on the roads of the pmr of unregistered vehicles”, 2023, accessed November 24, 2024, <https://government.n.t.gospmr.org/ob-ustanovlenii-na-2024-god-razmera-sbora-za-proezd-po-avtomobilnym-dorogam-pridnestrovskoj-moldavskoj-respubliki-transportnyh-sredstv-ne-zaregistrovannyh-v-pridnestrovskoj-moldavskoj-re-spublike/>.

66 “states customs committee of the pmr”, “road taxes”, accessed November 24, 2024, <https://customs.gospmr.org/ul/payments/dorozhnye-sbory/>.

67 “government of the pmr”, “Government meeting: the amount of the fee for the passage of large foreign trucks on Transnistrian roads has been approved”, 2023, accessed November 24, 2024, <https://government.gospmr.org/zasedanie-pravitelstva-utverzhdennaya-summa-sbora-za-proezd-po-avtomobilnym-dorogam-pridnestrovyia-inostrannyh-bolshegruzov/>.

68 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “Supreme Soviet deputies proposed amendments to the law on the road fund,” 2024, accessed November 24, 2024, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-03-22/deputaty-verhovnogo-soveta-predlozhili-vnesti-popravki-v-zakon-o-tovarnoj-nomenklature-pri-pri-pri-osushhestvlenii-vneshneekonom/>.

69 “government of the pmr”, “Government meeting: main topics discussed,” 2024, accessed November 24, 2024, <https://government.gospmr.org/zasedanie-pravitelstva-osnovnye-temy/>.

70 “states customs committee of the pmr”, “reports”, accessed November 24, 2024, <https://customs.gospmr.org/about-customs/reports/>.

71 “government of the pmr”, “Land use and customs tariffs: new approaches”, 2024, accessed November 24, 2024, <https://government.gospmr.org/zasedanie-pravitelstva-prodolzhaetsya-poisk-istochnikov-popolneniya-resbyudzheta/>.

72 “government of the pmr”, “On the Approval for the Year 2024 of Customs Tariffs for Goods Imported into the Territory of the pmr and Tariff Nomenclature Applied in Foreign Trade”, 2023, accessed November 24, 2024, <https://government.gospmr.org/ob-utverzhdanii-na-2024-god-tamozhennogo-tarifa-na-tovary-importiruemye-na-territoriyu-pridnestrovskoj-moldavskoj-respubliki-i-tovarnoj-nomenklature-pri-pri-pri-osushhestvlenii-vneshneekonom/>.

73 “states customs committee of the pmr”, “for guests from Transnistria,” accessed November 24, 2024, <https://customs.gospmr.org/fl/gostyam-pridnestrovyia/>.

which those responsible for such decisions in the region are liable”⁷⁴. The BPR also noted that “the situation has been brought to the attention of the competent national authorities in order to take appropriate legal action”. Subsequently, the authorities did not inform the public about the legal actions initiated in this regard. Although we have asked the BPR to inform us which institutions have been notified and what legal action has been taken, this information has not been provided. Instead, the BPR stated that the matter was discussed at the level of political representatives in the negotiation process and that the support of international mediators and observers was requested⁷⁵. This situation highlights the poor public communication on the actions taken by the national authorities to discourage the Tiraspol leadership and the persisting climate of impunity.

Strengthening illegal checkpoints under the pretext of the “terrorist alert code”

Freedom of movement is restricted on a daily basis by a network of illegal checkpoints and other barriers set up by Transnistrian structures. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they set up more than 37 additional posts along the administrative line, deploying “border guards” who arrogated to themselves the power to control, inspect and decide whether to allow or deny people to cross. As a result, the movement of 50,000 inhabitants in 11 localities in the Security Zone was obstructed⁷⁶. In October 2023, there were 51 such barriers, and in 2024, according to the BPR, the number increased to 53, including stationary/mobile posts, modules and concrete blocks^{77, 78}.

The barriers introduced during the health crisis have not only remained in place but have been further consolidated with the introduction of the “terrorist alert code” in 2022, following suspicious explosions⁷⁹. This code entails additional restrictions on movement, increased surveillance and the strengthening of illegal checkpoints. In 2024, it was extended five times under the pretext of unfounded security risks and, according to a “decree” signed by Vadim Krasnoselski, will remain in force until March 9, 2025^{80, 81, 82, 83, 84}.

74 Government of the Republic of Moldova, “Reaction of the Bureau for Reintegration Policies on Tiraspol’s New Abusive Measures,” 2023, accessed November 25, 2024, <https://gov.md/ro/content/reaction-of-reintegration-policy-office-on-new-abusive-measures-of-tyraspol>.

75 Response of the Bureau for Reintegration Policies No. 23-78-14223 of December 24, 2024 to Promo-LEX’s request for access to information of public interest.

76 Security Zone YouTube channel, “Cristina Lesnic on the posts installed during the pandemic,” 2020, accessed November 25, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dlyz2980HU>.

77 Promo-LEX, “Human Rights in the Transnistrian Region of the Republic of Moldova. 2023 Retrospective,” 2024, accessed November 25, 2024, https://promolex.md/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/RAPORT_DORT_RO_2023-1.pdf.

78 Response of the Bureau for Reintegration Policies No. 23-78-14223 of December 24, 2024 to Promo-LEX’s request for access to information of public interest.

79 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “In Transnistria the red level of terrorist danger has been established,” 2022, accessed November 25, 2024, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/22-04-26/v-pridnestrove-obyavlen-krasnyy-uroven-terroristicheskoy-opasnosti>.

80 “president of the pmr”, “decree No. 8 of January 12, 2024 on the extension of the validity period of the “yellow” terrorist threat level”, 2024, accessed November 26, 2024, <https://president.gospmr.org/pravovye-akty/ukazi/o-prodlenii-srok3a-deystviya-visokogo-jeltogo-urovnya-terroristicheskoy-opasnosti.html>.

81 “president of the pmr”, “decree No. 85 of March 12, 2024 on the extension of the validity period of the “yellow” terrorist threat level”, 2024, accessed November 26, 2024, <https://president.gospmr.org/pravovye-akty/ukazi/o-prodlenii-sroka-deystviya-visokogo-jeltogo-urovnya-terroristicheskoy-opasnosti24.html>.

82 “president of the pmr”, “decree No. 169 of May 10, 2024 on the extension of the validity period of the “yellow” terrorist threat level”, 2024, accessed November 26, 2024, <https://president.gospmr.org/pravovye-akty/ukazi/o-prodlenii-sroka-deystviya-visokogo-jeltogo-urovnya-terroristicheskoy-opasnosti.html>.

83 “president of the pmr”, “decree No. 484 of November 6, 2024 on the extension of the validity period of the “yellow” terrorist threat level”, 2024, accessed November 26, 2024, <https://president.gospmr.org/pravovye-akty/ukazi/o-prodlenii-sroka2-deystviya-visokogo-jeltogo-urovnya-terroristicheskoy-opasnosti.html>.

84 “president of the pmr”, “decree No. 588 of December 28, 2024 on the extension of the validity period of the “yellow” terrorist threat level”, 2024, accessed December 30, 2024, <https://president.gospmr.org/pravovye-akty/ukazi/o-prodlenii-sroka-deystviya-visokogo-jeltogo-urovnya-terroristicheskoy-opasnosti.html>.

The constitutional authorities have stated that the alleged explosions and drone attacks that took place in the first months of 2024 are “an attempt to provoke fear and panic in the region”⁸⁵, and the Institute for the Study of War has emphasized that the Russian Federation or other actors acting in Russia’s interests would most likely be the beneficiaries of these provocations⁸⁶. The aim would be “to create the right conditions to justify hybrid operations aimed at destabilizing Moldova”. Also, the Ukrainian Center for Combating Disinformation labeled these actions as a Russian provocation aimed at misinforming public opinion⁸⁷.

Since 2022, Transnistrian leaders have deliberately kept this issue in the media and public discourse to justify the disproportionate powers given to their security structures and to strengthen their presence in the Security Zone. For example, in 2024, the “terrorist alert code” was used as a pretext to propose the installation of an additional post of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces at the Dubăsari hydroelectric power plant on the territory controlled by Chisinau^{88, 89}.

In addition to maintaining the existing posts, in 2024, the illegal checkpoints at Bâcioc and Bender were extended^{90, 91, 92}. In November 2024, the Moldovan Delegation to the UCC reported that the fortification of the Bâcioc post near the bridge over the Nistru River, rehabilitated with international support, aims to strengthen the presence of Transnistrian structures in the Security Zone and to increase abusive controls⁹³.

Restricting the free movement of people in the Security Zone

Throughout the year, illegal restrictions imposed by the Transnistrian security structures continued to violate the freedom of movement of residents in areas of the Security Zone, which are under the control of the constitutional authorities. These violations included the stopping of vehicles, attempts to illegally detain individuals, and acts of physical intimidation⁹⁴. The patrolling of localities in the Security Zone by representatives of the “ministry of internal affairs of the pmr” and the “ministry of security of the pmr” constitutes an abusive and systematic practice aimed at maintaining a climate of control and pressure on the population.

85 Government of the Republic of Moldova, “Bureau for Reintegration Policies [Commentary of March 17, 2024](https://gov.md/ro/content/comentariul-biroului-politici-de-reintegrati),” accessed November 27, 2024, <https://gov.md/ro/content/comentariul-biroului-politici-de-reintegrati>.

86 Institute for the Study of War, “Analysis of the Russian Offensive, March 17, 2024,” accessed November 27, 2024, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-17-2024>.

87 АрміяInform (Ukrainian Defense Ministry News Agency), “Russia carried out a drone attack on Transnistria as a provocation”, accessed November 27, 2024, <https://armyinform.com.ua/2024/03/17/rosiya-z-metoyu-provokacziyi-atakuvala-bezpilotnykom-prydnistrovya/>.

88 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “A second peacekeeping post is proposed to be set up near the Dubăsari hydropower plant”, 2024, accessed November 28, 2024, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-04-18> [https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-04-18 / u-dubossarskoy-ges-predlagayut-ustanovit-vtoroy-mirotvorcheskiy](https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-04-18/u-dubossarskoy-ges-predlagayut-ustanovit-vtoroy-mirotvorcheskiy).

89 Government of the Republic of Moldova, “[The situation](https://gov.md/ro/content/situatia-din-zona-de-securitate-abordate-la-sedinenta-comisiei-unificate-comisiei-unificate-de) in the Security Zone was discussed at the meeting of the Unified Control Commission,” 2024, accessed November 28, 2024, <https://gov.md/ro/content/situatia-din-zona-de-securitate-abordate-la-sedinenta-comisiei-unificate-comisiei-unificate-de>.

90 “states customs committee of the pmr”, “infrastructure projects”, accessed November 28, 2024, <https://customs.gospmr.org/news/infrastrukturnye-proekty/>.

91 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “Bender-Chisinau customs checkpoint is being modernized”, 2024, accessed November 28, 2024, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-06-21/tamozhennyj>.

92 “states customs committee of the pmr”, “inspection point - at the border crossing point Bâcioc”, 2024, accessed November 28, 2024, <https://customs.gospmr.org/news/dosmotrovyy-boks-na-tpp-bychok/>.

93 Government of the Republic of Moldova, “[Obstruction of free movement](https://gov.md/ro/content/obstructionarea-liberei-circulatii-pe-podul-pes-t-e-nistru-de-la-gura-bacului-bacioc-subiect) on the bridge over the Nistru River from Gura Bâcului - Bâcioc, subject of discussion at the UCC”, 2024, accessed November 28, 2024, <https://gov.md/ro/content/obstructionarea-liberei-circulatii-pe-podul-pes-t-e-nistru-de-la-gura-bacului-bacioc-subiect>.

94 Government of the Republic of Moldova, “[Current issues](https://gov.md/ro/content/subiecte-de-actualitate-din-zona-de-securitate-abordate-la-sedinenta-comisiei-unificate-comisiei-unificate-de) in the Security Zone discussed at the meeting of the UCC”, 2024, accessed November 28, 2024, <https://gov.md/ro/content/subiecte-de-actualitate-din-zona-de-securitate-abordate-la-sedinenta-comisiei-unificate-comisiei-unificate-de>.

Obstacles for teachers and pupils in Romanian language schools

In 2024, the freedom of movement of teachers and students from Romanian-language schools in the Transnistrian region continued to be restricted. Hundreds of pupils are forced to pass daily through illegal checkpoints of Transnistrian structures, where they are subjected to abusive checks. Although they are accompanied by teachers, their access is conditional on the presentation of their identity card and a declaration signed by their parents. In addition, the so-called “Transnistrian border guards” continue to exert pressure on the teachers of these institutions, including threats of unlawful detentions and repeated intimidation. There have been reports of instances where, at illegal checkpoints, teachers’ ID cards were rejected, preventing them from accessing their workplaces. These actions reflect a deliberate and systematic attempt to undermine the right to education and to create a climate of pressure on Romanian-language schools.

Illegal vehicle checks and driver intimidation

Near the village of Fîrlădeni, Căușeni district, a group of so-called “militiamen” from Bender forcibly stopped a vehicle carrying residents of the village, which is under the jurisdiction of the constitutional authorities. During the incident, they tried to illegally detain the driver of the vehicle, using physical force and special means. The driver resisted the unlawful action and called the police for intervention. Upon receiving the call, the perpetrators immediately left the scene. The Moldovan police have opened a criminal investigation, and efforts are underway to identify the persons involved, clarify the circumstances, and take the necessary legal actions.

This case reflects how Transnistrian security structures are being used to intimidate and maintain a climate of pressure on residents of the Security Zone. The arbitrary interventions against drivers not only violate freedom of movement, but also demonstrate the lack of any responsibility on the part of those involved in these illegal practices.

Continuing the abusive practice of restricting access to the region by arbitrarily declaring people as “undesirables”

Another incident that highlights the consequences of impunity and the use of the network of illegal checkpoints as a tool of persecution is the case of writers Maria Ivanov, Dumitru Crudu, Emilian Galaicu-Păun and Elvira Moroșan⁹⁵. On September 16, 2024, while heading to the “Alexandru cel Bun” High School in Bender, the writers were detained for over an hour at a checkpoint located at the entrance to the city. The writers were interrogated by so-called “border guards” and representatives of the “ministry of state security of the pmr”, during which their identity documents were confiscated. The car, which contained several copies of the cultural magazine “Timpul”, was inspected by representatives of the “ministry of state security of the pmr”. Some of the magazines were confiscated on the pretext that they contained information portraying the Russian Federation as an aggressor state. Following the intervention of the BPR, the writers were released, but they were told that they were declared “undesirable persons” and that their access to the Transnistrian region was indefinitely banned⁹⁶.

Thus, a number of Moldovan journalists and writers from the right bank of the Nistru River continue to appear on the so-called “blacklist of undesirable persons” in the Transnistrian

95 “Timpul” magazine, “Dumitru Crudu: Protest”, 2024, accessed November 28, 2024, https://portal.revistatimpul.ro/timpul-chisinou/dum_i_tru-crudu-protest/?fbclid=IwZXhXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR2_yA7bVtCUCCIVVw_KLu5scr19-YA__ktanN5n4H1Ai1TW4t-Yl2k2k0K0gzk_aem_NUwMRaBRYFP6TJDl3wZ30Q.

96 *Ibid.*

region, a list managed by the “ministry of state security” headed by Valeri Ghebos. This underlines the fact that the work of Moldovan journalists and writers, their visits to the region and the materials they publish are monitored by the Transnistrian security structures. Moldovan writers and journalists often learn about their “undesirable person” status only when they are stopped and interrogated at illegal checkpoints. So far, the constitutional authorities have not requested information from Tiraspol on the citizens included in the so-called “list of undesirable persons” in the Transnistrian region⁹⁷.

Restricting access of diplomatic missions and OSCE to the Security Zone

During 2024, vehicles belonging to diplomatic missions accredited to Chisinau, the OSCE Mission and Ukrainian representatives to the UCC were stopped and prevented from transiting certain areas within the perimeter of the Security Zone. These restrictions have been imposed at the posts of the JPF under the direction of the commanding officers of these posts, who are delegates from the Russian Federation, indicating a deliberate practice aimed at limiting access for international actors.

In addition, representatives of the OSCE Mission have been denied access to certain localities, including by Transnistrian “border guards” operating at illegal checkpoints. These restrictions persist despite prior notifications from the OSCE to the Transnistrian structures and Russian Federation representatives about their planned activities. Limiting access for diplomatic missions and the OSCE contributes to a lack of transparency and prevents effective monitoring of the situation on the ground. Moreover, the artificial barriers imposed by the Russian contingent in the JPF reflect a clear strategy of maintaining control and reducing international influence in the settlement process. These practices undermine the commitments undertaken in the official negotiating formats and strengthen the impunity of the representatives of the Transnistrian structures.

Abuses against journalists

The freedom of movement of journalists in the Transnistrian region continues to be severely restricted, with journalists constantly facing intimidation and obstruction by Transnistrian security structures. As in previous years, we have observed cases of journalists being illegally detained, accused of “spying” and forced to delete photographed or filmed material.

