



White paper on the educational reintegration of the Transnistrian region


Reflections and Directions for Action

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Acronyms

ANCE	National Agency for Curriculum and Assessment
BPR	Bureau for reintegration policies
SEN	Special Educational Needs
MEC	Ministry of Education and Research
MC	Ministry of Culture
UN	United Nations
MRT	the so-called “Moldovan Republic of Transnistria”, a designation used for the territory under Russian occupation since 1992
USD	US dollar



Introduction

Education is essential for building and strengthening a resilient, inclusive, innovative society rooted in democratic values. Its role becomes all the more strategic in the transition to democracy of countries or regions that have been under the control of authoritarian regimes for long periods. In the context of the Transnistrian region, the reintegration and reform of the education system will constitute one of the fundamental pillars of the processes of de-occupation and democratisation. This process will not be limited to taking administrative control of educational institutions and modernising educational infrastructure, but will entail a profound and long-term transformation, aimed at reintegrating children, young people and the population as a whole into the country's linguistic, civic, informational and cultural sphere.

The complexity of this process is exacerbated by the current state of the educational system in the region. Education is affected by a combination of chronic problems: the ideologisation, politicisation, Russification and militarisation of education; systemic underfunding; poor infrastructure; high levels of functional illiteracy; a shortage of qualified teachers; and a curriculum that is outdated and misaligned with labour market needs. These shortcomings are particularly acute in small rural schools serving disadvantaged communities. Particular attention will need to be paid to children in vulnerable situations, including those with special educational needs (SEN), orphans or children deprived of parental care, children enrolled in paramilitary structures, and those placed in closed-type institutions. The situation of these groups highlights the need for a multidisciplinary approach in the process of planning and coordinating educational reintegration.

In the event of the de-occupation of the Transnistrian region, the state will need to carry out a rigorous assessment of the state of the education system. To ensure the continuity of the administration and operation of schools, it may be necessary to establish temporary transitional arrangements. As a priority, the transformation of education will need to be based on processes of democratisation, de-ideologisation and demilitarisation, support for the learning of the Romanian language, the promotion of national culture and the cognitive de-occupation of the population. The reshaping of values, perceptions and attitudes formed under occupation will be a determining factor for the success of reintegration. In this document, cognitive de-occupation is used in the sense defined by the “Strategy for the Cognitive De-occupation of Crimea”, approved by the Mission of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea¹. The concept represents a set of strategic, operational and tactical measures, planned and implemented by various actors, with the aim of preparing, guiding and evaluating long-term transformation processes at the political, societal and psychological levels. These processes aim to reshape the consciousness, social values, worldview and civic behaviour of the population, thereby contributing to the full restoration of constitutional order.

The legacy of over three decades of Russian occupation will have long-term effects, and addressing these realities requires a strategic vision, grounded in a coherent framework of sectoral reintegration policies. The need for thorough preparation for this endeavour is underscored both by the state's lack of experience in managing complex processes of de-occupation and reintegration of territories that have been under Russian occupation for a long time, and by the absence of a dedicated strategy for the reintegration of education. Even in the absence of effective control over the region, the authorities can advance the reintegration process by strengthening capacities for planning and developing sectoral

policies, establishing platforms for inter-institutional dialogue, and preparing the legal framework necessary to manage a potential transition process. Furthermore, the authorities can initiate strategic interventions on the right bank of the Nistru, such as preparing the society for reintegration, developing a distinct policy on the memory of the Moldovan-Russian war and the post-1992 Russian occupation, facilitating access to cultural products and services in the Romanian language, supporting the learning of Romanian among children in the occupied territory, and supporting the socio-cultural integration of students from the region.

This White Paper constitutes an initial contribution to opening an honest and wide-ranging debate on the state's level of preparedness for the reintegration of the Transnistrian region in the educational sphere. The document has been drawn up in a context favourable to advancing the reintegration agenda and is important for consolidating the Republic of Moldova's European path.

The analysis is based on documentary research, an examination of data published by the unlawful Transnistrian bodies, an analysis of the regulatory and institutional framework, as well as on the responses provided by the constitutional authorities to requests for access to information of public interest. Responses from the Ministry of Education and Research (MEC), the Ministry of Culture (MC), the National Agency for Curriculum and Assessment (ANCE), the Bureau for reintegration policies (BPR) and the Academy of Sciences of Moldova were analysed. The document also includes general references to practices in countries facing similar challenges – Ukraine and South Korea. It is important to note that the publicly available data on the education system in the Transnistrian region comes exclusively from sources published by the unlawful Transnistrian bodies. In the absence of access to independent verification mechanisms, the accuracy of this information cannot be confirmed.

The White Paper is structured into three chapters. The first chapter analyses the state of the education system in the Transnistrian region and the challenges of reintegration, providing an assessment of the main structural vulnerabilities. The second chapter evaluates the readiness of the constitutional authorities for educational reintegration. It examines the shortcomings of the institutional framework, including gaps in accountability, the lack of a clear mandate, and the absence of inter-institutional coordination mechanisms. The chapter also identifies strategic areas where the authorities can take action prior to the restoration of constitutional control over the region. The final chapter sets out recommendations for the Government of the Republic of Moldova, including the BPR, MEC and MC, focusing on the development of the institutional and strategic public policy framework necessary to prepare for educational reintegration.

The document is exploratory in nature and does not aim to formulate solutions or scenarios for educational reintegration. Its objective is to identify the main critical areas requiring further analysis, strategic planning and coordinated interventions. Policy options, transition scenarios and operational solutions are to be developed within a broad governmental framework, involving the relevant institutions, academia, civil society and independent experts.

Note on terminology: The use in this document of terms such as “ministry”, “government of the MRT”, “law” or other designations attributed to the unlawful Transnistrian bodies does not imply their legitimisation or *de jure* recognition, nor that of the functions exercised within them or the documents they issue. The exact names of these bodies and functions are used exceptionally, solely for the purpose of precisely identifying the sources analysed.

Chapter 1.

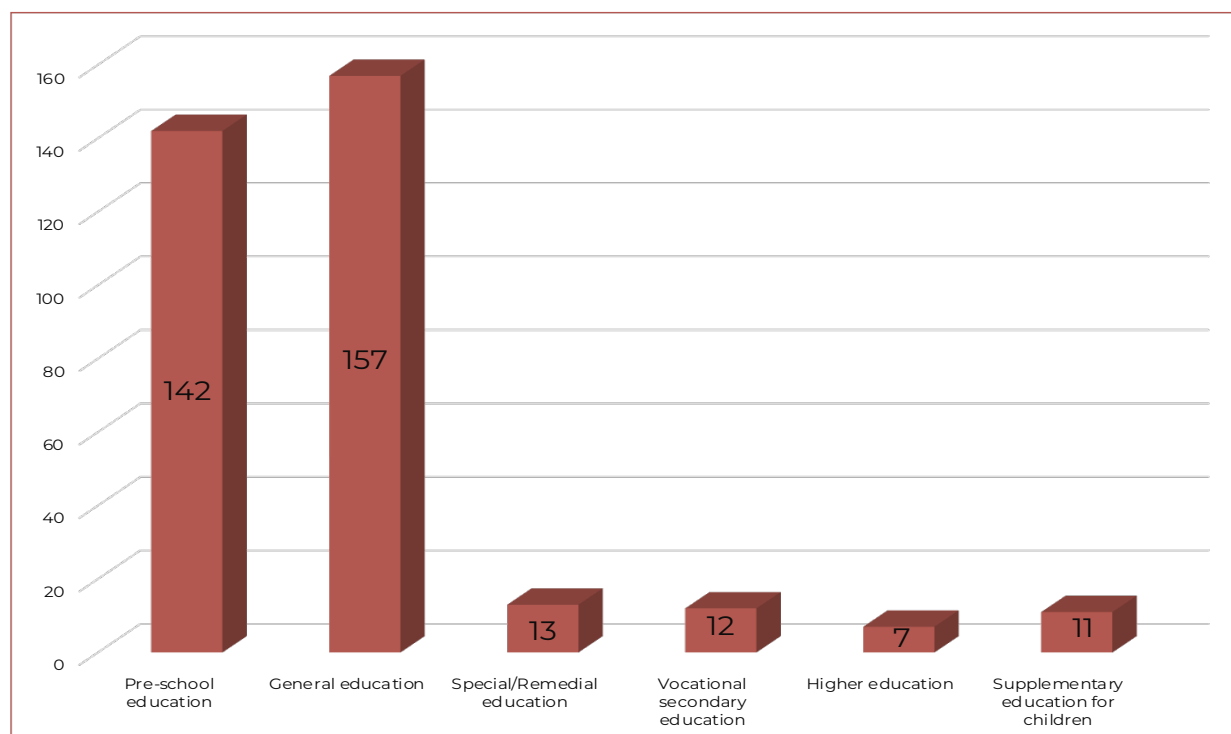
The state of the education system in the Transnistrian region and the challenges of reintegration

This section provides an overview of the education system established by the occupation regime in Tiraspol, highlighting its specific features, the local educational and informational context, as well as the challenges that may arise in a potential reintegration process. At the same time, the section includes general references to the experience of states that have undergone similar processes or are facing comparable situations, such as Ukraine, whose practices and lessons may be relevant to the context of the Republic of Moldova.

1.1 The network of educational institutions

At the start of the 2025–2026 academic year, there were 342 educational institutions operating in the Transnistrian region under the control of the Tiraspol regime². The majority (87%) are preschool and general education institutions. The distribution of educational institutions by educational level is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Structure of the network of educational institutions in 2025



Source: compiled by the author based on [data](#) published by the “ministry of education” in Tiraspol

In terms of geographical distribution, of the 142 pre-school educational organisations, 94 operate in urban areas and 48 in rural areas. As for general education institutions, 69 are located in urban areas and 88 in rural areas³. The accelerated depopulation of the region over the last three decades has led to the emergence of an increasing number of small

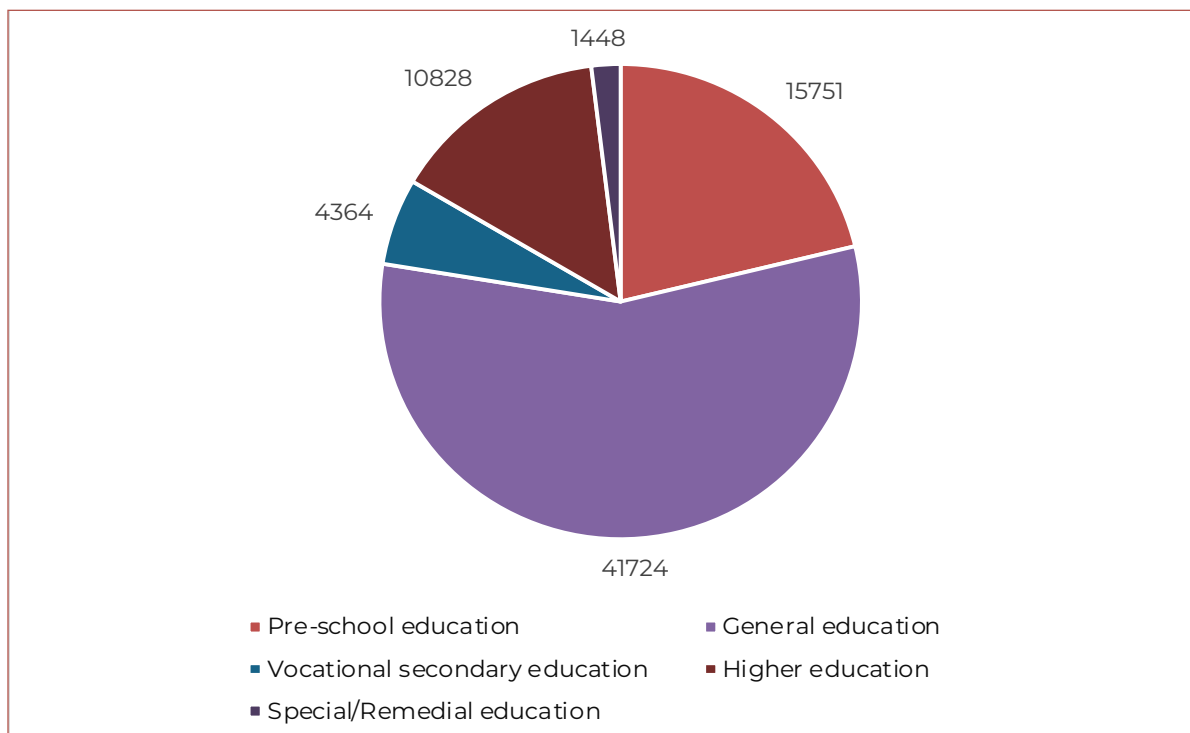
schools, a fact that directly affects the quality of the educational process. The enrolment rate for kindergartens across the entire region is 58.5%⁴. In general education, 86 institutions are small schools, some of which have only three or four pupils^{5,6}. The enrolment rate for schools in urban areas exceeds 58%, whilst in rural areas it reaches only 27%⁷.