The lack of “special accreditation” is being used as a pretext for the illegal detention of Moldovan journalists, as Transnistrian structures systematically refuse to grant it under pretexts such as “risk of terrorist attacks”. Among the journalists who have been refused accreditation and subsequently illegally detained are Viorica Tataru and Andrei Captarenco⁹⁸. At the same time, in 2024, the Transnistrian authorities continued to block the access of foreign journalists to the region, preventing them from obtaining the necessary accreditation to carry out journalistic activities⁹⁹. In the absence of accreditation, many are forced to enter “clandestinely” on the left bank of the Nistru River, exposing themselves to various risks, including arbitrary detention and confiscation of equipment.

It is also important to note that obtaining this accreditation does not guarantee free access to the region or the possibility to carry out journalistic activities without restrictions. A

97 Response of the Bureau for Reintegration Policies No. 23-78-14223 of December 24, 2024 to Promo-LEX’s request for access to information of public interest.

98 Ziarul de Gardă, “Video: Who sent you, who is behind you, who is paying you? Journalists kidnapped in Tiraspol, Viorica Tataru and Andrei Captarenco, on ZdCe podcast,” 2024, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://www.w.zdg.md/video/video/video-video-who-sent-you-who-stands-behind-your-back-who-pays-you-journalists-abducted-in-tiraspol-viorica-tataru-and-andrei-captarenco-on-podcast-zdce/>.

99 Facebook account of Romanian journalist Mircea C. Barbu, Facebook post of April 4, 2024, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/mirceacbarbu/videos/781925>.

conclusive example is the case of photojournalist Elena Covalenco, who in September 2023 was denied access to the Transnistrian region, despite the fact that she had an accreditation issued by the Sheriff club to photograph the Sheriff Tiraspol vs AS Roma match. This case demonstrates the arbitrary nature of the accreditation system, which does not serve as a legitimate administrative mechanism, but rather as an instrument of censorship and control over the independent press.

The illegal detention of journalists Viorica Tataru and Andrei Captarenco on January 24, 2024, in Tiraspol, of Russian journalist Timofei Iliușin on June 24, as well as of technician Octavian Lupăcescu and cameraman Ion Moroz from Studio-L Căușeni on November 15, 2024, highlights that the “ministry of state security of the pmr”, led by Valeri Ghebos, continues unhindered its practices of intimidation of independent journalists^{100, 101}.

- ▶ Journalists Viorica Tataru and Andrei Captarenco were detained after 9 minutes of filming during a pseudo-protest organized by Transnistrian structures. The journalists were interrogated for almost 3 hours in a cell in the basement of the “ministry of state security” in Tiraspol. During the interrogation, they were filmed and questioned about their views on the peacekeeping mission on the Nistru River, Transnistrian structures and the criminalization of separatism¹⁰².
- ▶ SOTAvision journalist Timofei Iliușin was illegally detained for 48 hours for alleged “illegal border crossing”. Earlier, in March 2023, Timofei Iliușin was declared “undesirable” by the alleged “ministry of state security” in Tiraspol. As in the case of photojournalist Elena Covalenco, the decision informing Iliușin of his “undesirable” status did not include any concrete reference to actions allegedly “undermining” the security of the region. In June 2024, during his illegal detention, the journalist was held in degrading conditions in one of the detention centers of the “ministry of state security”. According to his testimonies, he was deprived of food and access to the toilet and was subjected to repeated interrogations, intimidation and threats of sexual violence¹⁰³. Both Timofei Iliușin and TV8 journalists Viorica Tataru and Andrei Captarenco had their phones confiscated during detention and were compelled to delete the filmed and photographed material.
- ▶ Technician Octavian Lupăcescu and cameraman Ion Moroz from Studio-L Căușeni were illegally detained at the unauthorized checkpoint in the Gîsca village, while they were on their way to the village of Fîrlădeni to make a broadcast. They were then escorted to Bender, where they were “fined” under the pretext of violating the entry regime into the Transnistrian region. The Studio-L Căușeni team had no contact with them for two hours¹⁰⁴.

Another important aspect is that the news portals that systematically reflect the realities in the Transnistrian region and critically analyze the actions of the leaders of Transnistrian

100 TVR Moldova, “A new incident on the left bank of the Nistru River. Journalists Viorica Tătaru and Andrei Captarenco were detained this morning in Tiraspol while filming a protest organized by the separatist authorities”, 2024, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://tvrmdova.md/article/ee00dc8e257c891a/un-nou-incident-in-stanga-nistrului-jurnalistii-viorica-tataru-si-andrei-captarenco-retinuti-in-aceasta-dimineata-la-tiraspol-in-timp-ce-filmau-un-protest-organizat-de-autoritatile-separatiste.html>.

101 Newsmaker, “Russian journalist Timofei Iliușin, detained in Transnistrian region, has been released,” 2024, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://newsmaker.md/ru/video-govorili-hochesh-my-tebe-dubinku-v-zh-zasunem-kak-zhurnalista-iz-rossii-derzhali-v-mgb-pridnestrovyia-intervyu-nm>.

102 Ziarul de Gardă, “Video: Who sent you, who is behind you, who is paying you? Journalists abducted in Tiraspol, Viorica Tataru and Andrei Captarenco, on ZdCe podcast,” 2024, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://www.zdg.md/video/video-cine-v-a-trimis-cine-sta-in-spatele-vostru-cine-va-plateste-jurnalistii-rapiti-la-tiraspol-viorica-tataru-si-andrei-captarenco-la-podcast-zdce/>.

103 Newsmaker, “Video: “They were saying: do you want, we'll stick the bat in...?” How a Russian journalist was detained at Transnistrias' MGB. NM Interview”, 2024, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://newsmaker.md/ru/video-govorili-hochesh-my-tebe-dubinku-v-zh-zasunem-kak-zhurnalista-iz-rossii-derzhali-v-mgb-pridnestrovyia-intervyu-nm>.

104 Promo-LEX, “Urgent Appeal to the Diplomatic Missions, the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Moldova on the Detention of Two Media Representatives,” 2024, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://promolex.md/urgent-appeal-to-the-diplomatic-missions-government-of-the-republic-of-moldova-and-the-prosecutor-s-office-of-the-republic-of-moldova/>.

structures, such as SecurityZone.md, are categorized as “hostile non-commercial organizations” by the “ministry of state security of the pmr”, on the orders of Valeri Ghebos. Residents of the Transnistrian region who collaborate with these journalists are identified and informed that they risk being charged with “treason against the homeland”. The penalty for so-called “treason” is imprisonment from 12 to 20 years¹⁰⁵.

Moldovan and foreign journalists, as well as persons illegally detained or intimidated at checkpoints need information support from the constitutional authorities. The authorities’ web platforms do not provide essential information on the steps to be followed in such cases. Victims also lack access to a helpline or an assistance center to guide them to the relevant institutions¹⁰⁶. Without these information resources, people are vulnerable and at risk of repeat victimization. Access to information support is essential given the legislative vacuum in the region and the systematic nature of abuses.

105 “supreme soviet of the pmr”, “criminal code of the pmr (updated version as of 13.11.2024)”, accessed December 2, 2024, https://www.vspmr.org/legislation/laws/zakonodateljnie-akti-v-sfere-ugolovno_g_o-tamojennogo-administrativnogo-prava/ugolovniy-kodeks-bridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki.html.

106 Promo-LEX, “Analytical Note: Information Support for Victims of Human Rights Violations in the Transnistrian Region”, 2024, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://promolex.md/nota-analitica-suport-informational-pentru-victimele-incalcarilor-drepturilor-omului-din-regiunea-transnistreana/>.

CHAPTER 4

RIGHT TO EDUCATION



In 2024, Romanian-language schools in the Transnistrian region continued to be the target of illegal actions committed by Transnistrian structures, including: substantial increases in utility tariffs compared to those applied to Tiraspol-subordinated schools; abusive inspections; threatening teachers at illegal checkpoints; intimidating and interrogating parents in order to coerce them to transfer their children to Tiraspol-controlled schools; and demanding lists of pupils to be taken into the military records of paramilitary structures.

At the same time, structural problems related to educational infrastructure have remained largely unresolved. Lack of modern and spacious transportation, inadequate conditions for the educational process and lack of financial resources to reconfigure and expand premises are increasingly acute in the context of the continually rising number of students. Additional measures are also needed to: (1) support the integration of non-native Romanian-speaking children, (2) promote Romanian language learning among children and young people in the region, and (3) improve pupils' access to cultural services and products in Romanian. Investing in modernizing and equipping these institutions would facilitate the integration of more children into the national education system, which should be a priority direction in the field of the country's reintegration.

In the context of the non-execution of the group of cases *Catan and others v. Russia* by the Russian Federation, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, at its meeting on March 12-14, 2024, reiterated the fundamental importance of primary and secondary education for the development of every child in the language of his or her country and in his or her mother tongue, in accordance with Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights¹⁰⁷. The Committee recalled that, in addition to the payment of just satisfaction, the measures to enforce these judgments include revoking the "regulatory framework" at the origin of the violations, returning Latin-script schools to their former premises or to alternative premises suitable for the educational process, and instituting measures to eliminate harassment and intimidation of pupils, parents and teachers.

Dynamics of pupil numbers

Over the last four years, there has been a trend of a slight increase in the number of pupils in the eight Romanian language schools. There is also a diversification in the localities of origin of pupils. Compared to the 2023-2024 school year, the number of pupils has increased by 123 this year¹⁰⁸. At Roghi Gymnasium alone, the number of children increased by 20%¹⁰⁹. If in the school year 2022-2023 the gymnasium had pupils only from the village, now children from the villages of Țâbuleuca, Corjova, as well as from the city of Dubăsari are enrolled.

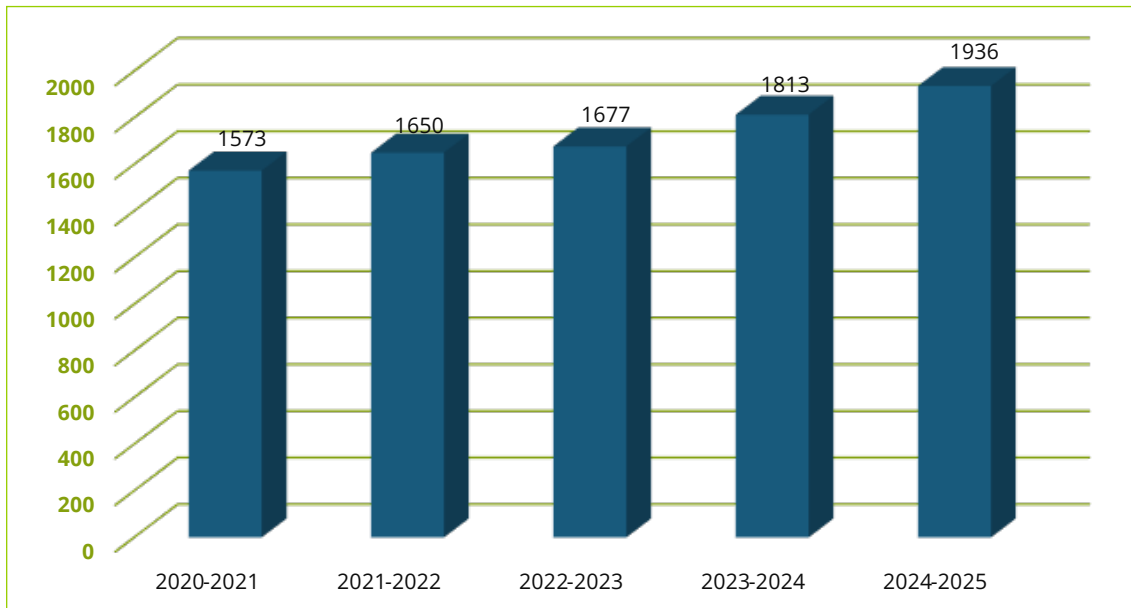
107 Council of Europe. Committee of Ministers, Decision of March 12-14, 2024 on the case of *Catan and Others v. Moldova and Russia*, accessed November 12, 2024, [https://search.coe.int/cm/#{"CoEIdentifier":\["0900001680aec21b"\],"sort":\["CoEValidationDate%20Descending"\]}](https://search.coe.int/cm/#{).

108 Government of the Republic of Moldova, "On the evolution of the number of children in the eight Romanian-language educational institutions in the Transnistrian region", 2024, accessed November 19, 2024, <https://www.gov.md/en/node/53306>.

109 Response of the Bureau for Reintegration Policies No. 23-78-14223 of December 24, 2024 to Promo-LEX's request for access to information of public interest.

Figure 4.1.

Enrollment Growth Trends in Romanian-Language Schools in the Transnistrian Region during 2020-2024



Source: elaborated by the authors based on BPR data¹¹⁰.

While the number of pupils in the eight Romanian-language schools is growing by an average of 5% a year, half of the 158 schools under the control of Transnistrian structures are experiencing an acute shortage of pupils. In the districts of Râbnîța, Grigoriopol, Slobozia and Dubăsari, there are more than 40 schools where the number of staff significantly exceeds the number of pupils, with some classes having only 1-2 pupils¹¹¹. Schools subordinated to Transnistrian structures also face a shortage of teachers. In small schools, basic subjects are often taught either by pre-school educators or by people who do not have a teaching diploma¹¹². The Transnistrian structures are examining the possibility of closing some small schools, including those teaching in Cyrillic¹¹³. This measure could lead to an increase in the number of pupils in Romanian-language schools subordinated to the MER.

In recent years, it has been observed that Romanian-language schools are becoming much more attractive for the population of the region. The increase in the number of pupils in schools subordinated to the MER is, among other things, the result of the growing interest of Russian-speaking families in studying in Romanian and obtaining a recognized diploma, which subsequently gives students easier access to university studies on the right bank of the country or in EU member states. However, we note that this growth requires the allocation of additional budgetary resources for the expansion or restructuring of buildings, improvement of study conditions, opening new classrooms and the purchase of modern and sufficiently spacious transport. For example, in the current school year, the request of the “Mihai Eminescu” Theoretical Lyceum in Dubăsari to open two twelfth-grade classes with Russian-language teaching was rejected due to lack of budgetary resources. In recent years, an increasing number of native Russian-speaking pupils have been applying to enroll in the

110 Bureau for Reintegration Policies, “On the evolution of the number of children in the eight Romanian-language educational institutions in the Transnistrian region”, 2024, accessed November 19, 2024, <https://www.gov.md/en/node/53306>.

111 “government of the pmr”, “Quality School Education - a Priority”, 2024, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://government.gospmr.org/kachestvennoe-shkolnoe-obrazovanie-prioritet/>.

112 “government of the pmr”, “the aim is to ensure high-quality comprehensive secondary education in all schools of the republic”, 2024, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://government.gospmr.org/czel-obespechit-kachestvennoe-polnoe-srednee-obrazovanie-vo-vseh-shkolah-respubliki/>.

113 “supreme soviet of the pmr”, “presidential administration discussed the issue of small schools”, 2024, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://vspmr.org/news/supreme-council/v-administratsii-prezidenta-obsudili-problemu-malokomplektnih-shkol.html>.

school's Russian-language classes. At present, the school has three Russian-language high school classes with a total of 46 pupils.

This trend represents an opportunity that national authorities can capitalize on to integrate more children and young people into the national education system, thus promoting the study of the Romanian language, national culture, a model of democratic and pluralist education. For pupils in the Transnistrian region, these educational institutions represent the only alternative to schools subordinated to Tiraspol, where education is marked by political indoctrination and militarization¹¹⁴. At the same time, the contribution of Romanian-language schools to the implementation of the National Program for the Study of the Romanian Language for Adults has shown that these institutions can play an essential role in the eventual reintegration of the country and in bringing the inhabitants of the region closer to the national cultural and linguistic values¹¹⁵.

Teacher shortages

With increasing student numbers, teacher shortages are a challenge for three of the eight schools. The "Alexandru cel Bun" high school in Bender needs teachers for physics and English, and in the near future will need a math teacher. The "Lucian Blaga" high school in Tiraspol does not have a school psychologist, and in the near future there is a risk that the institution will have no teachers for mathematics, physics, history and Romanian language and literature. The "Stefan cel Mare si Sfânt" high school in Grigoriopol (in exile in Doroțcaia village) is facing a shortage of specialists in the subjects: art education, technological education, mathematics, physics and history.

It is important to note that there are no special allowances for young teachers employed in Romanian-language schools in the Transnistrian region. In addition, the provisions on one-time allowances and compensation for expenses for renting accommodation and for electricity and heating do not apply to young specialists living in the temporarily occupied territory of the country. The reason for this is the fact that the financial means allocated by the MER to the new teachers are managed and paid through the budgets of the second level administrative-territorial units¹¹⁶.

Deficiencies in educational infrastructure and discriminatory fees

Some of the main challenges faced by Romanian-language schools are the lack of their own premises and the lack of conditions adapted to the standards of quality education. This problem is becoming more and more acute as the number of pupils increases annually, which makes it necessary to restructure and extend the existing premises or to identify alternative learning spaces. Most of the eight Romanian-language schools operate in unsuitable buildings, which have not undergone capital repairs in the last two decades.