In higher education, 75% (8,154) of students are enrolled at “T. G. Shevchenko” University, the largest local higher education institution, which comprises eight faculties, two institutes and two branches, located in Bender and Râbnîța⁸. The remaining higher education institutions have a specialised focus, covering fields such as “law”, the military sector, the arts and medicine.

1.2 Pre-school and school-age population

At the start of 2025, the number of children (aged between 0 and 18) stood at 64,096. In the 2025–2026 academic year, the region’s education system comprised 74,115 children and young people over the age of 18, enrolled at all levels of education⁹. Figure 2 illustrates the structure of the school-age population in the Transnistrian region by educational level.

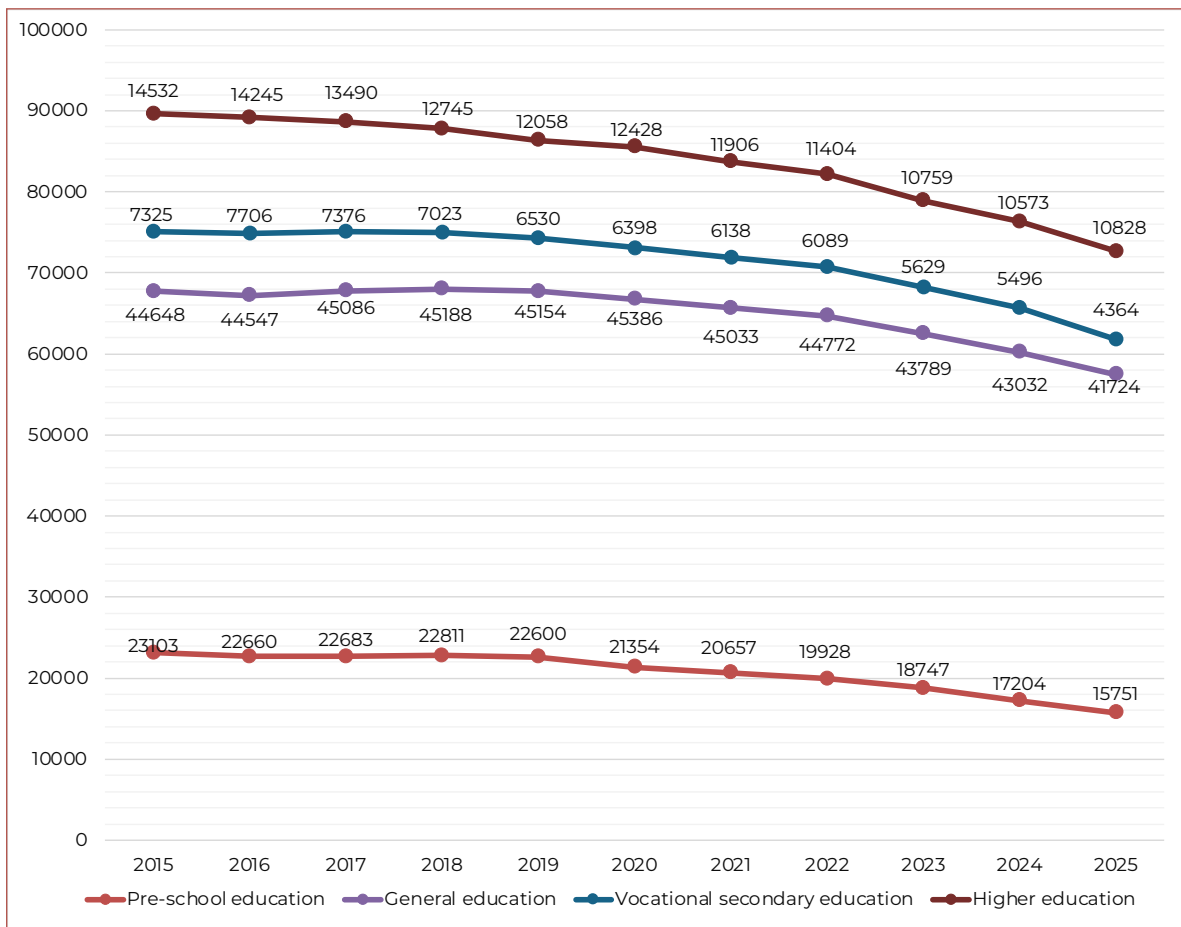
Figure 2. Structure of the school-age population in 2025



Source: compiled by the author based on [data](#) published by the “ministry of education” in Tiraspol

The ongoing exodus of children and young people remains a persistent trend, which will intensify in the coming years, particularly against the backdrop of the worsening socio-economic situation in the region. Over the last 10 years, the number of children aged between 0 and 18 has fallen by 33%^{10,11}. The decline is evident across all educational levels. Between 2015 and 2025, the number of children in pre-school institutions fell by 31%, the number of pupils in general education by 6.5%, and the number of students in secondary vocational and higher education fell by 40% and 25% respectively^{12,13}.

Figure 3. Trends in the number of pupils and students in the education system, 2015–2025



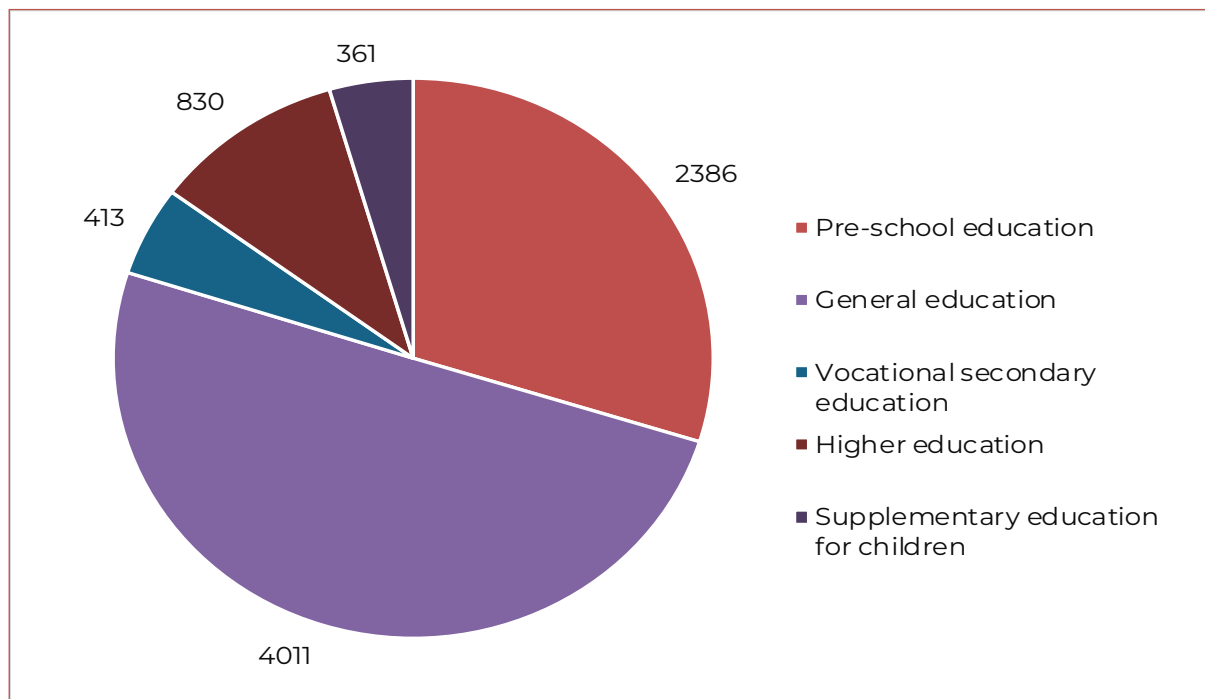
Source: compiled by the author based on reports published by the “ministry of education” in Tiraspol in [2017](#), [2020](#) and [2025](#)

Due to demographic trends and the acute economic crisis, maintaining the school network in its current form will lead to a growing number of small schools, an increasingly inefficient allocation of resources and, ultimately, a decline in the quality of education.

1.3 The workforce of the education system

In 2025, there were 17,215 employees in the education system, of whom 8,016 (46%) were teaching staff, 8,203 (48%) were administrative, auxiliary and support staff, and 996 (6%) held management positions¹⁴.

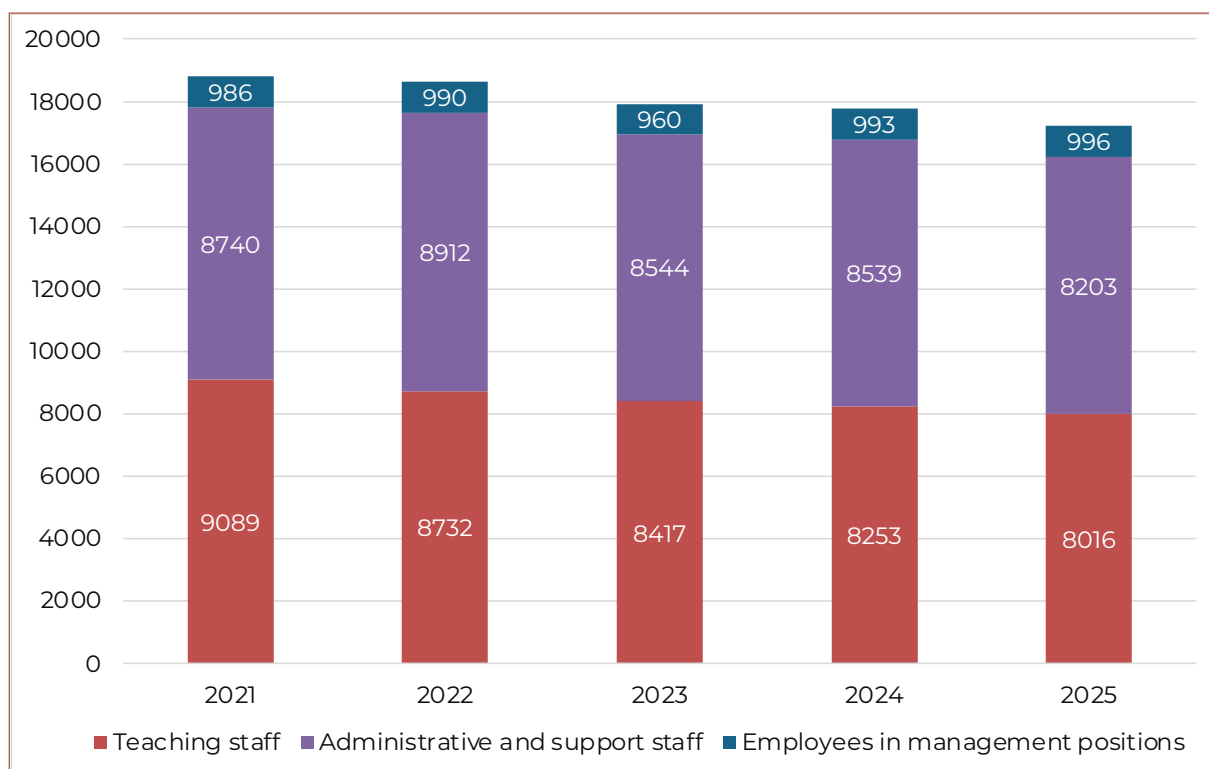
Figure 4. Distribution of teaching staff by educational level in 2025



Source: compiled by the author based on [data](#) published by the “ministry of education” in Tiraspol

Data published by employment agencies reveal a steady decline in the number of people employed in the education system. Between 2021 and 2025, the total number fell by 8.5%. The number of teaching staff fell by 11.8%, and that of administrative/support staff by 6.1%. Due to the shortage of teaching staff, from 1 September 2026, students enrolled in teacher education programmes will be able to be employed as teachers after completing their third year, on the basis of an incomplete higher education degree¹⁵. The employment of students before the completion of their teacher training indicates not only an acute shortage of teaching staff, but also the system’s inability to attract and retain qualified staff, with serious implications for the quality of teaching.