Efforts to renovate, reconfigure and adapt the spaces in these buildings to the imperative requirements of an educational process are often blocked due to lack of financial resources. The budgetary resources allocated to these schools allow only minor repairs to be carried out. In some cases, the cost of regular maintenance work is covered by the parents. The table below includes the main problems related to the educational infrastructure of these schools.

114 Novosti Pridnestrovia, "Patriotic Education", accessed December 12, 2024, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/hash/patrioticheskoe-vospitanie>.

115 Security Zone, "VIDEO. Transnistrian residents are actively learning Romanian. Enrollment in the National Romanian Language Study Program continues this year", 2024, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://zonadesecuritate.md/video-locuitorii-regiunii-transnistrene-invata-activ-romana-inscrierile-la-programul-national-de-studiere-a-limbii-romane-continua-si-in-acest-an/>.

116 Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, Education Code of the Republic of Moldova No. 152 of 17.07.2014, accessed January 13, 2025, https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=1_1_0112&lang=ro.

Table 4.1.

Problems related to educational infrastructure

Educational institution	Types of difficulties and needs
<p>„Lucian Blaga” Theoretical Lyceum from Tiraspol</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The institution does not have a sports hall, a canteen, a language room, and physics and chemistry laboratories. The Transnistrian authorities have consistently refused to allow pupils access to the sports halls in schools under their control. » With increasing student numbers, the high school is looking for alternative space. The top priority is to relocate the primary classes, which total almost 50 pupils. The high school runs the risk of not having enough space for the new pupils. » The high school requires investment to renovate the roof, the facade and repair the heating network. According to estimates in 2023, the cost of these works would be over 2.000.000 lei.
<p>„Alexandru cel Bun” Theoretical Lyceum from and the boarding school for children left without parental care from Bender, where the students of grades VI - XII of „Alexandru cel Bun” Theoretical Lyceum study</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The school lacks essential facilities such as laboratories and a sports hall. » The boarding school building, built approximately 67 years ago, requires capital repairs. Among the most important works are: strengthening of the study block; landscaping of the outside courtyard and reconstruction of the sports field, which is completely damaged; renovation of the assembly hall; repair of classrooms; equipping the classroom for technological education and modernization of the heating system. The school has obtained funding only for the strengthening of the study block’s resistance structure, amounting to 1.710.000 lei. The implementation of this project is planned for 2025. However, due to the lack of cadastral documentation proving the ownership of the boarding school building, the school administration is facing difficulties in starting the renovation works. » The upward trend in the number of pupils in the first grades over the last three years requires the identification of alternative learning spaces.
<p>„Stefan cel Mare si Sfânt” Lyceum from Grigoriopol (in exile in the village of Dorotcaia)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Given the increase in the number of students in recent years and the fact that the institution shares the same building with the Dorotcaia High School, there is a risk that it may not have enough space to accommodate all the students who apply for enrollment. » Due to lack of space, lessons are held between 13:00 and 19:00, with some students having to travel up to 30 kilometers to get to school. » The institution lacks the financial resources required for capital renovations and classroom restructuring. The estimated cost for these works is 2.000.000 lei. The needs include upgrading the electrical network, modernizing classroom lighting, and purchasing modern equipment, such as interactive whiteboards. In 2024, the institution requested an increase in the budget, but the request was denied.

<p>„Mihai Eminescu” Theoretical Lyceum from Corjova village, Dubăsari</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The high school is housed in an adapted residential building which does not meet the needs of an educational institution. The exterior of the building has not been renovated in the last three decades, and traces of bullets from the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war can be seen on the facade. The building has also not benefited from major restructuring and renovation. » The classrooms, the assembly hall, the sports halls and the canteen are cramped and unsuited to the educational process. Laboratories and computer rooms are also substandard. In addition, the school furniture and canteen tables are very old. » The high school’s budget is largely allocated to cover teachers’ salaries, provide food for the students, pay utilities and partially maintain school transportation. In the last four years, the funds available for repairs were only 21-22 thousand lei annually. The repair works are mainly carried out by parents’ contributions. The budget estimated by the institution for the current school year was higher than that approved by the MER. The Ministry capped it, citing lack of financial resources. » In order to improve the conditions in the institution, the following priority investments are needed: renovation of interior plastering, thermal insulation of exterior walls, replacement of doors, replacement of the roof, replacement of floors, renovation of sports halls, modernization of the canteen and its equipment and furniture, renovation of the assembly hall, and replacement of school furniture. The necessary repair works are estimated at tens of millions of lei. For example, renovating the sports halls alone would require around 3 million lei.
<p>„Evrika” Theoretical Lyceum from Râbnîța</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The institution’s budget only allows for minor repairs inside the building. The facade of the building is damaged and the cost of a capital repair is estimated at around 2 million lei. » The sanitary blocks need renovation as they are not adapted to the needs of the students. These works are estimated at 800-900 thousand lei. » Another issue is the repair of a section of corridor lined with flammable material, which was requested by the Transnistrian fire service during the joint inspection before the start of the current school year. The cost of this work is estimated at around 200.000 lei. » Another priority is equipping a linguaphone room, which would facilitate the development of foreign language skills.
<p>Gymnasium „Constantin Sucitu” from Corjova village, Dubăsari</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Although the institution is not experiencing major difficulties in terms of educational infrastructure, financial resources are needed to renovate the assembly hall. In 2024, reconstruction works started, for which 300.000 lei were spent. On the other hand, for 2025, only 91.000 lei have been foreseen, while the total amount needed to complete the works amounts to approximately 600.000 lei.

Gymnasium Roghi

» During the period 2017-2024, the gymnasium has benefited from various investments aimed at improving conditions and renovating the sanitary groups, canteen, stadium and the sport hall. However, funds are still needed to modernize classrooms and equip them with modern technology.

Source: elaborated by the authors on the basis of information provided by Romanian-language schools in the Transnistrian region, at the request of Promo-LEX Association.

It is also important to note that most of the schools operate on the basis of limited-term leases signed with the Transnistrian structures, which will expire in 2027. There is no certainty that the Transnistrian structures will extend these contracts, nor is it known what conditions may be imposed. According to the MER, discussions on this issue will take place during the meetings of the working group on education in the period 2026-2027¹¹⁷. However, given Tiraspol's tendency to refuse to convene the working group on education and to exploit the vulnerable situation of the schools to gain advantage in the negotiations, we highlight the risk that the process of extending the leases could be hindered or obstructed. Another challenge regarding leases is their duration, which is limited to a maximum of 10 years. This restriction limits schools' access to funding opportunities, as most donors require longer leases of 20-25 years as an eligibility criterion.

Abusive utility rate hikes

A significant part of the schools' budget is directed to cover the costs of utilities, as a result of the substantial and discriminatory increase in tariffs imposed by Transnistrian structures at the beginning of 2024. The boarding school in Bender has allocated 44.8% of its budget to pay utilities, while the "Alexandru cel Bun" high school in Bender, the "Stefan cel Mare si Sfânt" high school in Grigoriopol, the "Mihai Eminescu" high school in Dubăsari and the "Evrika" high school in Râbnița - 16.2%¹¹⁸.

In response to the entry into force of the new Customs Code of the Republic of Moldova, which stipulates that economic agents from the Transnistrian region registered at the Public Services Agency must pay the same customs duties as companies from the right bank of the Nistru River, Transnistrian structures have adopted new abusive measures against Romanian-language schools. Utility tariffs in the Transnistrian region for the year 2024 were set by a "decree" signed by the so-called "prime minister of the pmr" Aleksandr Rosenberg on May 31, 2023¹¹⁹. On January 15, 2024, the document was amended exclusively to increase the tariffs for communal services applied to commercial and non-commercial institutions that are not registered in the Transnistrian region, as well as to persons who are not "citizens of the pmr" and own non-lodging premises in the region¹²⁰. Analyzing the tariffs set by this "decree", we note that the highest costs in all categories of utilities apply to institutions subordinated to Chisinau, such as schools with Romanian-language teaching¹²¹. On May 27, 2024, Aleksandr Rosenberg signed the "decree on setting tariffs for utilities

117 The unofficial response of the Ministry of Education and Research to the request for access to information of public interest formulated by Promo-LEX Association.

118 The unofficial response of the Ministry of Education and Research to the request for access to information of public interest formulated by Promo-LEX Association.

119 "government of the pmr", "decree No. 183 of May 31, 2023", 2024, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://mer.gospmr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/post-%E2%84%84%96-183.pdf>.

120 "government of the pmr", "decree No. 22 of January 15, 2024", accessed December 12, 2024, <https://government.gospmr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/01/postanovlenie-%E2%84%96-22.pdf>.

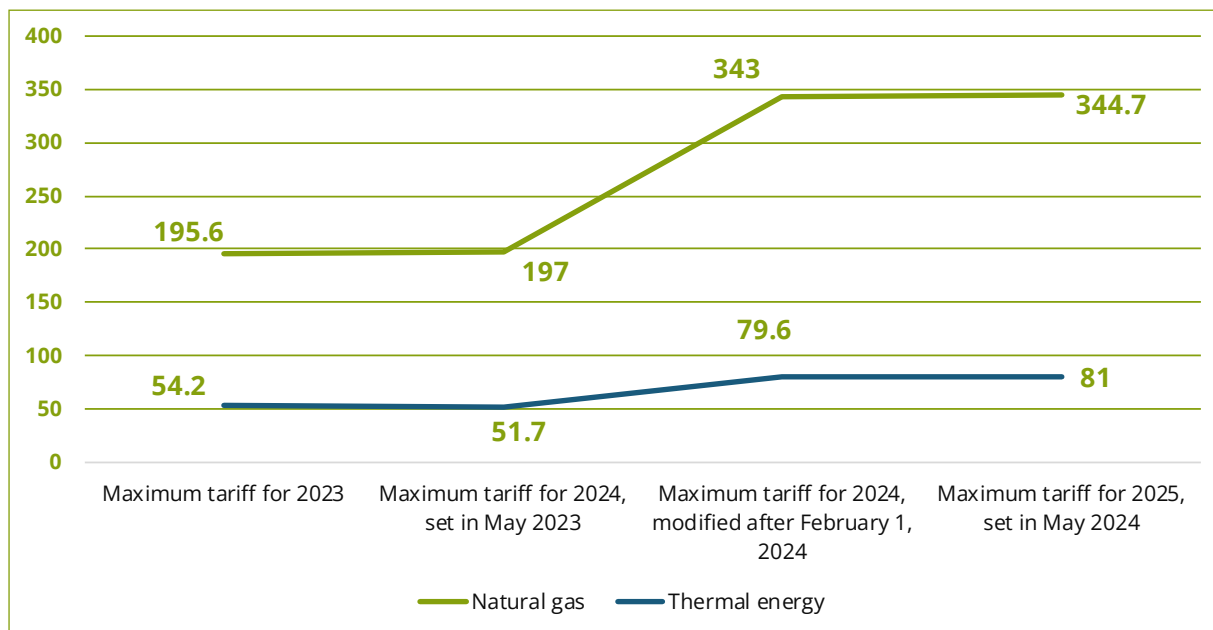
121 "government of the pmr", "On Amendments to Ordinance No. 183 of May 31, 2023", 2024, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://government.gospmr.org/o-vnesenii-izmenenij-v-postanovlenie-pravitelstva-pridnestrovskoj-moldavskoj-respubliki-ot-31-maya-2023-goda-%E2%84%84%96-183-ob-ustanovlenii-na-2024-god-predelnyh-urovnej-tarifov-na-uslugi-gaz-3/>.

in 2025”, which stipulates that prices will be increased again. In 2025, Romanian-language schools will continue to pay the highest tariffs in the region¹²².

The graph below highlights that the most significant increase in tariffs from 2021 to date has occurred after the entry into force of the new Moldovan Customs Code. This shows that Tiraspol is using the vulnerable situation of Romanian-language schools as a tool to react to the measures taken by the constitutional authorities to establish a single economic space.

Figure 4.2.

Tendency of increase in natural gas and heating tariffs for Romanian-language schools in 2021-2025



Source: prepared by the authors on the basis of information provided by the Transnistrian structures through the so-called “decrees” regulating the tariffs for utilities in the period 2020-2024¹²³.

Note: Prices are expressed in US dollars.

According to the information provided by BPR, the average percentage of tariffs for

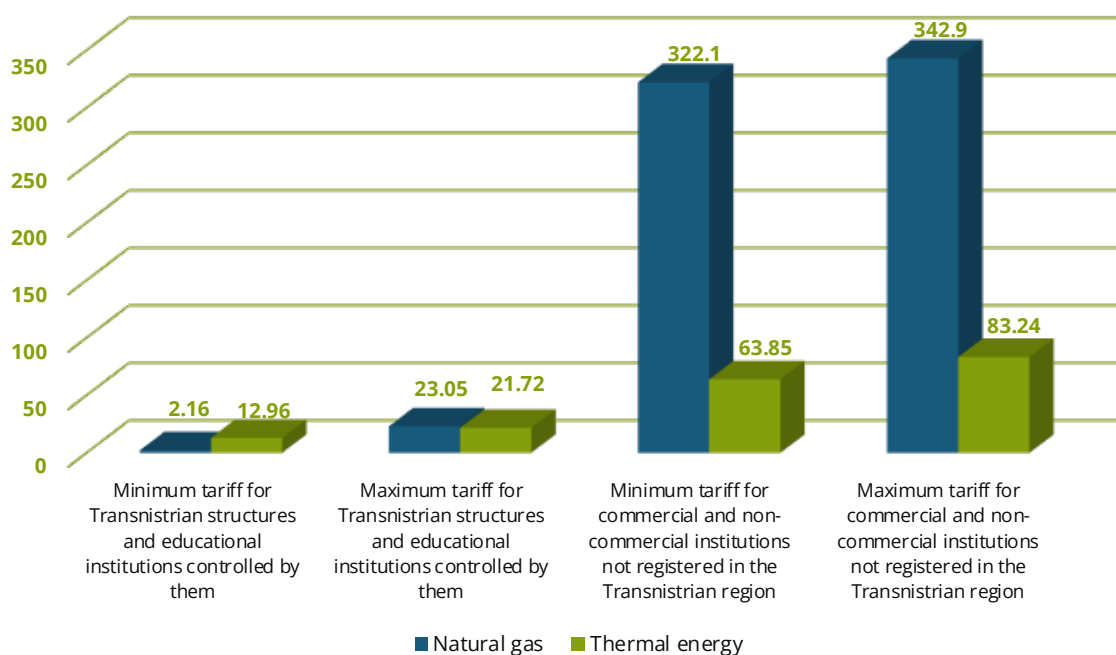
122 “government of the pmr”, “On the establishment for 2025 of maximum tariffs for gas, electricity, heat, water supply and sewerage services”, 2024, accessed December 12, 2024, <http://www.minjust.gospmr.org/oo/Publication.nsf/9306298df-912e905c2258221004d4624/af8100672003ccb6c2258b2c00483a03!OpenDocument>.

123 <http://www.minjust.gospmr.org/oo/Publication.nsf/805c7c76d1c2ddb8c2258213005be80f/837e0b0972afcdb3c2258577004a9c-cb!OpenDocument>, <http://www.minjust.gospmr.org/oo/Publication.nsf/9306298df912e905c2258221004d4624/af8100672003ccb-6c2258b2c00483a03!OpenDocument>, <http://www.minjust.gospmr.org/oo/Publication.nsf/805c7c76d1c2ddb8c2258213005be80f/cdea004778a0d7d9c22586e6004e4b88!OpenDocument>, <https://mer.gospmr.org/zakoni/postanovlenie-%E2%84%96-320-ot-30-avgusta-2022-goda-ob-ustanovlenii-na-2023-god-predelnyh-urovnej-tarifov-na-uslugi-gazosnabzheniya-na-uslugi-v-sfere-elektro-energetiki-na-uslugi-po-snabzheniy>, <https://mer.gospmr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/post-%E2%84%96-183.pdf>, <https://government.gospmr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/postanovlenie-%E2%84%96-22.pdf>, accessed December 4, 2024.

communal services for schools with Romanian language teaching increased by 82% in 2024 compared to 2023¹²⁴. The largest increase is in the price of natural gas - 501%, followed by a 125% increase in the price of electricity. The graphs below illustrate the major differences between the tariffs paid by institutions controlled by the Transnistrian structures and institutions subordinated to the constitutional authorities. The biggest differences are observed in the tariffs for the supply of natural gas. In practice, for 1,000 m³, commercial and non-commercial institutions that are not registered in the Transnistrian region, such as schools with Romanian-language teaching, pay a minimum tariff of about 149 times higher and a maximum tariff of up to 14 times higher than institutions and schools subordinated to the Transnistrian structures.

Figure 4.3.

Minimum and maximum tariffs for natural gas and heating energy applied to Romanian-language schools, compared to those applied to schools subordinated to Tiraspol



In terms of the thermal energy tariff, Romanian-language schools pay 4-5 times more than schools controlled by Tiraspol. Furthermore, they pay up to 32% more for electricity and 20% more for sewage and water supply.