Figure 5. Trend in the number of employees in 2021–2025



Source: compiled by the author based on [data](#) published by the “ministry of education” in Tiraspol

The education system faces persistent problems regarding the quality of training and qualifications of teaching staff. In 2025, the proportion of staff without a teaching qualification was significant: 36.7% in pre-school education, 29.3% in general education, 27.1% in upper secondary vocational education and 30.8% in higher education. At the same time, 835 people (10.4% of the total) teach subjects for which they do not hold specialist qualifications, with higher proportions in pre-school education (17.4%) and supplementary/out-of-school education (17.2%), followed by general education (8.1%), secondary vocational education (6.8%) and higher education (0.8%)¹⁶. The phenomenon is more pronounced in schools with small student numbers, where core subjects are taught by pre-school teachers or by people with other specialisations¹⁷. This problem has persisted for several years. As early as 2014, the “ministry of education” publicly acknowledged the shortage of qualified teachers, describing the scale of the problem as “shocking”. Data for rural areas indicated that 23% of physics teachers, 48% of chemistry teachers and 38% of history teachers lacked relevant qualifications¹⁸.

The large number of teachers without specialist qualifications or with questionable training directly affects the quality of education. The so-called “ministry of education” in Tiraspol has acknowledged the existence of major discrepancies between the marks awarded and the actual level of pupils’ knowledge. For example, during the 2022 admissions process at “T. G. Shevchenko” University, 43.2% of candidates failed to confirm the marks on their school certificates, including pupils who had been awarded gold and silver medals for academic achievement¹⁹.

Another persistent problem is the ageing of the teaching staff. Over the last five years, the number of teachers of retirement age¹ has increased by 6.7% (279 people)²⁰. Almost a third of teachers are of retirement age, whilst the number of young specialists is steadily declining.

¹ The general retirement age in the Transnistrian region is 55 for women, with a minimum of 20 years’ service, and 60 for men, with a minimum of 25 years’ service. At the same time, the so-called “legislation” provides for the possibility of early retirement, depending on the number of children or the existence of a disability. These provisions indicate discrepancies with the framework applicable on the right bank of the Nistru.

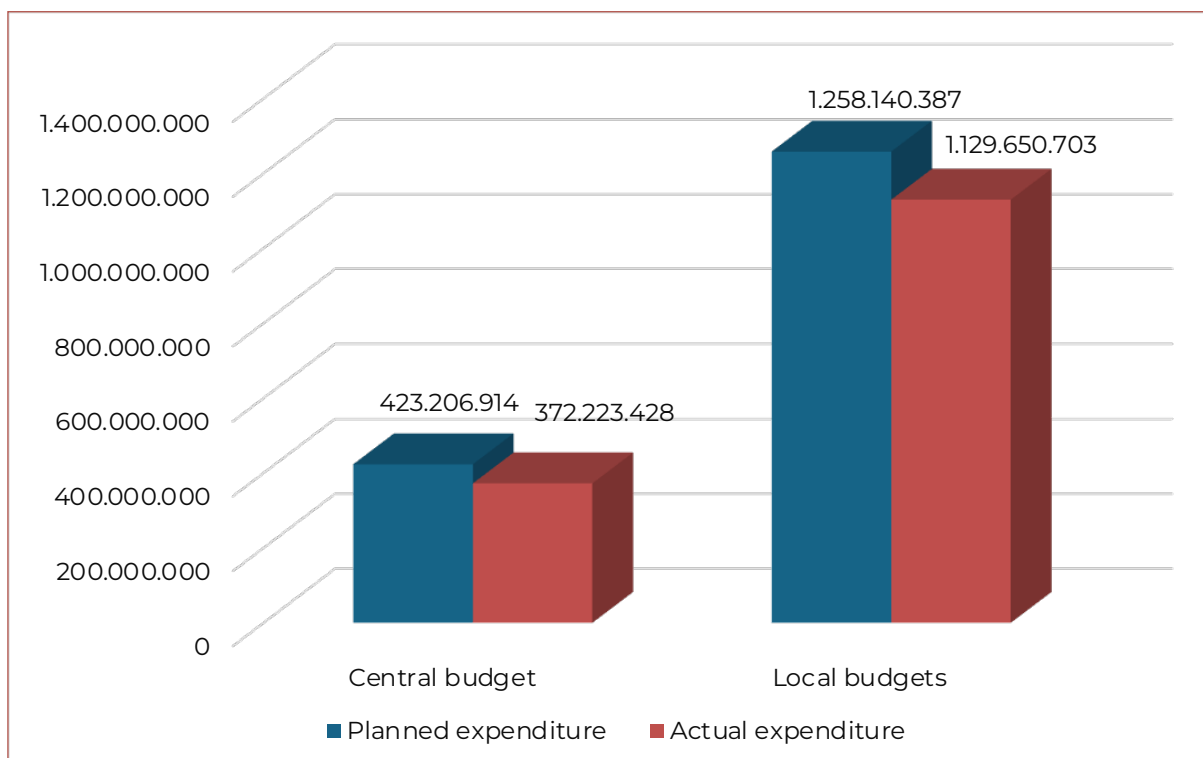
The average age of teaching staff is 53. The proportion of teachers of retirement age is 22.3% in pre-school education, 34.3% in general education, 24.4% in further education and 31.4% in higher education²¹. In 2022, representatives of the “ministry of education” admitted that the proportion of young specialists was “unacceptably low”, such that for every ten teachers of retirement age there was only one young teacher²². Low salaries (on average around 6,000 “Transnistrian rubles” or 370 USD), poor working conditions and a lack of incentives reduce the attractiveness of the profession²³. In rural areas, where the situation is even more acute, the shortage of qualified staff is frequently addressed by teachers taking on multiple roles or by employing people without teaching qualifications.

1.4 Education funding

In 2025, actual expenditure on education totalled approximately 1.501 billion “rubles” (around 93 million USD)²⁴. Of this amount, 75.2% came from city and district budgets, and 24.8% from the region’s central budget. Local budgets fund pre-school, primary and secondary education, whilst the central budget covers special education for children with SEN, higher education, continuing professional development for teachers and institutions for orphaned children. According to data from 2024, the annual cost per pupil ranged from 9,000 to 20,000 “rubles” (approximately 560–1,200 USD), depending on the level of education²⁵.

In the region’s central budget for 2025, expenditure on education was initially planned at 423.2 million “rubles” (USD 26 million), but the expenditure actually funded amounted to 372.2 million “rubles” (USD 23 million), i.e. 88% of the initial plan. Thus, at central level, education was underfunded by approximately 51 million “rubles” (USD 3 million) compared to the planned amounts²⁶. At the level of city and district budgets, education accounts for a significantly higher share. Of the 1.258 billion “rubles” (USD 78 million) initially planned, 1.130 billion “rubles” (USD 70 million) were actually funded, representing 89.8% of the plan. The difference between the planned and actual funding amounts was approximately 128 million “rubles” (USD 8 million)²⁷.

Figure 6. Differences between planned allocations and actual funding for education, 2025



Source: compiled by the author based on [the report](#) published by the “ministry of finance” in Tiraspol

Overall, education accounted for approximately 64% of expenditure funded by local budgets and around 8% of expenditure funded by the central budget. In 2025, the largest share of education expenditure went to secondary education, which accounted for 42% of the total, followed by pre-school education – 24%, higher education – 10%, and special education – 8%²⁸.

In 2025, the financial resources allocated to the entire education system were directed almost entirely towards salaries (around 80% of total expenditure), which keeps investment in infrastructure to a minimum²⁹. To cover part of their operational costs, institutions have relied on income from other sources, such as donations and fee-based services. Of this revenue, 33% was used for staff costs, 16% for utilities, and 24% for other types of expenditure, such as routine repairs, publishing services, transport maintenance, food and other goods and services³⁰. Furthermore, against the backdrop of the difficult economic situation, not all planned expenditure can be fully implemented.

This funding and budget structure does not allow for the modernisation of the education system and perpetuates the deterioration of existing infrastructure. The “ministry of education” report for 2024 confirms that school infrastructure is outdated across all segments of the education system and indicates that numerous institutions require major repairs, whilst existing conditions fail to meet either educational standards or safety regulations³¹. Vocational education is identified as one of the most disadvantaged sectors.

Underfunding directly affects access to teaching materials. The textbook stock, comprising 780,665 copies, has a wear rate of 68%, and new textbooks account for only 17%. Funding allocated for updating the stock during the 2022–2024 period was insufficient, and with the onset of the economic crisis in 2025, it was suspended³². Institutions teaching in Romanian (Cyrillic script) and Ukrainian are in a particularly problematic situation, as they are not fully provided with textbooks and teaching materials.

1.5 Russification of the education system

Since 2002, the educational process in the region has been organised on the basis of the educational standards of the Russian Federation, which are revised every five years³³. This alignment process involves the application of the Russian curriculum and related teaching materials, supplemented with local elements on the history, geography and culture of the region. At the same time, the assessment system used in the Russian Federation, on a 5-point scale, is adopted, as is the structure of the educational levels: years 1–4 (primary), years 5–9 (lower secondary) and years 10–11 (upper secondary). The accreditation process for general schools in the Russian Federation is expected to be completed by 2026, which would allow for the issuance of dual diplomas³⁴.

Furthermore, as part of the alignment process, the stock of textbooks has been periodically updated. For example, the implementation of standards updated in 2016 led to the replacement of approximately 360,000 textbooks with new editions, the majority of which were supplied by the authorities of the Russian Federation³⁵. At the same time, the “Rossotrudnichestvo” agency continues to supply the region with books and textbooks that promote revisionist narratives and Russian propaganda^{36,37}. In this context, ideologised subjects, such as history, are focused almost exclusively on the historical and cultural space of the Russian Federation, neglecting the historical realities and developments of the Republic of Moldova³⁸.