124 Government of the Republic of Moldova, "After a nearly two-year break, the meeting of the working groups on education took place", 2024, accessed January 2, 2025, https://gov.md/ro/content/dupa-o-pauza-de-aproape-doi-ani-avut-loc-sedinta-grupurilor-de-lucru-pentru-educatie?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAR1TPGiOZX8SsiUef0nWS9LLDrsPyl_YOQHLul8w_1iUQ47mLwq34dAWOO8_aem_HPIDKvclclwnLg6lvyU_9Q.

Figure 4.4.

Minimum and maximum tariffs for water supply and sewerage services applied to Romanian-language schools, compared to those applied to schools subordinated to Tiraspol

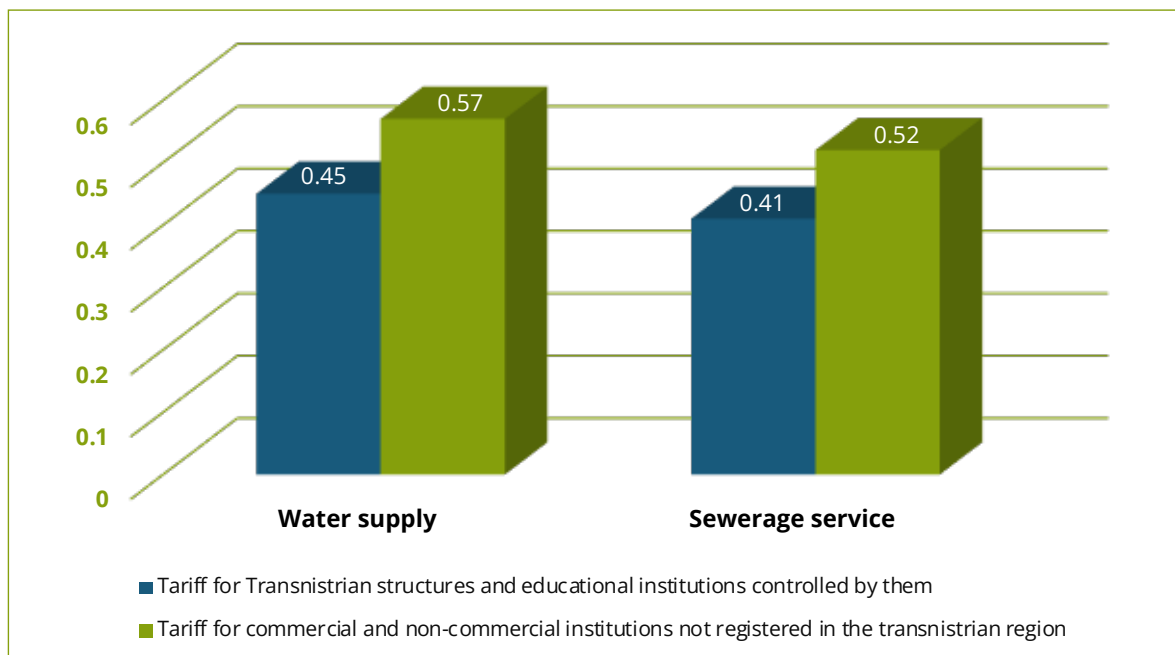


Figure 4.5.

Minimum and maximum electricity tariffs applied to Romanian-language schools, compared to those applied to schools subordinated to Tiraspol



Sources: elaborated by the authors on the basis of the information extracted from “decree no. 22 of January 15, 2024 on the amendment of “decree of the government of the pmr” no. 183 of May 31, 2023 on the establishment for the year 2024 of maximum tariffs for gas, electricity, thermal energy and water supply and sewerage services”¹²⁵.

125 “government of the pmr”, “decree No. 22 from 15 January 2024 on establishing the maximum tariff levels for gas supply services, electricity services, thermal energy, water supply and sewerage services for the year 2024”, 2024, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://government.gospmr.org/o-vnesenii-izmenenij-v-postanovlenie-pravitelstva-pridnestrovskoj-moldavskoj-respubliki-ot-31-maya-2023-goda-%E2%84%96-183-ob-ustanovlenii-na-2024-god-predelnyh-urovnej-tarifov-na-uslugi-gaz-3/>.

Note: Since rates have been increased differentially, the charts show the minimum and maximum price for utilities. Rates are expressed in US dollars.

- (1) Natural gas tariffs are per 1,000 m³.
- (2) Thermal energy tariffs are per Gcal.
- (3) Tariffs for water supply and sewerage services are per 1 m³.
- (4) Electricity tariffs are per kWh.

Transportation of pupils and teachers

The transportation of pupils remains a challenge for Romanian-language schools due to the lack of modern and sufficiently spacious vehicles. Most of the minibuses and buses available to these schools are outdated, requiring frequent and costly repairs, with some even lacking the necessary spare parts for maintenance. The need for new and spacious means of transportation is becoming more acute as the number of pupils enrolled in these institutions increases each year and as the localities from which they come are becoming more diverse.

Among the schools in need of additional buses are Roghi Gymnasium, Corjova Gymnasium, "Mihai Eminescu" High School in Corjova, "Evrika" High School in Râbnița, "Alexandru cel Bun" High School in Bender and "Lucian Blaga" High School in Tiraspol.

- ▶ The "Alexandru cel Bun" High School in Bender transports 270 students daily. The school's means of transportation makes 12 daily trips in the city area. The institution urgently needs a school bus with a capacity of at least 50 seats.
- ▶ The "Evrika" Theoretical High School in Râbnița transports 111 pupils from the town and five rural localities every day. The institution requires a coach with a capacity of at least 35 seats to transport pupils over a distance of 80-90 km (round-trip). Of the institution's 3 means of transport, two, with a capacity of 23 and 33 seats, are outdated and the parts needed to repair them are no longer available.
- ▶ The "Lucian Blaga" High School in Tiraspol transports 167 students (69% of the total number of students) from eight localities, some of them 40 km away from the city, such as Dnestrovsc. The institution needs four modern means of transportation with a total capacity of 170 seats. Currently, the institution owns three used vehicles with capacities of 16, 18, and 19 seats. In addition, it rents a 55-seat vehicle to transport 87 pupils from Slobozia.
- ▶ The "Stefan cel Mare și Sfânt" High School hires five coaches, each with a capacity of 50-55 seats, to transport 310 students from five localities. The maximum distance from which pupils are transported is 26 km. Annual costs for this service amount to about 2.100.000 lei. The school arranges pupil transportation by renting vehicles, as there is no available space in Grigoriopol to park its own buses.
- ▶ At the "Mihai Eminescu" High School in the village of Corjova, Dubăsari district, 500 students and more than 40 employees from eight localities are transported daily. The institution currently has six means of transportation with a total capacity of 151 seats, the largest of which has 33 seats. In order to provide transportation for all pupils, it is necessary to organize 3-4 trips every morning. The school's transportation fleet includes vehicles from 2006, 2010, 2016, 2020, 2022 and 2024. In August 2024, the high school

received a 17-seater bus as part of a batch of 69 buses purchased by MER with the support of the Romanian Government¹²⁶. However, the institution is in need of three new, high-capacity buses to replace the older means of transportation.

- ▶ Gymnasium “Constantin Sucitu” from the village of Corjova has a minibus with 16 seats, which transports daily 32 students from the city of Dubăsari, Lunga and Mahala villages. In view of the increasing trend in the number of pupils, the institution needs a bus with a capacity of about 40 seats.
- ▶ At Roghi Gymnasium, 22 students are transported daily from two directions: the village of Țâbuleuca - the village of Roghi and the city of Dubăsari - the village of Roghi, covering distances of about 25 kilometers. In August 2024, Roghi Gymnasium received a 17-seater bus as part of a batch of 69 buses purchased by MER with the support of the Romanian Government¹²⁷. However, the institution still needs an additional bus to ensure the simultaneous transportation of students on both routes.

Table 4.2.

Transportation needs for each school

Educational institution	Necessary vehicles	Capacity (seats)
„Alexandru cel Bun” Theoretical Lyceum from Bender	1	> 50 seats
„Evrika” Theoretical Lyceum from Râbnîța	1	> 35 seats
„Lucian Blaga” Theoretical Lyceum from Tiraspol	4	≈ 170 seats
„Mihai Eminescu” Theoretical Lyceum from Corjova, Dubăsari	3	> 100 seats
Gymnasium „Constantin Sucitu” from Corjova village, Dubăsari	1	≈ 40 seats
Gymnasium Roghi, Dubăsari	1	≈ 20 seats

Source: elaborated by the authors on the basis of information provided by Romanian-language schools in the Transnistrian region, at the request of Promo-LEX Association.

According to the MER, the eight schools have a transportation capacity of 911 pupils, which would ensure the transportation of 1,900 pupils, in 2-3 trips. However, the aforementioned information indicates that 11 modern and spacious vehicles are needed, including to make several trips simultaneously.

In addition to the transportation of students, “Lucian Blaga” High School in Tiraspol, “Stefan cel Mare și Sfânt” High School in Grigoriopol (Doroțcaia s.) and “Mihai Eminescu” Theoretical High School in Dubăsari need an additional vehicle for administrative activities and teachers’ travel. The existing vehicles are in poor condition. They are used for transporting diesel and gasoline from the right bank of the Nistru River, as well as for transporting building materials, food and textbooks. At the same time, the “Alexander the Good” High School in Bender will have to replace the existing means of transportation in the near future due to wear and tear.

Intimidation of parents and teachers

126 Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, “The first 40 out of 69 school buses purchased by the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova arrived in the Transnistrian region on July 2, 2025, <http://mdc.gov.md/ro/content/actualitate-40-de-autobuze-scolare-din-cel-69-achitigate-de-ministerul-educatiei-si-recherii-ajung-în-regiunea-transnistriană>”

127 Ibid.

in response to the growing number of applications from Russian-speaking families and individuals employed in Transnistrian structures, who, despite their backgrounds, choose to send their children to schools under the jurisdiction of the constitutional authorities. As a result of the intimidation and abusive interrogations by Transnistrian structures, some families have been forced to transfer their children to schools controlled by Tiraspol.

Also in September 2024, the controlled media in the region initiated a campaign of intimidation and denigration against the “Alexandru cel Bun” Theoretical Lyceum in Bender. The campaign was launched after Transnistrian structures banned Moldovan writers Maria Ivanov, Dumitru Crudu, Emilian Galaicu-Păun and Elvira Morosan from entering the region, using the pretext that the cultural magazines “Timpul”, which they were carrying, contained political propaganda¹²⁸.

The TV channel “Pervii Pridnestrovskii”, financed by Transnistrian structures, made news reports and programs promoting the following false narratives: (1) the cultural magazines were allegedly aimed at instilling in “Transnistrian children” a hostile attitude towards the Russian Federation and Transnistrian structures, (2) Russians were portrayed as barbarians and the inhabitants of the region as separatist puppets, (3) by distributing these magazines and organizing meetings with writers from the right bank, the aim was to form groups of children who would later be involved in subversive actions against the so-called “pmr”^{129, 130}. The reports emphasized that Transnistrian structures are constantly monitoring the type of information and materials distributed to pupils in Romanian-language schools, especially those related to history and civic education. Transnistrian TV included in its news reports footage filmed in the school yard without the permission of the school.

Also, during the annual joint inspection before the start of the 2024-2025 school year, representatives of the Transnistrian structures showed a hostile attitude towards the school administrations¹³¹. The “Alexandru cel Bun” Theoretical High School in Bender has not yet received the operating permit from the regional fire service. They have requested the removal of wooden paneling from the walls of the corridors, which are more than 30 years old. The operating permit is issued with the approval of the so-called “ministry of foreign affairs of the pmr”, headed by Vitali Ignatiev, known for his lack of cooperation on the problems of Romanian-language schools. The transfer of fire protection issues to this structure underlines that Tiraspol is using the vulnerability of schools as a tool of negotiation.

Another relevant issue concerns the difficulties schools face in transporting goods and food across the administrative line. Despite the 2017 protocol agreement between Chisinau and Tiraspol, which stipulates that transportation of goods is permitted as long as the accompanying invoices clearly list the schools as recipients, schools continue to face restrictions imposed by Transnistrian structures. First, all transported goods are registered and inspected at illegal checkpoints, where they are subjected to the quantitative limits set by these structures. Secondly, only goods and products included on a pre-approved list can be transported. If certain goods are not on the list or if quantities exceed the established limits, school representatives are forced to bypass these illegal checkpoints, exposing them to additional risks.

128 NewsMaker, “They say that 300 years ago, Romanians lived in Dubăsari”. How the detention of writers from Chisinau was explained”, 2024, accessed December 3, 2025, <https://newsmaker.md/ru/mol-esche-300-let-nazad-v-dubossarah-zhili-rumyny-kak-v-pridnestrove-obyasnili-zaderzhanie-pisateley-iz-kishineva>.

129 Pervii Pridnestrovskii, “Newspapers with ‘Rewritten History’ from Moldova”, broadcast September 20, 2024, accessed January 3, 2025, <https://tv.pgtrk.com/ru/show/60547/148945>.

130 Pervii Pridnestrovskii, “Separatist Barbarians’ or Moldovan Newspapers”, report dated September 19, 2024, accessed January 3, 2025, <https://tv.pgtrk.com/ru/news/20240919/149276>.

131 Government of the Republic of Moldova, “After a nearly two-year break, the meeting of the working groups on education took place”, 2024, accessed January 2, 2025, https://gov.md/ro/content/dupa-o-pauza-de-aproape-doi-ani-avut-loc-sedinta-grupurilor-de-lucru-pentru-educatie?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAR1TPGiOZX8SsiUefOnWS9LLDrsPyl_YOQHLul8w_1iUQ47mLwq34dAWOO8_aem-HPIDKvclclwnLg6lvyU_9Q.

Military records in paramilitary structures

Transnistrian structures continue to request lists of 16-year-old boys from school administrations in order to register them in their military records and subsequently incorporate them into paramilitary forces. The military register is managed by the so-called “ministry of defense of the pmr”, headed by Oleg Obrucikov, and includes data on all residents of the Transnistrian region, including those who do not have so-called “Transnistrian citizenship” but live in the territory of the region¹³². Exempted from enlistment in paramilitary structures are young people who live permanently outside the Transnistrian region and have registered their residence in the controlled territory of the country or in another state, those who have renounced “Transnistrian citizenship”, persons who are unfit from the point of view of health, those serving a custodial sentence, those who have already performed military service in another state for at least 12 months, as well as persons who have reached the age of 27¹³³.

The majority of students enrolled in Romanian-language high schools who were born on the territory of the Transnistrian region hold “Transnistrian citizenship”, which puts them at risk of being forcibly conscripted into paramilitary structures. For the past 30 years, Transnistrian structures have made access to various essential services conditional on the acquisition of “Transnistrian citizenship”. In order to avoid being registered in the military records of paramilitary structures, students who turn 16 must obtain their certificate of recruitment on the right bank of the Nistru River and change their place of residence to the territory controlled by the constitutional authorities or to another state. However, it is important to note that the change of residence exempts from military registration mainly those pupils who do not hold “Transnistrian citizenship”. According to the so-called “law on military obligation and military service”, persons with “Transnistrian citizenship” who return to the territory of the region for more than 90 days are obliged to re-register at the place of residence and be included in the military register of Transnistrian structures¹³⁴. Another factor that obliges students holding “Transnistrian citizenship” to be registered in the military records of the Transnistrian structures is the fact that one of the obligatory documents for the issuance of the “Transnistrian passport” is the recruit certificate¹³⁵. Thus, as long as these students remain on the territory of the region, the Transnistrian structures oblige them, through various abusive provisions, to be registered in the military register.

Although these cases are not widespread, it is worth emphasizing that in the last four years there have been cases in which students transferred in grade 12 from a Tiraspol-subordinated school to a Romanian-language high school were forcibly recruited into paramilitary structures. Students transferring from Tiraspol-controlled schools are particularly vulnerable, as the region’s “legislation” mandates recruitment after completing 11 grades.

The constitutional authorities do not collect information on the number of pupils in the eight Romanian-language schools who hold the so-called “Transnistrian citizenship” in order to inform families in advance about how to prevent forced recruitment into paramilitary structures. At the same time, there are no instructions or guidelines for such situations available on the web platforms of the constitutional authorities.

132 “supreme soviet of the pmr”, “law of the pmr on military service (updated version as of 23.11.2024)”, 2024, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.vspmr.org/legislation/laws/zakonodateljnje-akti-v-voennoj-sfere-i-v-sfere-oboroni/zakon-pridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki-o-vseobschey-voinskoy-obyazannosti-i-voennoj-službe.html>.

133 *Ibid.*

134 *Ibid.*

135 “ministry of internal affairs of the pmr”, “Issuance, Replacement and Obtaining of the Transnistrian Passport,” accessed January 4, 2025, <https://mvdpmr.org/mvd-pmr/gosuslugi/215-gos-uslugi-upvm/22256-oformlenie-vydacha-zamena-pasporta-pmr.html>.

When asked about the existence of a procedure to establish clear measures for school administrations and parents in case of attempts by Transnistrian structures to take military records or forcibly enlist pupils in paramilitary structures, BPR gave a general answer and the MER informed us that this issue does not fall within its competence¹³⁶. BPR mentioned that (1) it is in permanent dialogue with the school administrations, (2) military conscription on the right bank is encouraged at the military commissariats of the Republic of Moldova and (3) the necessary support is given in each individual case¹³⁷.

While it is important that the BPR emphasizes ongoing dialogue with schools, its response remains vague as to whether there is a formal protocol in place that provides concrete steps to protect students. No proactive measures are specified to prevent such situations, such as organizing regular information sessions or distributing explanatory materials about the risks, the rights of pupils and the institutions where parents can seek assistance. Additionally, there is no indication of a coordinated mechanism between the relevant institutions, such as the MER, the BPR, and the Ministry of Defense, to address these cases. The response suggests that the support provided is predominantly reactive. Furthermore, the BPR does not specify the concrete support available to these students

Integration of monolingual pupils

In recent years, there has been an upward trend in the number of Russian-speaking pupils in five Romanian-language schools in the Transnistrian region, with a total of 186 native Russian-speaking pupils enrolled in these schools. The “Mihai Eminescu” Theoretical High School in the village of Corjova, Dubăsari district, has 96 monolingual pupils (46 of whom are enrolled in Russian-language classes), “Alexandru cel Bun” High School in Bender - 33, “Lucian Blaga” High School in Tiraspol - 24, “Stefan cel Mare și Sfânt” High School in Grigoriopol - 20, and “Evrika” Theoretical High School in Râbnîța - 9.

Given that Russian-native speakers do not master Romanian at conversational level, their integration, both educationally and linguistically, is a major challenge. Some students transfer from Tiraspol-controlled schools to Romanian-language schools at the high school level, despite having no knowledge of Romanian at the elementary level. In the first years, in the classes with monolingual pupils, teachers simultaneously translate the lessons into Russian in order to facilitate understanding of the teaching material. These pupils need consistent support to be able to take national exams and to benefit from the same educational opportunities as other pupils.

Currently, there is no program in place to support monolingual pupils in these schools to learn Romanian intensively and gradually adapt to the curriculum. Also, schools with a higher number of monolingual pupils are not allocated additional resources, such as funds, textbooks and teachers, to support these pupils in learning Romanian. Moreover, in the last 30 years, no initiatives have been implemented to support Romanian language learning for children and young people in the Transnistrian region. The National Romanian Language Learning Program for the period 2023-2025 is exclusively for adults. Representatives of Romanian-language schools emphasize that there is a growing interest from families with children to study Romanian. Thus, it would be recommended that the authorities examine the possibility of implementing a program dedicated to Romanian language learning for children from the left bank of the Nistru River.

The lack of basic knowledge of the Romanian language among children and young people

136 The unofficial response of the Ministry of Education and Research to the request for access to information of public interest formulated by Promo-LEX Association.

137 Response of the Bureau for Reintegration Policies No. 23-78-14223 of December 24, 2024 to Promo-LEX's request for access to information of public interest.

is also a consequence of the non-existence of Romanian-language kindergartens in the Transnistrian region. The only educational institutions that have pre-school groups in Romanian are the “Evrika” Lyceum in Râbnița, the “Mihai Eminescu” Lyceum in Corjova, the “Constantin Sucitu” Gymnasium in Corjova and the Roghi Gymnasium. In the regions in the vicinity of the cities of Grigoriopol, Bender, Tiraspol, Slobozia and Dnestrovsc there are no alternatives to kindergartens subordinated to Transnistrian structures. As of 2024, 27 children were enrolled in two pre-school groups (3-5 years and 5-7 years) at the “Evrika” Theoretical High School, 18 children at the “Constantin Sucitu” Gymnasium, and 12 children at the “Mihai Eminescu” Theoretical High School. In addition, 11 children attend the Community Center which operates within the Roghi Gymnasium. According to the information provided by “Evrika” Theoretical High School, “Constantin Sucitu” Gymnasium and Roghi Gymnasium, there is a trend of increasing number of applications for enrolment in pre-school groups. At the “Mihai Eminescu” Theoretical High School, the number of preschoolers has decreased due to the program, which ends at 13:30. Therefore, parents are choosing to transfer their children to Russian-language kindergartens in Dubăsari, which are subordinated to Tiraspol.

Access to cultural products and services in Romanian

Since the students enrolled in these schools live in the temporarily occupied territory of the country, their access to cultural services and products, such as books, exhibitions, performances, guided tours to museums, book fairs or film festivals, is limited. Also, access of writers from the right bank of the Nistru River to the region is often restricted due to

illegal checkpoints and alleged declarations of “undesirability”¹³⁸. Therefore, additional measures are needed to complement the educational process in the classroom in order to strengthen students’ attachment to national cultural values, to counter the deeply anti-Western and anti-Romanian discourse in the Transnistrian region, as well as to support children’s education in the Romanian language.

The MC does not implement a program of cultural activities and initiatives dedicated to students from these schools. Instead, cultural activities are sporadically organized by institutions subordinated to the MC, such as the National Museum of Art, the National Museum of Romanian Literature, the National Museum of History of Moldova and the National Children’s Library “Ion Creangă”. Over the past two years, these institutions, with the financial support of development partners and the ministry, have organized two meetings with writers, theatre performances, a study visit to Lithuania, 14 guided museum tours, a summer and an autumn school, focusing on promoting democratic values, building European culture and intergenerational communication. Out of the eight schools, most of the activities involved pupils from the “Lucian Blaga” Theoretical Lyceum in Tiraspol, followed by the “Evrika” Theoretical Lyceum in Râbnița. The MC also highlighted the collaboration between the Center of Culture and Art “Ginta Latină”, “Lucian Blaga” Lyceum in Tiraspol and “Evrika” Lyceum in Râbnița, which facilitates the regular participation of dozens of students in theatre performances¹³⁹. This model of good practice can be followed by other cultural institutions in order to ensure constant access for students from the Transnistrian region to more cultural activities and events.

Also, young people aged 18 from the Transnistrian region, who hold Moldovan citizenship, can benefit from the cultural voucher worth 1,000 lei, offered through the program “Cultural Voucher”, implemented by the MC. However, the program’s promotion in the Transnistrian region has been limited. Currently, the MC does not have information on the number of young people from the left bank of the Nistru River and the municipality of Bender who have accessed this voucher, as the geographical distribution of the beneficiaries is not known¹⁴⁰. For the year 2025, the Ministry plans to increase the visibility of the program through the MER channels in order to reach also potential beneficiaries aged 18 from the Transnistrian region. A possible extension of the program to pupils of different ages in the Romanian-language schools could improve their access to culture. The practice of providing cultural vouchers for primary and secondary school pupils has been implemented in other countries and recommended as a model by the Council of Europe¹⁴¹.

The problem of adopted children in the Transnistrian region

Children adopted by decisions of the so-called “judges” in the Transnistrian region cannot be documented with Moldovan identity documents, as their adoptive parents have no legal form of guardianship and protection. This situation restricts several fundamental rights, such as the right to free movement, the right to education and the right to special protection. School administrations have reported that they receive yearly requests from Moldovan

138 NewsMaker, “A group of writers from Chisinau was not allowed to enter Tighina. Reaction of the Bureau for Reintegration Policies”, 2024, accessed January 4, 2025, <https://newsmaker.md/ro/un-grup-de-scriitori-de-la-chisinau-nu-a-fost-lasat-sa-intre-in-tighina-reactia-biroului-politici-de-reintegrare/>.

139 Response of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova No. 03/1-09/3945 of 27.12.2024 to the request for access to information of public interest formulated by Promo-LEX.

140 Response of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova No. 03/1-09/3945 of 27.12.2024 to the request for access to information of public interest formulated by Promo-LEX.

141 Council of Europe, Cultural Vouchers, accessed January 4, 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/-/culture-vouchers>.

citizens to enroll children adopted in the Transnistrian region. However, due to the lack of a documentation mechanism, their enrolment in schools subordinated to Chisinau is not possible. As a result, the parents of these children are forced to enroll them in schools subordinated to Tiraspol.

The State Register of Adoption, managed by the MLSP, does not include data on adoptions “approved” by Transnistrian structures¹⁴². The only available data are provided by Transnistrian structures. As of January 1, 2024, the number of children orphaned or left without parental care in the Transnistrian region was 2.742, of whom 1.476 were living in orphanages and boarding schools and 771 were under the guardianship of local inhabitants¹⁴³. Almost 30% of all children are children with special needs and children in need of remedial education.

This issue has been a matter of public attention for several years. Although in 2019 there were discussions about identifying a mechanism for the establishment of constitutional guardianship, this has not subsequently been realized¹⁴⁴. The MLSP indicated several impediments to the establishment of such a mechanism, including:

- ▶ lack of effective control over the Transnistrian region;
- ▶ the absence of a legal basis for recognizing adoption documents issued by Transnistrian structures. MLSP emphasized that such a decision can only be taken at the political level;
- ▶ the lack of legal mechanisms to verify the quality and veracity of the information contained in these documents, in particular as regards the assessment of the situation of children and the attribution of the status of children left without parental care and adoptable;
- ▶ lack of willingness to cooperate on the part of Transnistrian structures;
- ▶ the impossibility for representatives of the territorial guardianship authorities to travel to the left bank of the Nistru River in order to assess the situation of children left without parental care, due to the impediments created by the Transnistrian structures¹⁴⁵.

Law No. 370/2023 on the Rights of the Child stipulates that all children are entitled to protection without any discrimination, regardless of where they are or any other criteria¹⁴⁶. According to the provisions of the law, the State promotes the national adoption of children with the status of adoptable children by citizens of the Republic of Moldova, regardless of their place of residence. Both Law No. 370/2023 and Law No. 99/2010 on the legal regime of adoption do not contain any reservations regarding adoption in the Transnistrian region¹⁴⁷. Unlike the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine has made clear reservations, stating that the Ukrainian authorities do not exercise their competences in the temporarily occupied territories and therefore persons residing in these areas cannot adopt children¹⁴⁸.

In 2024, after a break of two years, a meeting of the working group on social issues and humanitarian aid was held with the participation of specialists from both banks of the Nistru River. One of the topics discussed was the need for Transnistrian structures to comply with

142 Response of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection No. S-3808/24 to the request for access to information of public interest formulated by Promo-LEX.

143 “government of the pmr”, “report on the situation of children in 2023”, 2024, accessed January 4, 2025, <https://government.gospmr.org/gosudarstvennyj-doklad-o-polozhenii-detej-v-pridnestrovskoj-moldavskoj-respublike-v-2023-godu/>.

144 IPN News Agency, “Children adopted in the Transnistrian region cannot leave the borders of the Republic of Moldova,” 2019, accessed January 5, 2025, https://www.ipn.md/ro/copiii-adoptati-in-regiunea-transnistreana-nu-pot-parasi-hotarele-republicii-mol-7967_1048209.html.

145 Response of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection No. S-3808/24 to the request for access to information of public interest formulated by Promo-LEX.

146 Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, Law No. 370 of 30.11.2023 on the Rights of the Child, accessed January 5, 2025, https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=140710&lang=ro.

147 Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, Law No. 99 of 28.05.2010 on the legal regime of adoption, accessed January 5, 2025, https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=138813&lang=ro,

148 Ukrainian Helsinki Union, “Wartime Adoption: legal regulation and peculiarities of implementation”, 2024, accessed January 5, 2025,

the national regulatory framework on the adoption procedure¹⁴⁹. However, in the absence of a legal mechanism, the discussions on compliance with national legislation by Transnistrian structures have so far had no concrete impact on the protection of children without parental care in the Transnistrian region.

Militarization of education and political indoctrination in schools controlled by Tiraspol

Romanian-language schools are the only option for children in the region to benefit from an education based on the principles of peace, democracy and pluralism of opinions. In comparison, the education system controlled by Transnistrian structures serves as a tool for political indoctrination and preparation of children for war^{150,151,152}. The strong militarization of education in the region is aimed at creating generations loyal to Transnistrian structures. For leaders in the region, it is essential to be able to mobilize and maintain support for the continued existence of the so-called “pmr”. The “patriotic education” in the region is in fact militarism, cultivating a hostile attitude towards the constitutional authorities, ensuring training for military service and readiness to sacrifice for the defense of the so-called “pmr”, and promoting the idea that the region is predestined to be “reunited” with Russia¹⁵³. The same strategy of indoctrination of children and youth is being applied by the Russian Federation in the temporarily occupied regions of Ukraine since 2014¹⁵⁴.

The militarization of education in the Transnistrian region is a gross violation of international norms which explicitly state that children should be educated in the spirit of peace, freedom, tolerance, equality and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups¹⁵⁵. It is also a national security issue and a major challenge for the eventual reintegration process of the country.

“Military-patriotic education” has become a priority for Transnistrian structures over the last eight years. This is also emphasized by the inclusion of basic military education in the school curriculum¹⁵⁶. However, the foundations of this concept were laid in 2003 with the “decree on the concept of education of children and youth in the pmr” signed by Igor Smirnov¹⁵⁷. The “decree” stipulates that the promotion of love of the “motherland”, the formation of an ideal of service to the “motherland” and preparation for its defense are the main objectives of the education system in the region.

The concept of “patriotic education” in the Transnistrian region is Russian-inspired. Igor Smirnov’s 2003 “decree” was approved two years after a similar concept was adopted in the Russian Federation¹⁵⁸. The central elements of “military-patriotic education” in the

149 Government of the Republic of Moldova, “Experts in the field of social protection and humanitarian aid met in a working session,” 2024, accessed January 5, 2025, <https://www.helsinki.org.ua/articles/usynovlennia-v-umovakh-viyny-pravove-rehuliuвання-ta-osoblyvosti-realizatsii/>.

150 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “The concept of civic-patriotic education was approved in Transnistria”, 2020, accessed January 7, 2025, <https://www.novostipmr.com/ru/news/20-02-10/v-pridnestrove-utverdili-koncepciyu-grazhdansko-patrioticheskogo>.

151 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “Patriotic Education”, accessed January 7, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/hash/patrioticheskoe-vospitanie>.

152 “ministry of education of the pmr”, “decree No. 891 of 05.10.2022”, accessed January 7, 2025, https://minpros.gospmr.org/files/uoo/common/2022_10_05_02-06_891.pdf.

153 “government of the pmr”, “decree No. 20 of February 7, 2020”, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://government.gospmr.org/content/documents/2020/20.pdf>.

154 Radio Free Europe, “How Russia is preparing children in occupied Ukraine for war against their own country”, 2024, accessed January 7, 2025, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-prepares-children-occupied-ukraine-war/33217789.html>.

155 UNICEF Moldova, The Convention on the Rights of the Child, accessed January 9, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/moldova/me_dia/1401/file/Convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child.pdf.

156 “ministry of education of the pmr”, “decree No. 693 of August 5, 2022”, accessed January 9, 2025, http://www.minjust.gospmr.org/oo/P_ublication.nsf/805c7c76d1c2ddb8c2258213005be80f/bab75379226159edc22588ae004b57ba!OpenDocument.

157 “decree No. 201 of May 12, 2023 on the approval of the concept of education of children and youth in the pmr”, 2003, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://www.ulpmr.ru/ul/show/owOSP8ZHJZb952si6ILzLQJ5hbObAEF3HXus=>.

158 Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 122 of February 16, 2001, “On the State Program ‘Patriotic Education of

Transnistrian region, borrowed from the Russian Federation, are: basic military training from an early age and instilling a sense of responsibility for the fate of the “homeland”. In addition to practical military training, children are psychologically prepared from an early age to be involved in a war, through constantly promoted slogans such as: “service to the fatherland is a special happiness and honor”¹⁵⁹.

Since 2017, with the establishment of a “commission on the issues of patriotic and moral-spiritual education of children and youth” and the development of the “concept of patriotic education” at the initiative of Vadim Krasnoselski, more and more attention has been paid to “military-patriotic education”^{160, 161}. The level of involvement of Transnistrian paramilitary and security structures, such as the so-called “ministry of defense”, “ministry of state security”, “ministry of internal affairs”, in the activities of “military-patriotic education” in schools and kindergartens has also increased. An important role is also played by paramilitary organizations made up of participants in the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war, military schools, as well as youth associations^{162, 163}. Other important actors in the organization of “military-patriotic” activities are the clergy of the Tiraspol-Dubăsari dioceses, the Russian Embassy in Moldova, the Operational Group of Russian troops and the Rossotrudnicestvo Representation in the Republic of Moldova^{164, 165, 166}.

In 2024, paramilitary and force structures received 20% of the budget of the Transnistrian region, equivalent to more than 69 million dollars, while the so-called “ministry of education” and the entire education system received only 7.51% of the budget¹⁶⁷. This distribution underlines that militarization of the region is a priority. With a significant share of the budget, the paramilitary and security structures exert considerable influence on the educational sector. In recent years, the “ministry of state security”, under the leadership of Valeri Ghebos, has been implementing a “sponsorship and patronage program” for educational institutions. In 2024, 25 schools took part in this program, which consists of material support, but also the direct involvement of representatives of the security structures in the educational process¹⁶⁸. Pupils of these schools regularly participate in political indoctrination lessons, thematic meetings with representatives of various Transnistrian paramilitary structures,

Citizens of the Russian Federation for 2001-2005”, <https://base.garant.ru/1584972/#friends>.