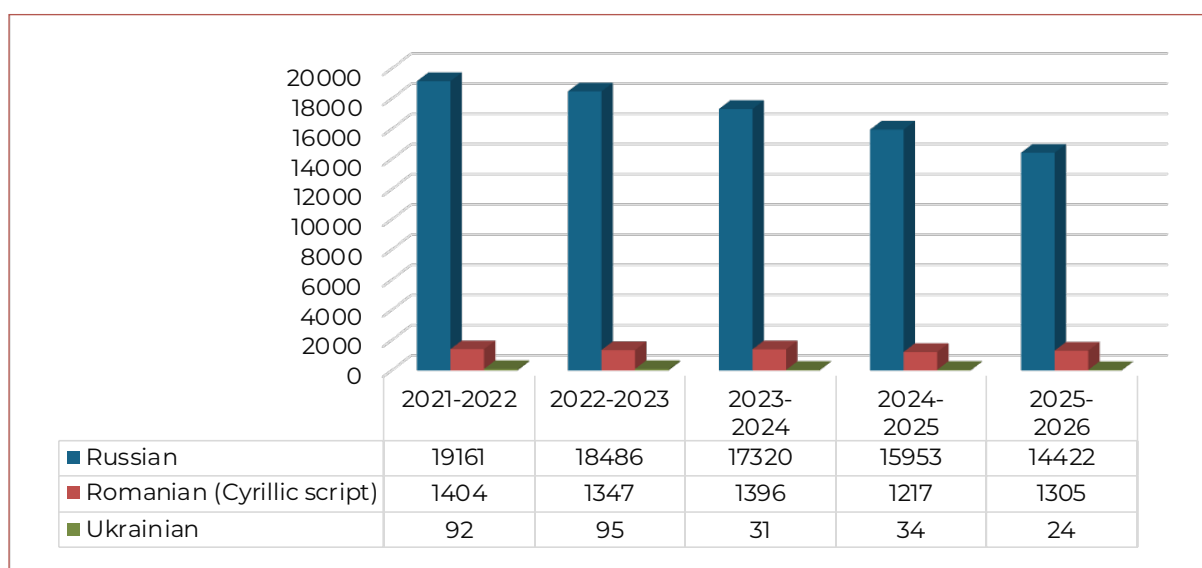
Higher education is also within the sphere of Russian influence. The “T. G. Shevchenko” University operates on the basis of Russian educational standards, being accredited by the Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science of the Russian Federation. The university awards two types of diplomas: the “Transnistrian” diploma and the Russian diploma³⁹. The university hosts a Russian centre of the “Ruskii Mir” Foundation, two “Ruskii

Mir” offices in Bender and Râbnîța, and a liaison centre with the “Rosstrudnichestvo” agency⁴⁰. Furthermore, the majority of the institution’s partnerships are with universities, research centres and non-governmental organisations in Russia. Political control over the institution is reinforced both by the fact that the “leader” of the occupation regime is listed as its founder, and by the presence on the university’s governing body of individuals holding leadership positions within the occupation structures⁴¹. For example, the position of Dean of the Faculty of Public Administration and Social and Human Sciences at the “T.G. Shevchenko” State University is held by the “chairperson of the supreme soviet”.

Russian influence is also evident in the training of teaching staff through programmes organised by the Russian authorities. Joint educational activity plans covering all levels of education are also being implemented⁴². Furthermore, under cooperation agreements between the unlawful Transnistrian bodies and the Russian authorities, hundreds of children have taken part in camps and competitions dedicated to the Soviet past and the modern history of the Russian Federation, in various cities across Russia, Belarus and occupied Crimea. Some of the educational centres to which children from the region are sent are on international sanctions lists, due to their involvement in the deportation and alleged “re-education” of Ukrainian children from the occupied territories⁴³. These activities promote nostalgia for the Soviet Union, romanticise service in paramilitary structures, justify the Russian Federation’s war of aggression against Ukraine and foster anti-Western attitudes.

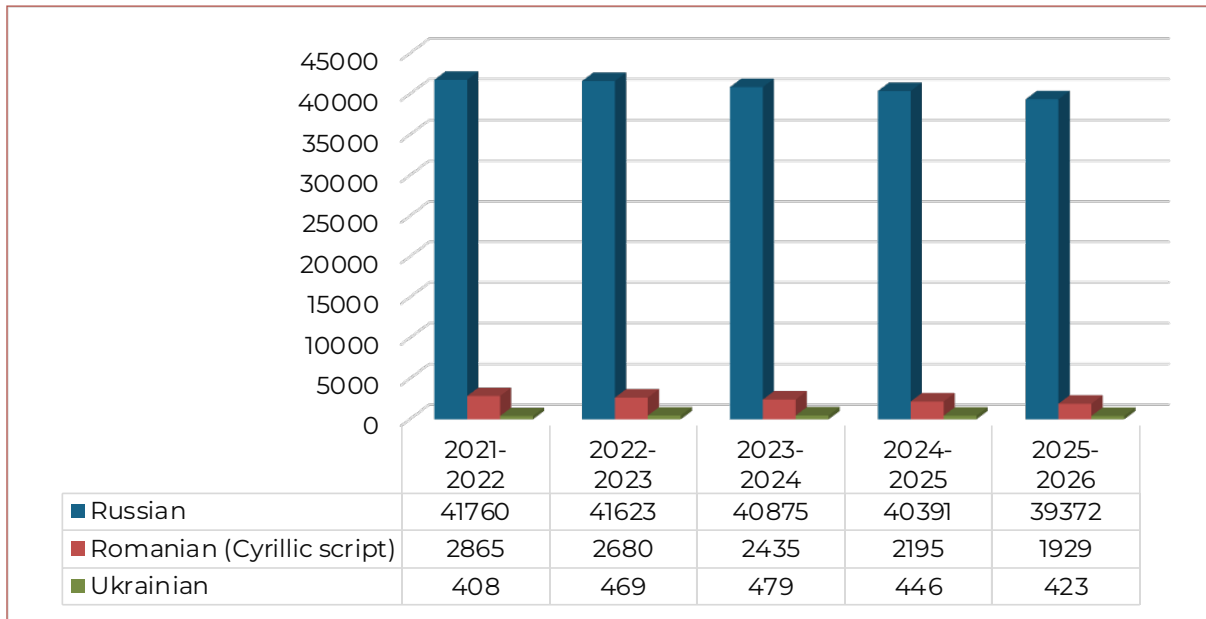
The linguistic component is central to the process of Russification. Although the “regulatory framework” provides for three “official languages”, in practice Russian is the main language of communication and instruction. Following the 1994 ban on education using the Latin script, the region remained the only territory where Romanian is taught using the Cyrillic script. The use of Romanian in the Latin script and Ukrainian, both as primary languages of instruction and as secondary languages, is declining every year. Figures 7 and 8 illustrate the trends in the number of pre-schoolers and pupils by language of instruction for the period 2021–2026. The number of pre-schoolers taught in Russian is more than ten times higher than the number taught in Romanian using the Cyrillic script, and in the case of schoolchildren, this difference is more than twenty times greater.

Figure 7. Trend in the number of pre-schoolers by language of instruction, 2021–2026



Source: compiled by the author based on [data](#) published by the “ministry of education” in Tiraspol

Figure 8. Trends in pupil numbers by language of instruction, 2021–2026

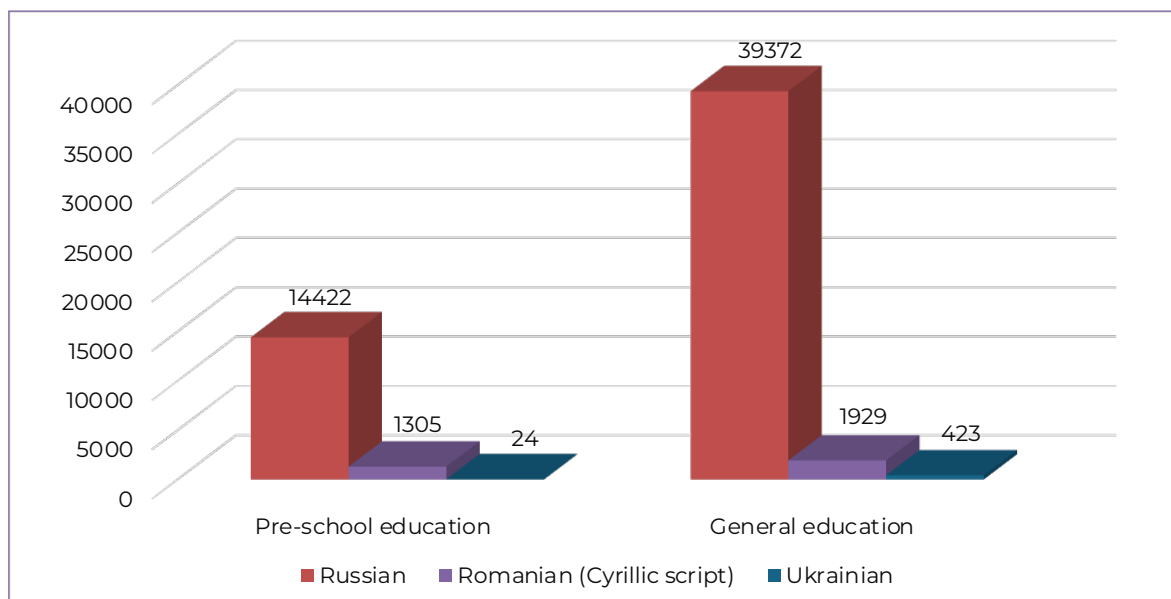


Source: compiled by the author based on [data](#) published by the “ministry of education” in Tiraspol

In the 2025–2026 academic year, 91.5% of children in pre-school institutions attended groups taught in Russian, a proportion that has remained relatively constant over the last five years. The groups taught in Ukrainian accounted for 0.2% of the total (just 24 children across the entire region), and those taught in Romanian (Cyrillic script) accounted for only 8.3% of the total⁴⁴. In the regions near the towns of Grigoriopol, Bender, Tiraspol, Slobozia and Dnestrovsc, there are no alternatives to the kindergartens under the control of the occupation regime. The only educational institution in the uncontrolled territory that offers pre-school groups taught in Romanian (Latin script) is the “Evrika” Secondary School in Râbnîța. In 2024, 27 children were enrolled in two pre-school groups at this institution.

The linguistic profile of general education is comparable to that of pre-school education. The proportion of pupils studying in Russian is 94.4%, whilst 4.6% study in Romanian (Cyrillic script) and 1% in Ukrainian⁴⁵.

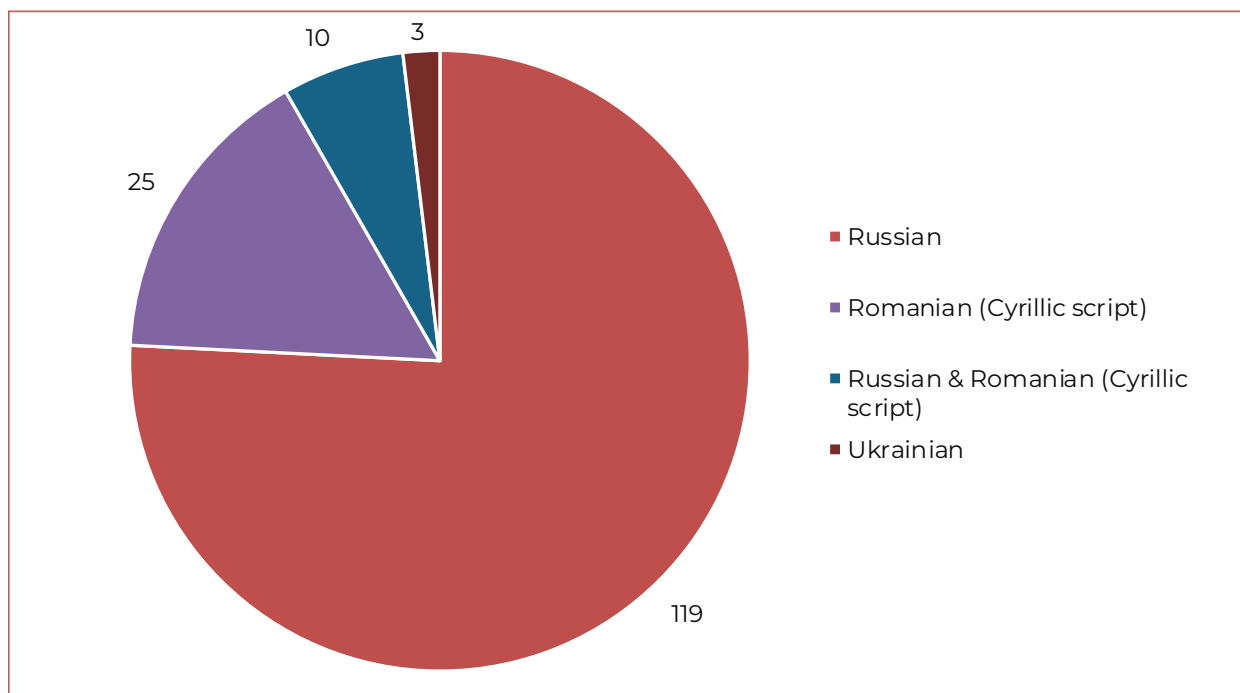
Figure 9. Distribution of children by language of instruction, 2025–2026



Source: compiled by the author based on [data](#) published by the “ministry of education” in Tiraspol

Almost 76% of primary and general education institutions teach exclusively in Russian. Only around a quarter of schools include, either fully or partially, teaching in Romanian (Cyrillic script), whilst teaching in Ukrainian is marginal, accounting for just 1.9% of the total. The geographical distribution indicates the absence of schools teaching exclusively in Romanian using the Cyrillic script in Dnestrovsc and Bender. Most institutions of this type are located in the Grigoriopol and Râbnița districts, with seven in each, followed by Dubăsari, with six institutions, Slobozia and Camenca, with two each, and Tiraspol, with one institution. Bilingual schools, where teaching is conducted in Russian and Romanian using the Cyrillic script, are concentrated in Slobozia, where there are four such institutions, and in Dubăsari, where there are three. In Grigoriopol, Râbnița and Camenca, there is one bilingual institution each⁴⁶.