- 159 “ministry of education of the pmr”, “decree no. 68 of 01.02.2024 on the organization of the republican contest “Serving the Fatherland - a special honor and joy”, 2024, accessed 8 January 2025, https://minpros.gospmr.org/files/Molodej/DOViMP / 2024/01.02.24_68..pdf.
- 160 “president of the pmr”, “decree No. 169 of March 14, 2017 on the establishment of the commission on issues of patriotic and spiritual-moral education of children and youth”, 2017, accessed January 9, 2025, https://president.gospmr.org/pravovy_e_akty/ukazi/o-sozdanii-komissii-po-voprosam-patrioticheskogo-i-duhovno-nravstvennogo-vospitaniya-detey-i-molodeji.html.
- 161 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “Civic activists have developed a concept for patriotic education of young people”, 2017, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ r https://novostipmr.com/ u/news/17-02-03/obshchestvenniki-razrabotali-koncepciyu-patrioticheskogo>.
- 162 paramilitary structure “army of Black Sea Cossacks”, “Military camp and sports training of the army of Black Sea Cossacks”, 2024, accessed January 9, 2025, https://k_a_zaki-pmr.ru/v-strane/voenno-sportivnye-sbory-kazachat-chernomorskogo-kazachego-vojska-2024/.
- 163 paramilitary structure “union of defenders of Transnistria”, “from medical care to the basics of self-defense: lessons for high school students of school No. 6”, 2024, accessed January 9, 2025, https://s_z_pmr.org/news/vsk-bars-provel-zanimatelnye-uroki-dlya-gimnazistov/.
- 164 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “Winners of the ‘Loyal Sons of Russia’ contest awarded in Tiraspol”, 2024, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-07-05/v-tiraspole-nagradili-pobediteley-konkursa-rossii-vernnye-syny>.
- 165 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “On the sublime and earthly. President of the pmr met with clergy”, 2024, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-09-10/o-vozyshennom-i-zemnom-prezident-pmr-vstretilsya-s-duhovenstvom>.
- 166 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “Camp ‘Red Star’ was opened for young members of the military”, 2021, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/21-07-04/dlya-yunarmeycev-otkrylsya-lager-krasnaya-zvezda>.
- 167 “supreme soviet of the pmr”, “Law of the pmr on the republican budget for 2024 (updated version of 13.12.2024)”, accessed January 10, 2025, <https://yspmr.org/legislation/laws/zakonodatelnie-akti-pridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki-v-sfere-byudjetnogo-finansovogo-ekonomicheskogo-nalogovogo-zakonodatelstva/zakon-pridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki-o-respublikanskom-byudjete-na-2024-god.html>.
- 168 “ministry of security of the pmr”, “lessons of courage and peace for schoolchildren”, 2024, accessed January 10, 2025, http://mgb.gospmr.org/news/u_r_oki-muzhestva-i-mira-dlya-shkolnikov/.

as well as military training camps^{169, 170}. In this way, Transnistrian structures ensure the curriculum aligns with the ideology promoted by Tiraspol, while simultaneously expanding their recruitment base.

In 2024, in Vadim Krasnoselski's annual speech, the actions of "patriotic, spiritual and moral education" of the young generation were included among the priorities set for the "ministry of digital development, communications and mass media", "ministry of defense", "ministry of education", and "ministry of state security"¹⁷¹. In addition to the conventional "patriotic activities", Krasnoselski's priorities for the "ministry of education" include the development of a course on the "legal foundations of the Transnistrian statehood", "formation of the Transnistrian people", "the Nistru War", "victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945", "Transnistrian involvement in the Great Patriotic War" and "Transnistria - a democratic and constitutional state". The course will be systematically taught in educational institutions of all levels¹⁷². Moreover, the topics of the course will be covered in a series of programs produced by the "ministry of digital development" and controlled mass media.

Although "military-patriotic education" is aimed at all age groups, it is mainly targeted at children and young people, starting from pre-school level. To achieve this, military camps, military-sport competitions, meetings with participants of the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war (referred to as "lessons of courage"), exhibitions on the 1992 war (framed as "large-scale aggression of Moldova against the pmr"), festivities, writing and drawing competitions, military parades, weapons displays, and regular visits to military museums are organized¹⁷³. Local media play an important role in promoting these activities as well as military service. Participation in military camps and enrollment in military schools is presented as a privilege and an honor, with the aim of enhancing the prestige of military professions.

Special attention is paid to the military education of children without parental care^{174, 175, 176}. Employees of boarding schools organize sports competitions, military-themed film screenings and discussions about military professions for pre-school children^{177, 178, 179}. Children without parental care are also sent to military camps, where they are trained by representatives of paramilitary and security structures¹⁸⁰. In addition, they frequently visit military museums, as well as the headquarters of paramilitary and military structures in the region. These

169 "ministry of security of the pmr", "three-day training camp for young students", 2024, accessed January 10, 2025, <http://mgb.gospmr.org/news/trexdnevnye-sbory-s-yunymi-vospitannikami/>.

170 "ministry of security of the pmr", "through the pages of history with sponsored school students", 2024, accessed January 10, 2025, <http://mgb.gospmr.org/news/po-stranicam-istorii-s-uchenikami-podshefnoj-shkoly/>.

171 Novosti Pridnestrovia, 2024, "Message of the president of the pmr to the state authorities and administration (transcript)", 2024, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-01-22/poslanie-prezidenta-pmr-organam-gosvlasti-i-upravleniya>.

172 Novosti Pridnestrovia, "Tasks in the field of education and youth policy," 2024, accessed January 10, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-01-22/poslanie-prezidenta-pmr-zadachi-v-sfere-obrazovaniya-i-molodezhnoy>.

173 Novosti Pridnestrovia, "Patriotic Education", accessed January 10, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/hash/patrioticheskoe-vospitanie>.

174 Bender boarding school, "Sports competitions at the kindergarten of the Bender orphanage", 2023, accessed January 11, 2025, https://detdompmr.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=345:l-----r-----&catid=1:2012-07-02-16-22-53&Itemid=16.

175 Novosti Pridnestrovia, "Field trip for schoolchildren to military unit", 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-06-11/shkolnikam-proveli-ekskursiyu-v-voinskuyu-chast>.

176 Bender boarding school, "heirs of victory", 2023, accessed January 11, 2-25, https://www.detdompmr.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=355:l-r&catid=1:2012-07-02-16-22-53&Itemid=16.

177 Tiraspol boarding school, "Education of Patriotism", accessed January 11, 2025, <https://domrebenka.idknet.com/index159.html>.

178 "ministry of social protection of the pmr", "A month of military-patriotic education was held at the boarding school in Parcani", 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, https://minsoctrud.gospmr.org/news/v_gou_parkanskaya_srednyaya_obscheobrazovatel'naya_shkola_internat_proshel_mesyachnik_voenno-patrioticheskogo_vospitaniya_.html.

179 "ministry of social protection of the pmr", "competition "Come on, boys" at boarding school in Parcani for orphans and children left without parental care", 2019, accessed January 11, 2025, https://minsoctrud.gospmr.org/news/konkurs_a_nu-ka_parni_v_gou_popenkskaya_shkola-internat_dlya_detey-sirot_i_detey_ostavshihsya_bez_popecheniya_roditeley.html.

180 Novosti Pridnestrovia, "Scout training camp united young patriots", 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-10-21/uchebno-trenirovochnyy-slet-razvedchik-obedinil-yunyh-patriotov>.

children, being excluded from society and lacking opportunities for integration, emotional support and direct parental influence, become vulnerable to manipulation and forced recruitment into paramilitary structures in the region. In Belarus, the Russian Federation and the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, there is also a strong emphasis on military education of children without parental care¹⁸¹.

According to a report published by the so-called “ministry of education of the pmr”, more than 1,400 events with a “military-patriotic” theme took place in all districts of the Transnistrian region in 2023¹⁸². A similar number of activities was realized in 2024. Among the actions carried out in 2024 were:

- ▶ Involvement of about 400 children aged between 13 and 17 in the military-sports competition “young patriot of Transnistria”, organized by the “ministry of internal affairs”¹⁸³; The competition consists of a history test, making propaganda posters to popularize military service, throwing grenades, shooting with pneumatic weapons and dismantling an AK-47 Kalashnikov at speed. The competition has been organized since 1993 and involves at least 300 pupils a year;
- ▶ 200 students, aged between 10 and 18, participated in the “military-patriotic camp Mars”, where they were trained to assemble and disassemble weapons, learned the basics of military service, participated in shooting exercises and took part in meetings with participants of the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war¹⁸⁴. The camp has been organized since 2004 by the paramilitary organization “union of defenders of Transnistria”¹⁸⁵;
- ▶ over 100 students participated in the “patriot-2024” airgun shooting competition¹⁸⁶. The event aims to promote students’ preparation for military service¹⁸⁷;
- ▶ Almost 100 students, including boarding school pupils, took part in a military training camp, where they took part in drone training and learned how to use drones and weapons¹⁸⁸;
- ▶ Almost 300 pupils and students participated in four other “military-patriotic” camps, organized by the paramilitary structure “army of Black Sea Cossacks” in collaboration with the University “Taras Shevchenko” in Tiraspol^{189, 190};
- ▶ Hundreds of schoolchildren have participated in political indoctrination lessons, weapons

181 Radio Free Europe, “Belarus steps up ‘military-patriotic’ training for orphans and other vulnerable children”, 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-children-orphans-crackdown-military-camps/33094165.html>.

182 “government of the pmr”, “MPs reviewed a report on the situation of children in Transnistria for 2023 and approved measures to improve the situation”, 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://government.gospmr.org/deputaty-rassmotr-e-li-do-k-lad-o-polozhenii-detej-v-pridnestrove-za-2023-god-i-utverdili-mery-po-ul-uluchsheniyu-situaczii/>.

183 “government of the pmr”, “Young Patriot of Transnistria - 2024”, 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://government.gospmr.org/yunyj-patr-i>.

184 Paramilitary structure “Union of Defenders of Transnistria”, “Mars-Bars camp started”, 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://sz-pmr.org/news/startoval-detskij-lager-mars-bars/>.

185 “supreme soviet of the pmr”, “Mars military-patriotic camp in a new format”, 2020, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://vspmr.org/news/supreme-council/voenno-patrioticheski-y-lagerj-mars-v-novom-formate.html>.

186 “ministry of education of the pmr”, “Patriot-2024”, 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, https://www.minpros.gospmr.org/news/12_8_95_.

187 “ministry of education of the pmr”, “The republican air rifle shooting contest “Patriot-2023” was held in Tiraspol”, 2023, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://minpros.gospmr.org/news/12485>.

188 “ministry of defense of the pmr”, “Suvorov cadets are the winners of the spring training camp “Scout-2024”, 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://mopmr.org/?p=67840>.

189 paramilitary structure “army of Black Sea Cossacks”, “patriotic children’s day event”, 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://kazaki-pmr.ru/kultura/patrioticheskoe-meroprijatie-ko-dnju-zashhity-detej/>.

190 paramilitary structure “army of Black Sea Cossacks”, “Military camp and sports training of the army of Black Sea Cossacks”, 2024, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://kazaki-pmr.ru/v-strane/voenno-sportivnye-sbory-kazachat-chernomorskogo-kazachego-vojska-2024/>.

exhibitions, as well as pneumatic gun shooting tournaments^{191, 192, 193, 194}. Political indoctrination lessons are also given by leaders of Transnistrian structures, as part of the “peer-to-peer dialogue” program, taken over from the Russian Federation. One such lesson on the Second World War, given by Vadim Krasnoselski, was attended by 700 children and young people¹⁹⁵;

- » An important role in organizing these activities is played by paramilitary organizations, such as the “union of defenders of Transnistria”, the “heirs of victory” movement and the “army of Black Sea Cossacks”, formed by participants of the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war. The leader of the “victory heirs” movement, Igor Buga, is on the Ukrainian “Mirotvorets” list¹⁹⁶. The activities carried out by these paramilitary structures are sponsored by the leader of the region, Vadim Krasnoselski¹⁹⁷. The “heirs of victory” movement and the “army of Black Sea Cossacks” carry out more than 100 activities in Transnistrian schools every year under an agreement signed with the “ministry of education of the pmr”¹⁹⁸.
- ▶ Hundreds of primary and secondary school students took part in field trips to military museums in the region, organized by the “ministry of defense” and the “ministry of state security”^{199, 200}. One of the topics frequently discussed was the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war, described as “Moldova’s aggression against the Transnistrian people”;
 - ▶ Thousands of students of different ages took part in “military-patriotic” celebrations, movie screenings and competitions²⁰¹. These events are organized monthly in all districts of the Transnistrian region. Drawing or writing competitions address themes such as “serving the motherland is a special joy and honor” and “my country is Transnistria”^{202, 203, 204, 205};
 - ▶ 200 children from kindergartens in Bender participated in a march dedicated to the 80th

191 “supreme soviet of the pmr”, “children of war”, 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://www.vspmr.org/news/supreme-council/detyam-o-voynе.html>.

192 paramilitary structure “army of Black Sea Cossacks”, “youth education”, 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://kazaki-pmr.ru/molodezh/vospitanie-molode> <https://kazaki-pmr.ru/molodezh/vospitanie-molode/hi/>.

193 paramilitary structure “army of Black Sea Cossacks”, “a lesson in courage for students”, 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://kazaki-pmr.ru/molodezh/urok-muzhestva-dlja-studentov/>.

194 paramilitary structure “army of Black Sea Cossacks”, “shooting tournament”, 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://kazaki-pmr.ru/molodezh/tur-nir-po-strelbe-2/>.

195 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “Vadim Krasnoselskiy gave an open lecture on the Great Patriotic War”, 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-04-19/vadim-krasnoselskiy-provel-otkrytyy-urok-o-velikoy-otechestvennoy>.

196 Mirotvoreț Research Center, “Igor Semenovich Buga”, 2022, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://myrotvorets.center/criminal/buga-igor-semenovich/>.

197 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “military sports club ‘Bars’ received a presidential grant”, 2024, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-05-20/voenno-sportivnyy-klub-bars-poluchil-prezidentskiy-grant>.

198 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “victory heirs plan to resume the youth movement in the republic’s educational establishments”, 2018, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/18-12-24/nasledniki-pobedy-namereny-vozobnovit-molodezhnoe-dvizhenie-v?page=2>.

199 “ministry of security of the pmr”, “museum of history of the Black Sea Cossacks army: field trips for schoolchildren”, 2024, accessed January 12, 2025, <http://mgb.gospmr.org/news/muzej-istorii-chernomorskogo-kazachego-vojska-ekskursiya-dlya-shkolnikov/>.

200 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “Schoolchildren from the capital visited the museum of the armed forces of the pmr”, 2024, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-04-13/stolichnye-shkolniki-pobyvali-v-muzee-vooruzhennyh-sil-pmr>.

201 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “The melodies of the victorious spring resounded in Tiraspol”, 2024, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-04-05/pesni-pobednoy-vesny-zvuchali-v-tiraspole>.

202 “ministry of education of the pmr”, “10 winners of the contest “serving the motherland is a special joy and honor!”, 2024, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://minpros.gospmr.org/news/12955>.

203 “ministry of education of the pmr”, “the first qualifying round of the contest “my country - my Transnistria” was held”, 2024, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://minpros.gospmr.org/news/12872>.

204 paramilitary structure “army of Black Sea Cossacks”, “Scout” training camp, 2024, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://kazaki-pmr.ru/molodezh/uchebno-trenirovochnyj-slet-razvedchik/>.

205 paramilitary structure “black sea army of Cossacks”, “Young Cossacks at the Scout-2024 Gathering”, 2024, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://kazaki-pmr.ru/molodezh/kazachata-na-slete-razvedchik-2024/>.

anniversary of the liberation of the city from fascist rule. The preschoolers performed military training exercises, recited military-patriotic slogans and marched in military uniforms²⁰⁶;

- ▶ Over 4,300 students in grades 10 and 11 study the compulsory subject “Life Safety Basics/ Initial Military Training” for two hours a week^{207, 208}. According to the curriculum, students must acquire the following knowledge and skills: applying military techniques such as moving in combat and throwing grenades, handling weapons, executing various types of commands, using protective equipment and providing first aid in military emergencies. The technical components of weapons, the tasks of a soldier in combat and the characteristics of armored vehicles are also studied. Topics such as the structure of the paramilitary system in the region, the role of different security structures, the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war, the benefits offered to the military and the history of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation are also covered²⁰⁹.