Figure 10. *Distribution of general education institutions by language of instruction in 2025–2026*



Source: compiled by the author based on [data](#) published by the “ministry of education” in Tiraspol

As regards vocational and higher education, the educational process is also almost entirely Russified. Thus, access to educational opportunities and cultural products in the Romanian language is non-existent, with the exception of the eight educational institutions subordinate to Chișinău.

The constitutional authorities will need to restore the use of the Romanian language in education and ensure the gradual development of communication skills in Romanian. To this end, it will be necessary to implement medium- and long-term programmes, including intensive courses and subject-specific courses, tailored to the age and educational level of pupils and students in the Transnistrian region. It will also be necessary to develop and distribute textbooks and self-study teaching materials. The Ukrainian state, facing a similar situation, has adopted several measures to facilitate access for children in the occupied territories to education in the Ukrainian language, including online Ukrainian language courses and educational programmes focused on subjects relating to Ukraine, delivered in a simplified format, which allow for remote enrolment in the Ukrainian education system⁴⁷.

1.6 Militarisation, ideologisation and politicisation of education

Since 1992, the education system has been used as a tool for political indoctrination and the promotion of a pro-Russian worldview. The so-called “law on education” sets as its objective the upbringing of children and young people in the spirit of “patriotism” and devotion to the regime, whilst educational standards emphasise “Pridnestrovian civic identity”, the display of respect for the symbols of the occupation regime, and preparation for service in paramilitary structures⁴⁸.

A central component of this process is the systematic promotion of anti-Romanian and anti-Western attitudes. Chişinău is portrayed as an “enemy”, a fact that may fuel hostility towards the prospect of reintegration; Romania is referred to almost exclusively through the prism of the Antonescu regime, and the West is described as a threat to the region’s security. These perceptions can be instilled more easily against a backdrop of limited knowledge of the history, culture and realities of the Republic of Moldova, as well as a repressive climate that discourages adults from passing on objective information to children about the past, the Russian military occupation and the goal of reintegration. Over time, isolation from the rest of the country has fostered a cultural, civic and identity-related uprooting, with profound and long-lasting effects.

Ideologisation affects all categories of children and young people, including orphans, those deprived of parental care, those deprived of their liberty, and those with SEN. The so-called “patriotic education” is promoted through an extensive network of schools, churches, unlawful security and force bodies, sports clubs and youth organisations, which function as extensions of local and Russian security services. Military-style activities are often organised by former combatants involved in the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war or in the Russian Federation’s military aggression against Ukraine, which began in 2014. During these events, children and young people wear clothing accessories in the colours of the occupation regime’s “flag”, as well as military camouflage uniforms bearing the letter Z, a symbol of support for the war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine⁴⁹.

The process of militarisation and indoctrination begins as early as pre-school and continues right through to higher education. In nurseries, children play the roles of wounded soldiers and frontline nurses, re-enact war scenes and sing “patriotic songs” that evoke nostalgia for the Soviet past⁵⁰. In schools, the myth of “Pridnestrovian identity” is systematically promoted, serving to consolidate loyalty to the regime in Tiraspol and reinforce the perception of a fundamental difference from the population on the right bank of the Nistru. In 2025, teachers in the region were required to use only the term “Pridnestrovian people” to refer to the region’s inhabitants, with phrases such as “the peoples of Transnistria” being banned⁵¹. At the same time, thematic lessons on the “Pridnestrovian people” or the “history of the MRT” are regularly organised in kindergartens, schools and public institutions⁵². During these activities, video recordings of propaganda lessons delivered by the leader of the occupation regime, Vadim Krasnoselski, are shown. Photographs from classrooms show children holding the flag of the occupation regime, alongside portraits of its leader. A particular role is played by the narrative of the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war, presented as “a continuation of the fight against fascism and Nazism from the Second World War”, promoted through thematic lessons, visits to museums, meetings with veterans and the screening of propaganda films⁵³.

In secondary school, the ideological component is supplemented by actual military training, through the compulsory subject “Basic Military Training”, taught by serving and reserve military personnel, which includes practical exercises with firearms and grenades⁵⁴. Representatives of paramilitary and force structures are directly involved in the ideological and military training of young people. At the same time, some pupils in grades 6–11 are recruited into paramilitary clubs, such as the military-sports clubs “Scânteia” (Искра) or “Bars” (Барс)^{55,56}. These clubs are characterised as “nurseries” for the occupation regime’s paramilitary structures⁵⁷. In parallel, over the last three decades the regime has developed the practice of educational institutions being “sponsored” by paramilitary units and various

local security structures. For example, in the 2024–2025 academic year, approximately 25 schools were under the “patronage” of the so-called “ministry of state security”, led by a former colonel of the Russian Federal Security Service⁵⁸.

Militarisation is further reinforced by the adoption of initiatives from the Russian Federation, such as the “Yunarmia” movement, which dozens of children from the region joined in 2017, with the support of the Operational Group of Russian Forces⁵⁹. According to local propaganda channels, the Operational Group of Russian Forces organises military-patriotic camps, such as the “Red Star” camp, where children are trained to use rifles and air guns.

Given the systematic efforts to reshape the collective mindset and foster generations loyal to the interests of the Russian Federation, strategic interventions in cognitive de-occupation will be necessary – a concept widely used by Ukrainian civil society and authorities in action plans and strategies targeting Crimea. In 2023, the Mission of the President of Ukraine to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea published the “Strategy for the Cognitive De-occupation of Crimea”, a cross-cutting instrument around which other strategies concerning Ukraine’s temporarily occupied territories are to be integrated and coordinated. Its aim is to transform the values and perceptions shaped under Russian colonial policies, in order to facilitate the reintegration of Crimea’s inhabitants into Ukraine’s socio-political and cultural spheres, through socio-psychological and intergenerational interventions focused on beliefs, emotions, fears, expectations and social identities⁶⁰.

1.7 Paramilitary educational structures

Four paramilitary educational institutions operate in the Transnistrian region, playing a central role in the militarisation of young people and the promotion of the ideology of the occupation regime:

- ▶ The “G. A. Potemkin-Tavriceski” Cadet School in Bender, subordinate to the “ministry of internal affairs”, founded in 2002;
- ▶ The Suvorov Military School in Tiraspol, subordinate to the “ministry of defence”, opened in 2017;
- ▶ The “M. I. Kutuzov” Law Institute in Tiraspol, subordinate to the “ministry of internal affairs”, established in 1993;
- ▶ The “A. I. Lebed” Military Institute in Tiraspol, subordinate to the “ministry of defence”, established in 1993.

In addition to these four paramilitary structures, Cossack cadet classes have been established in some schools through the involvement of the paramilitary organisation “Black Sea Cossack Army”⁶¹.

To date, over 500 young people have graduated from the “G. A. Potemkin-Tavriceski” cadet school, and 137 have graduated from the Suvorov military school^{62,63}. In August 2025, a further 120 minors were enrolled in these institutions. According to information available in February 2026, 416 minors were enrolled in these institutions: 266 at the Suvorov Military School and 150 at the Cadet School^{64,65}. At the same time, the “A. I. Lebed” Military Institute and the “M. I. Kutuzov” Law Institute have trained a cumulative total of approximately 10,500 people from their establishment to the present day^{66,67}.

The Cadet School and the Suvorov Military School are intended for children aged between 10 and 17. Some of these children come from disadvantaged backgrounds or boarding schools. The children are trained to serve in paramilitary structures and illegal security and law enforcement structures, such as the “ministry of security”, “prosecutor’s office”, “investigation committees”, “customs committee” and “ministry of justice”. During the seven years of training, the students live in isolation, in barracks, wear military camouflage

uniforms every day and follow a strict disciplinary regime. The programme combines general education with intensive military training (including shooting and tactical drills) and has a pronounced ideological component, modelled on Russian military schools^{68,69}. In addition, students frequently participate in military-patriotic extracurricular activities, such as grenade-throwing exercises; military training camps; target shooting, weapon disassembly and assembly competitions; re-enactments of battles from the Second World War; military parades; visits to special forces units; screenings of propaganda films about the Soviet past and the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war.

These institutions form an essential component of the region's paramilitary system, serving as one of the main sources of recruitment for illegal security and law enforcement structures. Enrolment in such schools significantly restricts children's future career options, as graduates are directed towards the "M. I. Kutuzov", the "A. I. Lebed" Military Institute or directly to paramilitary structures and other illegal bodies, without any guarantees regarding respect for their free and informed consent. Under these circumstances, breaking out of this cycle becomes extremely difficult without risking repercussions, all the more so as graduates are pressured to sign long-term contracts with unlawful Transnistrian bodies.

Given the role of these institutions within the local paramilitary system, the hostile environment that characterises them, and the numerous violations of children's rights, these structures are incompatible with the rule of law. Consequently, the future of these institutions should be decided as part of a broader process of demilitarising the region and reforming the education system. At the same time, this approach must be linked to the development of a clear vision for the integration of pupils from these paramilitary structures into a safe educational environment, which would reduce the risk of polarisation and radicalisation.

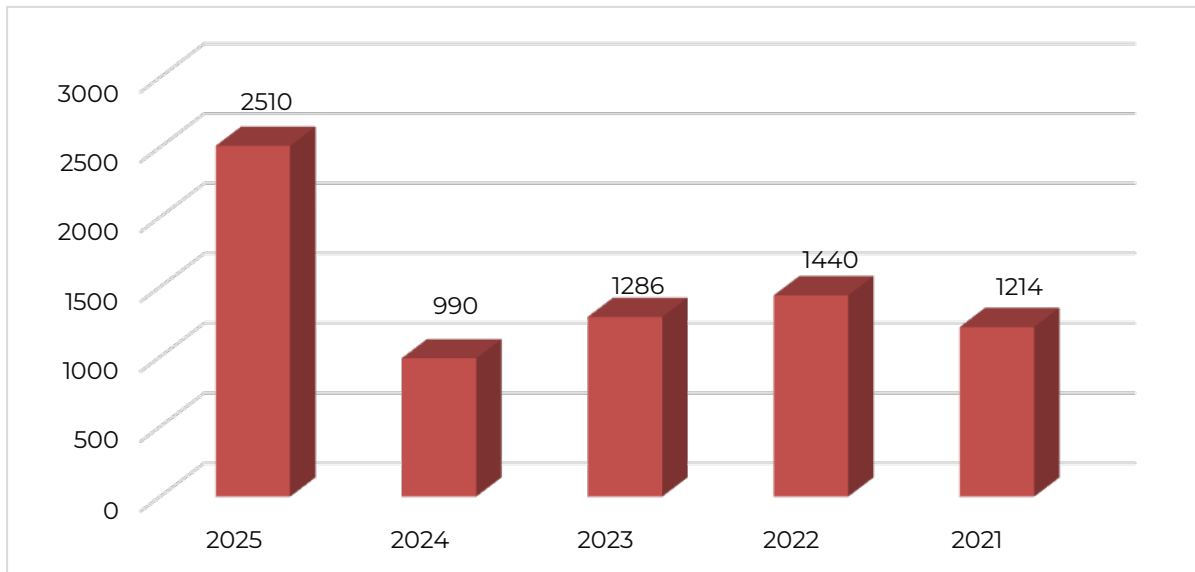
1.8 Youth policy

The occupation regime's youth policy functions as an instrument of political control and identity shaping. The ideological dimension, centred on the myth of "Pridnestrovian identity and statehood", is pervasive, featuring in all types of extracurricular activities, including sport and volunteering. In the first half of 2025 alone, as part of the "Year of the Pridnestrovian People", 443 trips to museums and memorials were organised for 43,770 school and university students, along with around 200 lessons and round-table discussions, approximately 300 hours of "patriotic" themed lessons, 20 seminars and scientific conferences, as well as over 900 cultural activities⁷⁰.

Data from the "service for culture and historical heritage of the MRT" indicates a high number of "patriotic" events, aimed primarily at children and young people: 1,214 events in 2021²; 1,440 in 2022 (156,307 participants); 1,286 in 2023 (163,664 participants), 990 in 2024 (123,465 participants) and 2,510 in 2025 (228,345 participants)⁷¹.

2 No data on the number of participants is available for 2021.

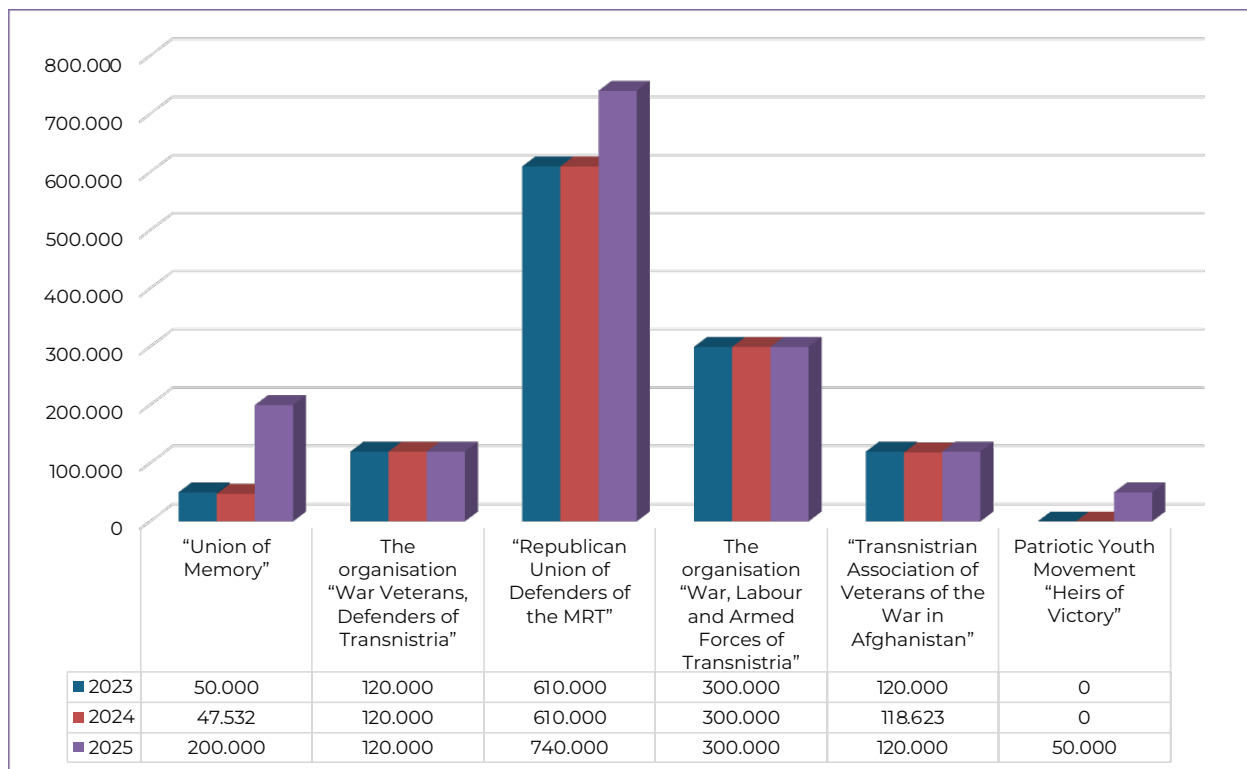
Figure 11. Number of “patriotic” events organised in the years 2021–2025



Source: compiled by the author based on [reports](#) published by the “service for culture and historical heritage of the MRT”

So-called “patriotic education” is not only formalised in the “regulatory framework”, but is also supported by generous budgetary allocations, maintained even during times of crisis. The report by the “ministry of social protection and labour” shows that, from 2023 onwards, certain paramilitary organisations carrying out “military-patriotic education” activities are being funded from the “government’s reserve fund”. The allocations amounted to 1.2 million “Transnistrian rubles” (approximately \$74,500) in 2023 and 2024, and in 2025, despite an acute economic crisis, funding increased to 1.5 million (approximately \$93,000)⁷².

Figure 12. Budget allocation for paramilitary structures involved in “patriotic education” in 2023–2025



Source: compiled by the author based on [the report](#) by the “ministry of social protection and labour” in Tiraspol, 2025

Pluralism of opinion, the promotion of diversity and the involvement of young people in participatory local governance are concepts alien to the framework promoted in the region. Youth organisations are not independent, and public participation is strictly controlled. Autonomous or critical initiatives are non-existent, whilst volunteering is permitted only in areas not considered politically “sensitive”. A significant proportion of youth organisations are geared towards promoting “patriotism” and Soviet memory. There are also youth movements affiliated with the so-called “Obnovlenie” (“Renewal”) party, which is under the control of the Sheriff holding company. At the same time, grants for youth organisations exclusively favour structures that align with the priorities of the occupation regime, such as military-sports clubs.

Systematic indoctrination may deepen the divisions between young people on both banks of the Nistru, including in relation to major regional issues, such as Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine or EU accession. Surveys conducted by Zona de Securitate and WatchDog.md on the left bank of the Nistru show that young people exhibit the highest level of disinterest among voters in the region towards electoral processes and political life in the Republic of Moldova⁷³. This is closely linked to the local educational and information environment, which is predominantly oriented towards the Russian sphere. Discussions about the recent history of the Republic of Moldova and the political scene on the right bank are almost non-existent. Consequently, many young people grow up without basic information about the state of which they are citizens and remain disconnected from the national civic and political sphere.

The effectiveness of the occupation regime’s efforts to indoctrinate young people and impose the myth of “Pridnestrovian identity” remains difficult to assess in the absence of independent sociological studies. However, the potential impact on the identity and cognitive development of young people cannot be ruled out. Access to the internet does not, in itself, equate to exposure to credible alternative sources, nor to the development of critical thinking. Consequently, in-depth analyses will be required to assess the impact of the politicisation of education and indoctrination; such analyses will be essential in the process of developing strategies for informational reintegration and cognitive de-occupation.

Reintegration will require reform of the youth sector, as some existing organisations promote ideas incompatible with the rule of law and democratic values. In this regard, youth policies adapted to the post-occupation context will be necessary, policies that stimulate civic participation, reduce the risk of radicalisation and polarisation, and create safe spaces for engagement. Such an approach is all the more important given that young people can play a central role in the processes of remembrance, reconciliation and democratic reconstruction.

Ukraine’s Action Plan for the Restoration of Education in De-occupied Territories (2024–2027) includes the involvement of children and young people in reintegration processes as a strategic priority. The plan provides for a youth policy aimed at reintegrating young people from de-occupied territories through their direct involvement in decision-making processes, support for civic and educational initiatives, the development of youth representation structures at local and national level, the promotion of civic education, democratic participation and dialogue, and the provision of grants and mobility programmes, with the aim of strengthening social cohesion and civic identity⁷⁴.

1.9 The responsibility of teachers and those in leadership roles

The politicisation and militarisation of the education system in the Transnistrian region, which have taken place over the last three decades, raise complex questions regarding how the work of teachers and administrative staff in the education sector during the occupation should be assessed and addressed. Education plays a vital role in shaping children's values, perceptions and views of society, the state, identity, rights and freedoms. For this reason, the way in which the education system has been used for propaganda, ideological control and militarisation cannot be ignored in the context of the region's reintegration, decriminalisation and democratisation.

In this context, it is necessary to formulate a clear vision regarding the future status of certain teaching staff or individuals in leadership positions who, for example:

- ▶ promoted, within educational institutions, Russian propaganda and the propaganda of the occupation regime, including through the teaching of ideologised subjects such as "History of the State and Law", "Basic Military Training" or "History of the MRT";
- ▶ have organised and implemented military training activities and programmes for children;
- ▶ have worked in educational institutions with a paramilitary profile, such as the Suvorov Military School;
- ▶ were involved in the violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms. A relevant example is the teaching staff at the Multidisciplinary Research and Consultancy Centre of the "T. G. Shevchenko" University, who cooperate with the "ministry of state security" in the investigation of alleged criminal cases of "extremism", by preparing linguistic expert reports subsequently used for the unlawful deprivation of liberty of citizens of the Republic of Moldova⁷⁵;
- ▶ have participated in the adoption and implementation of decisions regarding the introduction of the Russian Federation's educational standards and the replication of certain propaganda-driven educational initiatives inspired by the Russian Federation.

At the same time, it is important to note that this issue must be approached with caution. A blanket exemption from liability for all persons who have worked in the education system could harm the democratisation process and could perpetuate the influence of practices incompatible with the values of the rule of law. Furthermore, the automatic and undifferentiated criminalisation of all teaching staff would not constitute a reasonable approach.

Any analysis of this issue must take into account the specific realities of life under occupation. On the one hand, the population living under an occupation regime must have access to essential services, including education. On the other hand, in the Transnistrian region, education has been transformed into a tool for legitimising the regime, for ideological control and for the militarisation of children. Therefore, the mere fact that a person was employed in an educational institution in the region should not constitute a criterion for holding them accountable or for excluding them from the education system. The assessment should focus on the specific nature of the activities carried out. It must also be borne in mind that some teaching staff are a direct product of this system. Some individuals were born after 1992 and were educated exclusively in a deeply ideologised educational environment, with no real access to educational, professional or informational alternatives. This reality does not preclude the need to assess individual responsibility, but it does require a balanced and differentiated approach.

The points mentioned above show that there is no single solution to this issue. For this reason, it is essential that debates on the assessment of staff in the education system be initiated now, before the process of reintegration and democratisation of the region raises such issues in an already complicated and sensitive context.

In several Central and Eastern European states, following the collapse of the communist regimes, transitional justice measures have also targeted teaching staff, by assessing their role in perpetuating the ideological practices of authoritarian regimes. A relevant contemporary example is Ukraine, where extensive debates are taking place regarding the accountability of teaching staff in the occupied territories who collaborated with the occupying forces⁷⁶. These debates also address the limitations and shortcomings of the existing legal framework, given that Ukrainian criminal law regulates liability for collaboration with the Russian Federation under Article 111-1 of the Criminal Code, and paragraph 3 of this article specifically refers to activities carried out in the field of education⁷⁷.