An important role in the militarization of the Transnistrian region is played by the military schools, which have benefited from several investments after Vadim Krasnoselski became the region’s leader²¹⁰. Two military boarding schools operate in the region, which train children from the age of 10: “Grigory Potemkin-Tavricesky Republican Cadet Corps” and “Suvorov” military school. The first paramilitary structure is subordinated to the “ministry of internal affairs” and the second to the “ministry of defense”. The “Grigori Potemkin-Tavricesky Republican Cadet Corps” was established in 2002 and by 2024 had trained over 500 minors²¹¹. Since 2020, the cadet school began to recruit girls. As of January 1, 2024, 181 cadets were enrolled in this paramilitary structure, including 126 boys and 55 girls²¹². More than a third of these are children without parental care, children from large or disadvantaged families²¹³.

In 2017, at the initiative of Vadim Krasnoselski, the “Suvorov” military school was established, based on the model of military schools in the Russian Federation. In 2024, almost 300 students, aged between 10 and 18, were enrolled in this paramilitary structure, including children from the Russian Federation and Gagauzia²¹⁴. In order to recruit more pupils, visits and meetings are organized annually with children from other schools and their parents,

206 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “young Cossacks at scout-2024”, 2024, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-08-22/v-benderah-proshyo-l-marsh-pravnukov-salyut-pradedu>.

207 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “Statistics: minister of education reported to the president how many pupils started the school year”, 2024, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-09-09/statistika-nachala-uchebnogo-goda-glava-minprosa-rasskazala>.

208 “ministry of education of the pmr”, “decree No. 693 of 2022 on the Approval of the Curriculum of Educational Institutions Implementing the Basic Educational Program of General Secondary Education”, 2022, accessed January 12, 2025, <http://www.minjust.gospmr.org/oo/Publication.nsf/805c7c76d1c2ddb8c2258213005be80f/bab75379226159edc22588ae004b57ba!OpenDocument>.

209 “ministry of education of the pmr”, “decree No. 44 of 19.01.2023 on the approval of the course program “basic military training”, 2023, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://minpros.gospmr.org/files/NormAkt/Ministr/> https://minpros.gospmr.org/files/NormAkt/Ministr_2021/2023_01_19_02-06_44.pdf.

210 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “New building of military institute opened in Tiraspol”, 2024, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-12-25/novoe-zda-n-ie-voennogo-instituta-otkryli-v-tiraspole>.

211 “ministry of internal affairs of the pmr”, “republican cadet corps received guests”, 2024, accessed January 12, 2025, https://www.mvdpmr.org/novosti/obr-uchr/nov-rkk/42_7_31-rkk-prinyali-gostej.html.

212 “government of the pmr”, “MPs reviewed a report on the situation of children in Transnistria for 2023 and approved measures to improve the situation”, 2024, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://government.gospmr.org/deputaty-rass-m-otrel-i-doklad-o-polozhenii-detej-v-pridnestrove-za-2023-god-i-utverdili-mery-po-ul-uluchsheniyu-situaczii/>.

213 “ministry of internal affairs of the pmr”, “History of the republican cadet corps”, accessed January 13, 2025, <https://mvdpmr.org/podrazdeleniya-mvd/gou-r-kk/o-korpuse/25577-istoriya-rkk.html>.

214 “president of the pmr”, “president congratulated the military school “Suvorov” on its fifth jubilee and handed out diplomas”, 2024, accessed January 13, 2025, <https://president.gospmr.org/press-sluzhba/novosti/prezident-pozdravil-tsvu-s-pyatim-yubileynim-ypuskom-i-vruchil-attestati-suvorovtsam-medalistam.html>.

especially from disadvantaged families²¹⁵. Children left without parental care, children from disadvantaged families and children of paramilitary personnel are given priority for enrolment²¹⁶. After graduating from schools, most students enroll in the “military institute of the ministry of defense”, “law institute of the ministry of internal affairs” or in paramilitary and security structures²¹⁷. Since 2008 to date, more than 8.000 young people have graduated from the “military institute” in Tiraspol²¹⁸.

Combating “extremism” and promoting traditional family values

In addition to militarism, “patriotic education” in the Transnistrian region has two other components: combating “extremism” and promoting traditional family values. Every year, the “ministry of security” and the “ministry of internal affairs” organize writing and drawing competitions, as well as meetings with schoolchildren from different districts of the region to discuss extremism and terrorism. According to a decree signed by the “ministry of education of the pmr”, lessons for the prevention of extremist manifestations and terrorism are conducted quarterly in schools of the region²¹⁹. During these lessons, pupils are taught that the Transnistrian region is a target of Western and Moldovan secret services, which aim to recruit young people as spies to obtain information about local paramilitary structures and Russian military units, as well as to destroy the so-called “pmr”²²⁰. Another narrative promoted in these lessons is that any action that challenges the legality and legitimacy of the so-called “pmr” constitutes an attack on the Russian Federation. Pupils are also presented with the histories of the inhabitants of the Transnistrian region who are deprived of their liberty for so-called “acts of extremism” and “treason against the motherland”. The “patriotic education” of minors with the aim of “combating extremism and terrorism” is carried out also among primary school pupils, children left without parental care, as well as minors in illegal detention centers^{221, 222}.

The so-called “fight against extremism” is, in fact, a tool of repression used by Transnistrian structures to suppress freedom of expression and any opposition to the existing status quo²²³. On the basis of the so-called “anti-extremism legislation”, Transnistrian structures have opened “criminal cases” against at least 16 persons from 2015 to date, some of whom were illegally detained in inhuman conditions²²⁴. They were accused of “extremist” messages

215 “paramilitary structure Suvorov military school”, “open day at the Suvorov military school”, 2024, accessed January 13, 2025, <https://www.tsvu.idknet.com/index.php/2834-v-suvorovskom-uchilishche-proshel-den-otkrytykh-dverej69>.

216 “Paramilitary structure Suvorov military school Suvorov”, “Admission rules”, accessed January 13, 2025, https://www.tsvu.idknet.com/index.php/po_s_tupayushchim/2386-pravila-priema.

217 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “Suvorov military school in Tiraspol is 5 years old”, 2022, accessed January 13, 2025, https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/22-02-02/ti_r_aspolskomu-suvorovskomu-voennomu-uchilishchu-5-let.

218 “president of the pmr”, “commander-in-chief attended the commissioning ceremony of the new military institute building”, 2024, accessed January 13, 2025, https://presi_d_ent.gospmr.org/press-sluzhba/novosti/glavnokomanduyuschiy-prinyal-uchastie-v-tseremonii-sdachi-v-ekspluatatsiyu-novogo-zdaniya-voennogo-instituta.html.

219 “ministry of education of the pmr”, “decree No. 1050 of 06.11.2020 on the implementation of the plan of activities and events within the framework of the strategy to combat extremism for 2020-2026”, 2020, accessed January 13, 2025, https://minpros.gospmr.org/files/Molodej_/NPB-V/1050061120.pdf.

220 “Transnistrian e-school platform”, “lesson: extremism and terrorism in the pmr in 2024,” 2024, accessed January 14, 2025, https://edu.gospmr.org/course/view.php?id=233_9 https://edu.gospmr.org/course/view.php?id=233_5§ion=2.

221 “ministry of security of the pmr”, “the main problem of the 21st century was discussed with schoolchildren”, 2024, accessed January 14, 2025, <http://mgb.gospmr.org/news/o-glavnoj-probleme-21-veka-govorili-so-shkolnikami/>.

222 Bender boarding school, “Educational activity in the boarding school “Together against terrorism and extremism”, 2024, accessed January 14, 2025, https://detdopmr.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=379:-l-r&catid=1:2012-07-02-16-16-22-53&Itemid=16.

223 Promo-LEX, “Opinion Paper. Radiography of the Last 17 Years of “Countering Extremism” in the Transnistrian Region of the Republic of Moldova”, 2024, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://promolex.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Radiografia-ultimilor-17-ani-de-%E2%80%9Ecombatere-a-extremismului%E2%80%9D-%C3%AEn-regiunea-transnistrean%C4%83-a-Republicii-Moldova.pdf>.

224 Security Zone, “The Reserve of Silence: Chronicles of Repression Under the Pretext of Combating Extremism,” 2024, accessed January 15, 2025, https://zonadesecuritate.md/ru/reserve-of-silence-chronicles-of-repression-under-the-pretext-of-combating-extremism/?fbclid=IwZxh0bgNhZWOCMTAAAR36d8whqSq82nSOCO2fp8QWeKB-lFsHUJq9N0uU0n0EI75672ZpUNDVB6A_aem_sBNWlseFt-XbHcdsMYtlxg.

and actions, which in reality were criticisms of the region's leaders, expressed either on social media, in private conversations or in actions exposing abuses committed by them. The ECtHR judgments in cases involving complainants from the Transnistrian region who were deprived of their liberty for "inciting extremism" have found violations of the right not to be subjected to torture (Article 3), the right to liberty and security (Article 5(1)), the right to fair trial (Article 6(1)), and the right to an effective remedy (Article 13). The most recent judgment of the ECtHR in a case of unlawful detention on charges of "extremism" was delivered on February 20, 2024, in *Lypovchenko and Halabudenco v. Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation*²²⁵.

The promotion of traditional family values under the guise of "patriotic education" has become another priority direction for Transnistrian structures in recent years, as the Russian Federation has stepped up its attacks on liberal and progressive values, including in the LGBTQI+ area. The leader of the Transnistrian region, Vadim Krasnoselski, has designated 2024 as the "Year of Family Values", after a similar decision was adopted in the Russian Federation²²⁶. The program of activities was dedicated in particular to kindergartens and schools and included conferences, festive events, writing and drawing competitions, as well as reports in local media²²⁷. Moreover, the so-called "government of the pmr", led by Aleksandr Rosenberg, proposed to amend six "laws", including the "contravention code of the pmr", to introduce sanctions against "LGBT propaganda" as well as against "denial or disrespect" of traditional family values²²⁸.

The increased attention that the Transnistrian structures pay to the "traditional family values" agenda is justified by invoking alleged threats to the moral and psychological security of the Transnistrian society, as well as by the need to protect the young generation from "destructive external influences"²²⁹. In practice, the promotion of this conservative agenda is aimed at presenting marriage and the creation of large families as a patriotic obligation and an essential condition for building a "strong state"^{230, 231}.

Following the example of the Russian Federation²³², in 2015, Transnistrian structures included the component of traditional values in the school curriculum through subjects such as "Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture", "Moral Fundamentals of Family Life" and "Fundamentals of Spiritual and Moral Culture of the Transnistrian People"²³³. In 2024, almost 600 students studied the subject "Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture"²³⁴. These subjects also include topics such as "defense of the homeland", "Transnistria is our homeland" and "love and respect for the homeland".

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- 225 ECtHR, *Case of Lypovchenko and Halabudenco v. Republic of Moldova and Russia*, 2024, accessed January 15, 2025, [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{"itemid":\["001-231078"\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{).
- 226 Novosti Pridnestrovia, "In Transnistria, 2024 was declared the Year of Family Values", 2023, accessed January 15, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/23-11-28/v-pridnestro-ve-2024-y-obyavlen-godom-semeinyh-cennostey>.
- 227 "government of the pmr", "decree No. 26r of January 22, 2024 on the approval of the republican plan of activities for the implementation of the year of family values in 2024", 2024, accessed January 16, 2025, <https://government.gospmr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/rasp.-%E2%84%96-26r-ot-22.01.2024g.pdf>.
- 228 "government of the pmr", "decree no. 25r of January 22, 2024", 2024, accessed January 16, 2025, https://minpros.gospmr.org/files/Report/22.01.24_25p.pdf.
- 229 "government of the pmr", "Preserving traditional family values is a state priority", 2024, accessed January 16, 2025, <https://government.gospmr.org/sohranenie-tradiczionnyh-semejnyh-czennostej-prioritet-gosudarstva/>.
- 230 "Taras Shevchenko" University of Tiraspol, "A healthy family is the foundation of Transnistrian society", 2024, accessed January 16, 2025, <http://spsu.ru/news/6742-igu>.
- 231 Novosti Pridnestrovia, "An educational conference dedicated to family values was held in Tiraspol", 2024, accessed January 16, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-12-10/v-tiraspole-proshla-prosvetitelskaya-konferenciya>.
- 232 Novaya Gazeta Europe, "Putin's children. How the state is trying to instill its version of family values in Russian schoolchildren", 2024, accessed January 16, 2025, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2024/09/27/putins-children-en>.
- 233 "Transnistrian e-school platform", "courses", accessed January 16, 2025, <https://edu.gospmr.org/course/index.php?categoryId=2>.
- 234 Novosti Pridnestrovia, "ministry of education discussed cooperation with Tiraspol-Dubăsari Eparchy", 2024, accessed January 16, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-09-17/v-minprose-obsudili-sotrudnichestvo-s-tiraspolско-dubossarskoy>.

The Eparchy of Tiraspol and Dubăsari plays an important role in promoting traditional family values and “military-patriotic education” in schools and kindergartens in the region²³⁵. Representatives of the diocese frequently cooperate with paramilitary organizations and structures, such as the “youth army”, the “ministry of defense”, the “Tiraspol military institute”, the “Suvorov military school”, the “union of defenders of Transnistria”, the “heirs of victory” movement and the “army of Black Sea Cossacks”^{236, 237}. Events are organized to promote the idea that a marriage is an act of patriotism and a pledge of loyalty to the “state”. In 2024, during the meetings with Vadim Krasnoselski and various Transnistrian structures, the representatives of the diocese called for strengthening cooperation with educational institutions of all levels. They also proposed to familiarize pre-school children with the basics of Orthodoxy and the elements of “statehood” of the so-called “pmr”, in order to instill in them respect for the “state”²³⁸.

235 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “Diocese draws up a plan of events for the Year of Family Values”, 2024, accessed January 16, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-01-17/v-eparhii-razrabatyvayut-plan-meropriyatiy-k-godu-semeynyh>.

236 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “The agreement between the ministry of defense and the Tiraspol-Dubăsari Eparchy is implemented in practice”, 2018, accessed January 16, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/18-01-16/soglashenie-minoborony-i-tiraspolsko-dubossarskoy-eparhii?page=1>.

237 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “The ministry of defense and the Tiraspol-Dubăsari Eparchy held a round table”, 2024, accessed January 16, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/> https://novostipmr.com/r_u/news/24-02-29/ministerstvo-oborony-i-tiraspolsko-dubossarskaya-eparhiya-proveli.

238 Novosti Pridnestrovia, “On the sublime and earthly. president met with clergy”, 2024, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/24-09-10/o-v-ozvyshennom-i-zemnom-president-pmr-vstretilsya-s-duhovenstvom>.

CONCLUSIONS

I. Right to liberty and security

The Transnistrian region is marked by an oppressive environment, with illegal detentions and lack of access to fair trial. *The Freedom in the World 2024* report confirms the serious violations of fundamental rights and the vulnerability of the inhabitants to the abusive actions of Transnistrian structures.

The absence of public data on the organization and functioning of the “penitentiaries” (capacity, living conditions, independent monitoring mechanisms) and the constant refusal of Transnistrian structures to respond to requests for information reinforce suspicions of abuses.

The analysis of available data reveals a high incarceration rate on the left bank of the Nistru River (around 392 prisoners/100,000 inhabitants), 1.67 times higher than on the right bank of the Nistru River and more than three times higher than the European average.

“Pre-trial detention” is applied automatically, with 21.4% of all detainees (compared to 16.93% on the right bank), reflecting a framework lacking procedural safeguards. In addition, “administrative detention” increased by 22.55% between 2022 and 2023, increasing overcrowding and the risk of abuse.

BPR has an essential mandate to monitor the human rights situation in the region, but limited institutional capacity and lack of functional data collection/analysis mechanisms undermine efforts to document and report violations.

The very low number of victims who have addressed the BPR (only 18 in 2024) indicates mistrust and the absence of clear support tools (call-center, hotline). Although the Tiraspol regime refuses to cooperate, alternative solutions are needed to investigate violations, including through indirect sources (victims, witnesses, local NGOs). The Russian Federation’s refusal to recognize effective control over the Transnistrian regime and the non-cooperation of local structures perpetuate a legal vacuum. Impunity manifests itself in a total lack of transparency, lack of censorship of abuses and restrictions on access to information or international monitoring.

The reactive approach of the authorities in Chisinau and the lack of a robust institutional strategy make it difficult to protect fundamental rights on the left bank of the Nistru River.

II. The right not to be subjected to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment

The mistreatment of detainees in “militia” or “penitentiary” facilities continues to be reported in 2024, without any real implementation of the recommendations of UN experts (Thomas Hammarberg).

Victims assisted by Promo-LEX show evidence of inhuman treatment, including torture and lack of medical care. The “Transnistrian standard” of 2m² per detainee (as opposed to the 4m² recommended by the CPT) leads to overcrowding, encouraging the spread of disease and violence. Lack of funding to improve conditions and refusal to increase the minimum space standard (despite official acknowledgment of the problem) exacerbates violations.

There is a major discrepancy between the amounts allocated for medical services and the actual number of detainees: only 11.74 USD per detainee per year, compared to 148 USD on the right bank of the Nistru River.

Investments 23 times higher in administrative buildings (about 392.434 USD) than in prison living spaces (17.317 USD) confirm the systematic neglect of detention conditions.