Also relevant are Ukraine's efforts to train the necessary staff to resume activities in schools in the liberated territories, including for working with children affected by occupation, propaganda and militarisation. To ensure the effective functioning of state institutions in the de-occupied areas, including educational institutions, in 2023, Ukraine launched a pilot project aimed at creating and training a reserve of civil servants willing to work in the liberated territories⁷⁸. By November 2025, this pool comprised over 3,200 people.

1.10 Education for children with special educational needs

Education for children with SEN and disabilities, both from the perspective of the “legal framework” and the realities on the ground, is segregated. Inclusive education is virtually non-existent, and children with such needs are separated into special institutions or distinct classes. The education system lacks the resources and capacity needed to integrate pupils with diverse profiles.

In 2024, the total number of children enrolled in special educational programmes was 2,965, of whom 1,553 attended 13 special institutions. Of these, six are boarding schools, three operate as nursery-school educational complexes, and four are compensatory pre-school institutions (special nurseries with an educational-therapeutic component)⁷⁹.

The education system faces major shortcomings in supporting children with cognitive developmental disorders⁸⁰. Adapted educational infrastructure and resources are insufficient, and the shortage of qualified staff means that their needs remain largely unmet. In special schools, most teachers are trained to work with physical disabilities, whilst specialists in cognitive and behavioural disorders are extremely few in number, which affects the process of inclusion and the educational development of these children. At the same time, a report by the “ministry of education” acknowledges the ageing of teaching staff, the lack of young specialists in special educational institutions, the shortage of qualified staff, as well as the lack of modern educational methodologies and resources⁸¹.

Another particularly serious issue is the ideologisation of the education of children with SEN, who are taken to propaganda museums, attend screenings of propaganda films or “patriotic” lessons organised by former combatants from the Moldovan-Russian war or by veterans of local security structures^{82,83}. Special institutions are also involved in activities organised as part of the “Year of the Pridnestrovian People”, as well as in events dedicated to the establishment of the occupation bodies.

Despite existing barriers, unlike the Transnistrian region, the right bank of the Nistru has made significant progress in the field of inclusive education, by aligning the legislative framework with international standards, integrating an increasing number of children with SEN into mainstream schools, and implementing a national programme for the development of inclusive education. The reintegration process will highlight numerous major gaps between the right and left banks of the Nistru in this area. Consequently, a plan will be required to gradually reduce these discrepancies, based on national and international standards regarding inclusive education and children's rights.

1.11 The situation of orphaned children or those without parental care

As of 1 January 2025, 2,698 children and young people were in the child protection system administered by unlawful Transnistrian bodies. Of these:

- ▶ 754 orphans and children deprived of parental care were placed under guardianship (mostly of relatives);
- ▶ 14 children were placed in family-type homes;
- ▶ 1,542 children were in residential care;
- ▶ 388 pupils and students from the categories of orphans or children deprived of parental care were studying in vocational education institutions⁸⁴.

Of the total number of 1,542 children in residential care, 446 were orphans and children deprived of parental care, 252 came from vulnerable families, and 844 were children with SEN. There are six boarding schools operating in the region, under the authority of the so-called "ministry of social protection and labour"⁸⁵. Orphans, children from vulnerable backgrounds and children with disabilities are placed in these same institutions.

The boarding schools face major shortcomings caused by systematic underfunding. The lack of investment directly affects the children's living conditions and well-being. Reports by the "ombudsman" in Tiraspol highlight a lack of clothing and personal items, dilapidated furniture, poor material conditions, cases of violence, insufficient supervision of children and a lack of adequate medical monitoring^{86,87}. The reports also highlight that these shortcomings contravene minimum standards of safety and human dignity. Furthermore, there is a shortage of staff, and some of the workers lack the necessary qualifications to adequately meet the children's needs⁸⁸. The vulnerability of these children is exacerbated by the way in which the Russian occupation regime exposes them to public view. The so-called "ministry of social protection and labour" maintains an online catalogue of orphaned children, openly displayed on the internet, which lists 451 children⁸⁹. Their faces appear in clear, unblurred photographs, with no guarantee of personal data protection.

Preparing children for independent living also remains inadequate, and post-institutional support mechanisms are poorly developed. Access to social housing for young people leaving residential care is extremely limited, and the financial support provided, where it exists, is insufficient to ensure a decent standard of living⁹⁰. Consequently, social and professional integration after leaving the system is complicated⁹¹.

As with children with SEN, the education of orphans or children deprived of parental care is politicised. Boarding schools systematically organise "patriotic" activities that distort historical facts, promote the propaganda narratives of the occupation regime, mythologise the Soviet past and encourage early recruitment into paramilitary structures. Some of these children, as young as 3 or 4 years old, are involved in activities called "Minefield" or "Carry the Ammunition", where the game mimics war⁹². Furthermore, orphaned children are taken to military training camps and enrolled in paramilitary schools for minors.

It is imperative that the constitutional authorities formulate a clear conceptual framework regarding decisions on adoptions, guardianship and the termination of parental rights issued by the occupying bodies. This necessity stems from the fact that residents of the region are currently unable to obtain equivalent documents on the right bank of the Nistru, which affects the exercise of the rights of the children concerned. For example, in the absence of documents recognised by the constitutional authorities of the Republic of Moldova, children adopted in the region cannot be enrolled in educational institutions under the authority of Chişinău.

Another important aspect concerns the differences between the child protection systems on the two banks of the Nistru. On the right bank, there are no longer any boarding schools, as the constitutional authorities have been promoting, since 2007, the process of deinstitutionalisation of children deprived of parental care. Thus, in 2025, the last two boarding schools that remained operational only on paper were closed⁹³. Consequently, in the event of reintegration, the Republic of Moldova will take over on the left bank of the Nistru a model of residential institutions for orphaned children that it has already abandoned. Under these circumstances, Chişinău will need to prepare a transitional framework aimed at the gradual integration of the region into the national child protection system.

1.12 The situation of children in closed-type institutions

The Transnistrian region is characterised by a punitive environment towards adolescents, in which repressive measures tend to replace policies of prevention, protection and specialised support. This trend intensified in 2025, with the reduction of the age of “administrative liability” from 16 to 14 for a range of “offences” and the extension of “militia” surveillance of minors even when no “crime” has been committed, based on subjective assessments of behaviour deemed “deviant” or “immoral”⁹⁴.

At the same time, instead of measures aligned with international standards for preventing and combating violence in schools, the occupying bodies are promoting coercive solutions, such as placing children aged 14–18 in closed-type institutions and involving force structures in the educational environment⁹⁵. A 2025 survey by the “ministry of education” in Tiraspol, conducted on a sample of 9,000 people, indicates that 65% of school pupils and 87% of students have been victims of bullying, and 30% reported bullying by teaching staff⁹⁶. Another survey, conducted in 2026 on a sample of 6,496 school pupils and 3,298 university students, shows that 62.3% of school pupils and 45.1% of university students have faced situations of harassment. Of the respondents who reported such experiences, 47.6% indicated that the acts of harassment were committed by teachers⁹⁷.

There are two closed-type institutions for minors operating in the region:

- ▶ The “A. S. Makarenko” Educational Complex, under the control of the “ministry of internal affairs”, intended for children aged 11–14, including homeless children, those in at-risk situations, those whose parents are in illegal detention, or those accused of alleged anti-social behaviour. Within this facility, there is also an illegal temporary detention centre, designed to hold 25 minors³.
- ▶ The juvenile detention centre in Camenca, under the authority of the so-called “ministry of justice”, is intended for children aged 14–18.

3 The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that no so-called “MRT authority” can lawfully order detention, whilst UN standards require that the detention of minors be used only exceptionally, as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period.

The “A. S. Makarenko” closed institution was established in the late 1990s. Since then, approximately 11,000 adolescents have passed through this institution, of whom 303 were placed there on the basis of an alleged “court order”⁹⁸. Although it is publicly presented as a “re-education” school, in practice it functions as a detention centre, completely isolated from the outside world and lacking independent mechanisms for monitoring and overseeing the children’s situation. Some of the children are subsequently enrolled at the cadet school in Bender, which suggests that the institution also functions as a recruitment base for the security forces. Conditions at this institution are marked by serious systemic deficiencies, acknowledged even by the so-called “ombudsman” in Tiraspol: a lack of genuine integration into the educational process, the absence of legal and psychological support, restricted contact with family, insufficient and unqualified staff, dilapidated infrastructure, and minimal resources for socialisation and education. The situation of minors in the detention centre in Camenca, where approximately 8–10 children are placed annually, is also serious. They are deprived of effective access to education, face poor material conditions, and their correspondence is subject to censorship. The lack of an independent mechanism for monitoring and reporting abuse amplifies the risk of systemic violations of children’s rights⁹⁹.

These problems are exacerbated by the dysfunctionality of the region’s “child protection system”. Documents from the so-called “ministry of education” and the “prosecutor general’s office” describe this system as formalistic, lacking effective mechanisms for inter-institutional coordination and marked by major shortcomings in preventing situations of risk, identifying vulnerable families and providing the necessary support to children and families in difficulty^{100,101}.



Chapter 2.

The authorities' readiness for educational reintegration

The process of educational reintegration in the Transnistrian region will involve complex challenges. Some of these, however, can be anticipated and managed through measures planned in advance. A proactive approach would ensure clarity and consistency in the state's actions, reduce the risks of the post-occupation transition and create conditions for sustainable structural transformations. Educational reform, together with the reintegration of the population into the informational, linguistic and cultural space of the Republic of Moldova, will represent a decisive step towards the democratisation and liberalisation of the region and the success of the entire reintegration process. Building on these premises, this chapter analyses the current level of preparedness of the constitutional authorities for educational reintegration by examining existing measures and the limitations of the current approach.

2.1 From ad hoc measures to the need for an educational reintegration strategy

To date, the Republic of Moldova has implemented only ad hoc measures to facilitate access to education for children and young people from the Transnistrian region. These include: (i) the recognition of educational qualifications issued by educational institutions on the left bank of the Nistru River and in the municipality of Bender for the purpose of continuing studies at subsequent levels and stages, as well as for employment; (ii) the apostille certification of educational documents issued in the region for the purpose of continuing studies or employment abroad; (iii) the allocation of state-funded places in educational institutions on the right bank of the Nistru; and (iv) support for the operation of the eight schools teaching in Romanian (Latin script), which currently represent the only educational alternative to schools controlled by the occupation regime. Although important, these measures have not been integrated into a coherent public policy framework that strategically plans the reintegration of education, defines the priorities and stages of the process, and establishes clear institutional responsibilities.

Currently, there is no public policy document setting out the state's vision for the reintegration of the education system in the Transnistrian region. This finding is confirmed by the response from the MEC, which stated that it had not developed any strategies, roadmaps or other public policy documents in this area¹⁰². Furthermore, other relevant institutions, such as the Academy of Sciences of Moldova, the ANCE and the MC, indicated that they had not participated in the development of public policies regarding the reintegration of education^{103,104,105,106}.

The MEC also stated that its current approach is for "the reintegration process to occur naturally, driven by the desire of young people and parents to benefit from modern learning conditions and internationally recognised qualifications". In this context, it must be emphasised that the attractiveness of the national education system is important, but cannot replace a reintegration strategy, planned and coordinated at government level, which takes into account the realities imposed by the Russian occupation. Furthermore, this approach overlooks the need to anticipate the complex challenges associated with educational reintegration, in a context marked by a legal vacuum, Russification, and the politicisation and militarisation of education.

For its part, the BPR, the institution specialising in the Transnistrian issue, has indicated that the main elements of the strategic reintegration objective are found in the “Cohesion between the Banks” section of the Munteanu Government’s Work Programme, which, however, does not provide for the development of a strategy or policy dedicated to educational reintegration or other sectoral areas¹⁰⁷. Given that the Republic of Moldova does not yet have a comprehensive state strategy on the reintegration and protection of the rights of the population affected by the Russian occupation, this approach reveals that reintegration continues to be treated primarily at the level of general political guidelines and declarative commitments, rather than as a structured public policy supported by its own strategic framework. Such a framework should, essentially, include a clear vision for the reintegration of the parallel systems established by the occupation structures, including the education system.