The local “prosecutor’s office” recognizes the absence of psychiatrists, qualified staff and the impossibility of enforced treatment, yet it has no plan for addressing these deficiencies.

There is a lack of transparency on the number and conditions of “TDI”, some of which are located in the basements of the “militia”. Pre-trial detention can be kept 10 days/month in the same place without independent supervision.

Restrictions on filing complaints (automatic monitoring and censorship by the administration) make reporting abuses almost impossible. Official claims of “no complaints” hide a climate of fear and total censorship.

In the context of lack of space and minimal infrastructure, the so-called “laws” allow, in “exceptional cases”, minors to be detained together with adults, contrary to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Mandela Rules.

The internal disciplinary rules even provide for the isolation of minors for up to 5 days, which contravenes international child protection standards.

In order to change the situation, immediate and coordinated measures are needed at national and international level, including: diplomatic pressure for free access to information and independent monitoring, strengthening Moldova’s institutional capacities and creating a clear framework of protection for victims. This is the only way to guarantee respect for fundamental rights and put an end to the climate of fear and impunity on the left bank of the Nistru River.

III. Freedom of movement

The situation of freedom of movement to and from the Transnistrian region remained complicated and tense throughout 2024, marking a series of violations and abuses by Transnistrian structures. Despite the many requests of the constitutional authorities and international organizations, Moldovan citizens, farmers from the Dubăsari district, journalists, teachers, students and representatives of diplomatic missions continue to suffer the consequences of a vicious climate of impunity and a vast network of illegal barriers and checkpoints.

Under the pretext of the so-called “terrorist alert code”, Tiraspol has reinforced and extended the barriers put in place since the pandemic, creating significant difficulties in the movement of people and means of transportation. This network of checkpoints serves as a tool for the collection of illegal fees and intimidation of individuals, creating a constant risk of arbitrary detentions.

The entry into force of the new Customs Code of the Republic of Moldova in 2024 has triggered further abusive actions by Tiraspol, which has introduced illegal customs-like duties and limited farmers’ access to land and warehouses. As a result, farmers have suffered financial losses and restrictions on their activities, often being forced to pay substantial sums when crossing the administrative line. In addition to the compensation measures offered by the authorities in Chisinau, other forms of protection and support are needed to help farmers

who are unable to meet their financial obligations due to abuses committed by Transnistrian structures.

In addition to the illegal taxes imposed on farmers, Tiraspol continues to enforce a “road tax” on vehicles exceeding 18 tons and has introduced an additional “vignette tax” for residents of Doroțcaia village. These tariff barriers further escalate the financial burden on landowners and economic operators.

The cases of detention and interrogation of journalists, writers and civil society representatives in 2024 reflect the consolidation of the information monopoly and deepening isolationism. The practice of declaring journalists, writers and civic activists as “undesirables” has become a means of persecution, preventing access to the region and severely limiting freedom of expression and information.

The fragmented efforts and the often reactive approach of the constitutional authorities underline the need for robust inter-institutional cooperation and a clear strategy for the Security Zone and the Transnistrian region. The lack of an institution with sufficient competencies and resources to coordinate all aspects related to human rights and the regime imposed by Tiraspol perpetuates the vulnerability of citizens on the left bank of the Nistru River.

The abuses committed against farmers, teachers, pupils, journalists, and residents of the Security Zone demonstrate that the right to freedom of movement remains a fundamental right that is systematically violated. At the same time, economic pressures, restricted access to public services and justice, as well as the abusive control of movement, concretely illustrate the risks faced by individuals interacting with the Transnistrian region.

In conclusion, the serious situation of freedom of movement is maintained by chronic impunity, manifested by the lack of decisive and coordinated interventions by the constitutional authorities and the perpetuation of Tiraspol’s aggressive actions. Any genuine reintegration strategy must urgently address the restrictions imposed, ensure a coherent mechanism for the protection of fundamental rights and take immediate action against the illegal practices affecting the daily lives of thousands of citizens in the Transnistrian region and around the Security Zone.

IV. Right to education in Romanian-language schools in the Transnistrian region

The right to education for pupils and teachers in the eight Romanian-language schools in the Transnistrian region continues to be subject to systematic restrictions and multiple pressures, resulting in a climate of uncertainty and vulnerability for the educational community. Despite consolidation efforts and a slight increase in pupil numbers, the infrastructure, financing and security of the educational process remain marked by major obstacles.

The constant upward trend in the number of pupils - including monolinguals - reconfirms the fact that education in Romanian is becoming an attractive alternative for the region’s population, which wants internationally recognized diplomas and access to universities in Moldova or the EU. This development requires additional investment in infrastructure, school transport and teachers, which current budgets cannot cover.

The majority of schools operate in unsuitable or cramped premises without the necessary space for laboratories, sports halls or artistic activities. Capital repairs and modernizations are either postponed or partially completed due to lack of funds. In addition, the validity

of leases (expiring in 2027) and discriminatory utility tariffs imposed by Tiraspol add to the uncertainty and vulnerability of these institutions.

Some schools have difficulties in recruiting teachers in key subjects (mathematics, physics, foreign languages) and national legislation does not provide special allowances or compensation for young specialists who choose to teach in the Transnistrian region. In the absence of competitive salary packages and adequate conditions, teachers prefer to move to other, more accessible and safer locations.

The number of pupils who have to be transported dozens of kilometers every day has increased, and minibuses and buses are either rented at high prices or are in an advanced state of wear and tear. The lack of modern means of transport creates organizational and financial difficulties, increasing the strain on schools and parents.

Tiraspol resorts to harassment of families who choose Romanian-language schools, abusive controls, threats and denigration in the local media. At the same time, it continues to try to collect pupils' personal data in order to forcibly recruit them into paramilitary structures, which creates multiple risks and inconveniences, such as relocation to the right bank.

The increase in the number of Russian-speaking pupils in Chisinau's subordinate schools reveals the need for additional measures (intensive courses, adapted teaching materials) so that these children can reach the necessary level of language proficiency. In the absence of a national program dedicated to them, teachers have to translate lessons simultaneously and make additional individual efforts.

Illegal checkpoints and the policy of declaring writers as "undesirable persons" obstruct cultural events, book exchanges, visits by writers and journalists. Although there are specific initiatives (cultural vouchers, partnerships with museums and cultural institutions), they are not sufficiently promoted and do not cover all pupils in these schools.

The lack of a legal mechanism for children adopted through "decisions" of local "judges", the lack of official recognition of adoption papers and the increased emphasis on "military-patriotic education" in schools in the region illustrate the serious vulnerabilities faced by minors. The intense militarization and anti-Western rhetoric, combined with the lack of any real cooperation from Tiraspol, threaten not only the quality of education but also the security of children.

In conclusion, the right to education in the Transnistrian region for students who choose to study in Romanian is strongly distorted by political interference, lack of infrastructure and constant pressure from Transnistrian structures. The eight schools subordinated to the MER are the only alternative to an education system dominated by militarist ideology and political indoctrination. It is imperative that the national authorities step up their efforts to support these institutions, invest in strengthening them and draw up programs to ensure the widest possible access to education in Romanian, in safe and non-discriminatory conditions. At the same time, a clear legal and institutional framework, complemented by effective cooperation with international partners, is essential for protecting children's fundamental rights and for laying the foundations for their possible real reintegration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Area I: Institutional consolidation and human rights monitoring

Recommendation 1

Targeted subjects: Bureau for Reintegration Policies, Government of the Republic of Moldova

Conduct an institutional needs assessment report of the BPR, focusing on identifying gaps in resources, structures and processes: a. the report should include consultations with national and international experts and civil society; b. based on the findings, strengthen the institutional capacities of the BPR through restructuring or the creation of a new institutional entity with a clear mandate oriented towards monitoring, documenting and addressing human rights violations in the left bank of the Nistru River and Bender municipality.

Recommendation 2

Targeted subjects: Bureau for Reintegration Policies, Government of the Republic of Moldova

Establishment of a department within the BPR dedicated to the collection and analysis of data on human rights violations in the left bank of the Nistru River and Bender municipality. Develop a standardized protocol for monitoring, documenting and reporting violations. Annual publication of at least two analytical reports summarizing trends and documented violations.

Recommendation 3

Targeted subjects: Bureau for Reintegration Policies, Government of the Republic of Moldova

Development of a functional website of the BPR, accessible in Romanian and Russian, which should include: information about human rights, services available for victims and relevant contact details; a tool for rapid reporting of violations, such as a secure online form, an integrated call-center or live chat, for immediate assistance or to facilitate direct and confidential communication with victims from the left bank of the Nistru River and Bender municipality.

Area II: Protection and support to victims

Recommendation 4

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova (government mechanism)

Establish a dedicated government mechanism to support victims released from illegal detention. Provide legal, psychological and social assistance to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims into society.

Recommendation 5

Targeted subjects: Bureau for Reintegration Policies, Government of the Republic of Moldova

Develop a formal and accessible referral system for victims to available support services: elaborate and publish a formal referral protocol, including clear steps for directing victims to public institutions, civil society organizations or international entities offering specific support. Create a dedicated section on the BPR website where victims can find detailed information on available support, including guidelines, contact details and accessible resources. Conduct information campaigns to ensure that victims in the Transnistrian region are aware of the mechanism and can benefit from it.

Area III: International monitoring mechanisms and conditionality

Recommendation 6

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bureau for Reintegration Policies

Develop concrete demarches to international organizations for the establishment, under the aegis of the UN or OSCE, of an independent and permanent international mechanism to monitor illegal places of detention in the Transnistrian region, with a clear mandate to regularly collect, analyze and publish information on detention conditions and violations of fundamental rights.

Recommendation 7

Target subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova, relevant institutions involved in the negotiations

Conditioning the Transnistrian region's access to international funding, technical support on any dialogue platform, or political negotiations with the Tiraspol regime on the implementation of the following concrete measures for the protection of detainees: admission of an international monitoring mechanism for detention facilities, under the aegis of relevant international organizations, to constantly assess the respect for fundamental rights; elimination of censorship and control over detainees' correspondence, ensuring confidential access to families, lawyers, and human rights organizations; publication and annual updating of comprehensive statistical data on detention facilities, including information on capacity, detainee distribution, detention conditions, and data on mortality and morbidity.

Area IV: Support for farmers in Dubăsari district and economic agents in the Security Zone

Recommendation 8

Targeted subjects: Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, Government of the Republic of Moldova

Revise and supplement Law No. 39 of 02.03.2006 and other related normative acts in order to ensure access to additional financial support measures for farmers in the Dubăsari district who own agricultural land beyond the Râbnița-Tiraspol road. These should include credit rescheduling, tax concessions and protection against penalties, adapted to the difficulties caused by Transnistrian structures.

Recommendation 9

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova (Bureau for Reintegration Policies), “1+1” negotiators

Insist, on all dialog platforms, on the complete elimination of illegal customs duties imposed on farmers in the Dubăsari district by Transnistrian structures. The BPR to prioritize this issue in the “1+1” negotiating format, in sectoral working group meetings and in any other relevant dialogue formats.

Recommendation 10

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bureau for Reintegration Policies

Notify the OSCE, the European Union and other international partners about the abusive practice of Transnistrian structures, calling for diplomatic pressure to eliminate illegal taxes and end restrictions on farmers.

Area V: Inter-institutional coordination and transparency

Recommendation 11

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova

To clearly define the responsibilities of the institutions involved in managing the problems of farmers in the Dubăsari district and other economic agents in the Security Zone and Transnistrian region, by defining the exact tasks of each authority.

Recommendation 12

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova

Establishment of a permanent governmental platform for inter-institutional coordination, under the aegis of the Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration or the Prime Minister, which would regularly bring together representatives of central and local institutions, in order to ensure a coordinated and efficient approach to sectoral policies and to address economic and social problems in the Security Zone and the Transnistrian region.

Recommendation 13

Subjects targeted: Government of the Republic of Moldova (all relevant institutions), Bureau for Reintegration Policies

Publication on official web platforms of relevant guides, instructions and information for residents of the Transnistrian region, as well as for people affected by the repressive climate in the region, detailing the types of support available, the responsible institutions and mechanisms for reporting at-risk situations or human rights violations.

Recommendation 14

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova (Bureau for Reintegration Policies), sectoral working groups

Continue to ensure the participation of farmers from the Dubăsari district in working group meetings, where the impediments they face will be addressed. This practice will support transparency and prevent excessive politicization of issues by Transnistrian structures.

Recommendation 15

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova, Bureau for Reintegration Policies, 1+1 negotiators and other platforms

The constant call, on all platforms of dialogue, for the elimination of the illegal practice of declaring people as “undesirables” and the adoption of concrete measures to guarantee their freedom of movement.

Domain VI: Education and protection of language rights

Recommendation 16

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova (Ministry of Education and Research), Parliament of the Republic of Moldova (for budget)

Allocation of additional financial resources for the expansion and modernization of Romanian-language schools in the Transnistrian region, so that they can absorb the constant increase in the number of pupils, including native Russian-speaking pupils, who opt for studies in these schools.

Recommendation 17

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova (Ministry of Education and Research), local authorities

Identify and implement solutions to expand the capacity of Romanian-language schools, including the establishment of new educational spaces and the provision of modern and spacious transportation for pupils from remote locations.

Recommendation 18

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova (Ministry of Education and Research), local authorities

To identify potential solutions for opening Romanian-language kindergartens for children in the districts of Bender, Tiraspol, Slobozia, Dnestrovsc and Grigoriopol.

Recommendation 19

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova (Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Research)

To analyze the possibility of granting cultural vouchers to pupils from Romanian-language schools in the Transnistrian region, in order to facilitate their access to cultural products and services in Romanian.

Recommendation 20

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova (Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Research), local authorities

Carry out a campaign to promote the “Cultural Voucher” program for young people from the Transnistrian region in order to attract as many beneficiaries as possible.

Recommendation 21

Targeted subjects: Moldovan Government (Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Research), local authorities

Creating partnerships between cultural institutions and the eight Romanian-language schools to facilitate constant access for pupils to a greater number of cultural events in Romanian.

Recommendation 22

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova (Ministry of Education and Research), local authorities

Development and implementation of an additional Romanian language learning program for the children and young people from the Transnistrian region, providing extra-curricular courses and adapted educational activities.

Recommendation 23

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova (Ministry of Education and Research), Bureau for Reintegration Policies, local authorities

Development and implementation of an information program for parents and students in the Transnistrian region on the risks of forced recruitment into paramilitary structures and how to prevent military conscription. This program should include awareness campaigns, educational sessions and accessible information materials.

Recommendation 24

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova (Ministry of Education and Research), local authorities

Collect and analyze data on the number of pupils holding the so-called “Transnistrian citizenship” in order to identify vulnerable groups and develop tailored protection measures. This monitoring should be carried out in cooperation with local authorities and educational institutions.

Recommendation 25

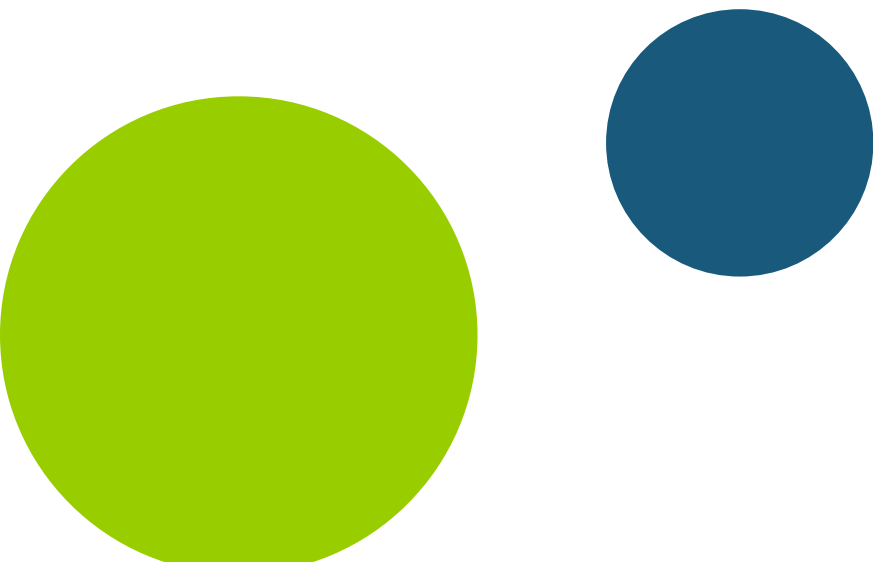
Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova (Ministry of Education and Research), Bureau for Reintegration Policies

Analysis of the phenomenon of political indoctrination and militarization of education in the Transnistrian region and identification of solutions to prevent and combat it, followed by the development and implementation of effective policies and measures, including at pre-school level.

Recommendation 26

Targeted subjects: Government of the Republic of Moldova (Ministry of Education and Research), Bureau for Reintegration Policies, Education Working Groups

Ensuring the participation of principals of Romanian-language schools in the meetings of the working group on education, given the importance of transparency and their involvement in the decision-making processes that directly concern them.



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