In this context, 34 years after the establishment of the Russian military occupation in the Transnistrian region, the authorities’ preparedness to manage the reintegration of education, the transition period and the effects of the prolonged occupation remains low. It is unclear, for example, how the transition from a Russified, militarised and politicised education system to one based on democratic values and anchored in unified national spaces is to be achieved. Furthermore, key issues remain unaddressed, such as: the future of the four paramilitary educational institutions; the accountability of teaching staff involved in the ideologisation and militarisation of education; the redeployment of teaching staff; curriculum reform; the management of documents issued under occupation; the registration of orphaned children; and the cognitive de-occupation of the population. In the absence of a vision and strategic planning, the post-occupation transition risks being marked by inconsistency and institutional chaos, which would weaken the state’s ability to respond effectively to the challenges and risks associated with reintegration.

2.2 Deficiencies in the institutional architecture

The low level of preparedness for reintegration in education is closely linked to deficiencies in the institutional architecture. The central problem lies in the absence of clear institutional responsibility for the development of sectoral reintegration policies in the field of education. Currently, there is no institution explicitly designated to lead this process, and the lack of a clear mandate significantly reduces the likelihood of progress in this direction.

According to the MEC, its role in relation to the Transnistrian region is mainly limited to three areas: (i) ensuring the functioning of the eight educational institutions under the Ministry’s authority, (ii) recognising educational qualifications issued in the region; and (iii) facilitating access for young people from the region to the Baccalaureate exams and admission to higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, the MEC indicated that the BPR remains the institution mandated to coordinate, at national level, reintegration policies, including actions relating to the field of education¹⁰⁸.

Although the BPR is responsible for facilitating and coordinating the development of reintegration policies¹⁰⁹, it lacks the mandate and institutional capacity required to develop complex sectoral policies in the field of education, nor can it replace the sectoral expertise of the ministries. The BPR is a subdivision of the State Chancellery, with an insufficient and understaffed structure (limited human resources and a lack of robust analytical and strategic planning capacities) to carry out all its responsibilities. The limitations of the BPR and other components of the institutional framework for reintegration are analysed in detail in the White Paper “Moldova’s preparations for the reintegration of the Transnistrian region in terms of justice and victims’ rights – an assessment of institutional preparedness”.

Another problematic issue concerns the lack of specialised units within key institutions, such as the MEC and the MC, with explicit responsibilities for preparing the educational, linguistic, cultural and informational reintegration of the population in the Transnistrian

region. Currently, these institutions treat the issue as a cross-cutting responsibility, distributed among sub-units that already manage complex areas relating to the territory controlled by the constitutional authorities. Such an approach does not ensure a clear strategic direction, dedicated resources and sufficient institutional capacity to prepare for the post-occupation transition and reintegration process.

According to the MC's response, certain aspects relating to the Transnistrian region are managed by various departments, depending on their area of competence. At the same time, the MC stated that it had not, by internal order, appointed a State Secretary or a senior civil servant responsible for Transnistrian issues, as provided for in Government Decision No. 545/2016 on the appointment of civil servants responsible for Transnistrian issues¹¹⁰. Furthermore, the MC does not have a formalised mechanism for internal coordination in this area. As regards the MEC, the institution indicated that, by Order No. 794/2025, individuals were designated to be responsible for matters concerning the Transnistrian region, both at a technical level, within the Directorate for General Education Management, and at the level of State Secretary.

The appointment of civil servants within the ministries as focal points may facilitate institutional communication and participation in working groups between Chişinău and Tiraspol, but cannot ensure progress in the process of planning and preparing for educational reintegration. In the case of both the MEC and the MC, the current approach involves assigning additional tasks to officials or sub-units that already manage complex portfolios concerning the territory under the control of the constitutional authorities and the European integration process. Furthermore, in the absence of a public policy framework regarding the temporarily occupied territory and the protection of population living there, as well as a consolidated institutional architecture with clearly defined responsibilities, this format does not provide strategic direction and cannot ensure progress in preparations for reintegration.

These shortcomings are exacerbated by the lack of an inter-institutional coordination mechanism. To date, no working group has been established to bring together all relevant institutions and agencies to plan and coordinate the development of educational reintegration policies. However, reintegration is a complex, interconnected and multidimensional process that cannot be planned by a single institution, nor managed in a fragmented manner by different entities, in the absence of clear mechanisms for coordination, synchronisation and shared responsibility. This need has been explicitly recognised by the MEC, which has indicated that the drafting of a public policy document dedicated to educational reintegration would require extensive coordination at government level, given its cross-sectoral and politically sensitive nature. At the same time, it is important to note that the working group on education between Chişinău and Tiraspol is not a platform for preparing educational reintegration. It is merely a mechanism for technical dialogue between specialists on both banks of the Nistru and cannot replace an inter-institutional working group of constitutional authorities.

At the same time, there is also a lack of a multidisciplinary consultative platform, established at the level of the Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration or within another governmental or parliamentary platform. Such a format would allow for the involvement of academia, research centres, think tanks, civil society and experts from within the country and abroad in shaping proposals for strategic approaches. At the same time, it would contribute to deepening the debate on the Transnistrian issue and to harnessing external expertise.

2.3 Key areas for strategic intervention

Although the state does not currently exercise effective control over the Transnistrian region, it has instruments for intervention within the territory under its control. The authorities can develop measures specifically for children and young people in the region and prepare

society as a whole for a process of gradual reintegration. Educational reintegration should not be treated solely as a stage following the restoration of constitutional control, but as a process that can be planned and initiated in advance. Based on this premise, the main areas of intervention relevant to preparing for educational reintegration are analysed below.

Education for reintegration

Preparing society for reintegration must constitute a distinct strategic direction of public policy. After three decades of forced separation, reintegration cannot be treated solely as an administrative or political process, but requires the formation of a lasting public consensus on the restoration of constitutional control over the Transnistrian region. From this perspective, the education system plays a vital role in fostering a clear understanding of the causes of the Moldovan-Russian war, the effects of the Russian occupation and the importance of reintegration.

Currently, the Republic of Moldova lacks an educational and remembrance framework dedicated to preparing society for reintegration. The national curriculum does not address the situation in the temporarily occupied territory, the effects of the post-1992 Russian occupation, or the strategic objective of reintegration. This gap is confirmed by the responses from the relevant institutions. The MEC has explicitly stated that there are no school programmes or subjects dedicated to the reintegration of the Transnistrian region, and the ANCE has reported that there are no methodological guidelines or teaching materials dedicated to this topic.

At the same time, recent initiatives by the MEC show that there is an institutional foundation that can be built upon. The organisation of the “Month of Remembrance and Gratitude” in 2025 and the “Decade of Remembrance and Gratitude” in 2026 represents a relevant tool for strengthening collective memory regarding the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war. These initiatives can be used as a starting point for developing a broader educational framework, aimed at linking the memory of the war with an analysis of the effects of the Russian occupation and with preparing society for reintegration.

The need for such a framework is also confirmed by an analysis of the “History of the Romanians and World History” textbooks, which reveals that the subject of the Russian military occupation is covered in just four pages and is limited to the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war. The textbooks do not explain developments in the Transnistrian region over the last three decades, the control mechanisms exercised through the occupation structures, the impact on human rights, and the relevance of reintegration for the security and democratic and European development of the Republic of Moldova. This approach contrasts sharply with the way the 1992 war is portrayed in the educational materials used in the temporarily occupied territory. The table below illustrates not only the quantitative disparity in content but also the differences in interpretation.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of the portrayal of the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war in school textbooks on both sides of the Nistru

The country's controlled territory	Temporarily occupied territory
<p>The subject is covered in just four pages. Key events and stages of the war are presented succinctly, without a monthly timeline.</p> <p>The 1992 war is presented as a war to defend the independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova.</p> <p>The parties to the war are presented as the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation, with Russia considered a directly involved party.</p> <p>Russia is described as a key factor in the escalation, motivated by imperial and geopolitical interests.</p> <p>The entities on the left bank are labelled as illegal and separatist, and the proclamation of the so-called "MRT" is described as unconstitutional.</p>	<p>The subject is covered in almost 150 pages, of which 100 are devoted to the background to the war and 50 to the events of 1992 themselves. The events are presented in detail, month by month, with names, episodes, extensive accounts and an emphasis on military operations.</p> <p>The war is presented as "armed aggression by Moldova" against Transnistria. The terminology used suggests that Chişinău attacked first, and that the region was the victim of an external attack.</p> <p>The war is placed in the context of the formation of a separate "Pridnestrovian identity" and "statehood", presented as a natural development.</p> <p>The parties to the war are presented as Moldova and Transnistria, whilst Russia is described as a "peacemaker".</p> <p>The region is referred to as a "republic", "state" or "the Transnistrian side".</p>

Source: Diez.md, [2026](#)

These differences underscore the need for a distinct educational framework for reintegration. This should include a more comprehensive analysis of the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war in history textbooks, the integration of the topic of integration and the post-1992 realities of the temporarily occupied territory into the curriculum, the development of teaching materials and methodological guides, teacher training, the organisation of educational activities in schools and communities, as well as support for interdisciplinary research on reintegration. For the purposes of this document, the concept of education for reintegration is formulated with reference to the South Korean model of "*unification education*", which provides a relevant benchmark. This model aims to foster the values, attitudes and skills necessary for reunification, to strengthen the sense of belonging to the same national community, to develop a culture of civic engagement and national security, and to increase society's readiness for unification at all levels¹¹. The South Korean model is also relevant in terms of how education for unification is implemented. The government has developed dedicated educational materials, such as the textbooks "Understanding Korean Unification" and "Understanding North Korea", and has utilised complementary dissemination tools, such as television, YouTube channels, video materials produced in partnership with other stakeholders, and immersive technologies. This practice indicates that education for reunification must be conceived as a multidimensional public intervention, encompassing curricular, extracurricular, digital and strategic communication components, rather than a measure limited to the formal curriculum.

In addition to interventions in the education system, preparing society for reintegration requires the development of a memory policy, which is currently lacking. When asked about the promotion of collective memory regarding the effects of the Russian occupation in the Transnistrian region, the MC referred to the “Action Plan 2025–2028 for the promotion of a culture of remembrance for the victims of political repression committed by the totalitarian communist regime between 1917 and 1989”. However, this instrument covers the memory of the Soviet occupation and communist repressions, but not the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war or the post-1992 Russian occupation. Consequently, a distinct memory policy is required, aligned with the objective of reintegration, which will contribute, in the medium and long term, to the process of cognitive de-occupation.

The absence of education for reintegration and of a memory policy maintains a low level of public awareness regarding the realities in the Transnistrian region and the relevance of reintegration for national security. This problem is reflected in the results of the Public Opinion Barometer from September 2025. When asked “What are the three most important issues that need to be resolved in the Republic of Moldova?”, only 9.4% of respondents included the restoration of the country’s territorial integrity/resolution of the Transnistrian issue among the top three national priorities. Of these, 4% cited this issue as their top priority, 3.1% placed it second, and 2.3% third. In the overall ranking of the 12 issues mentioned in the survey, territorial integrity ranked tenth¹¹².

This low level of awareness is also reflected in how the population perceives responsibility for human rights violations in the region. According to the sociological study “Citizens’ perceptions of the quality of elections and the functioning of democratic processes in the Republic of Moldova”, conducted between 22 February and 12 March 2026 on a sample of 1,226 respondents, 33.7% of participants believe that the main responsibility lies with the occupation regime in Tiraspol, whilst 31.2% point to the constitutional authorities of the Republic of Moldova. Only 11.9% point to the Russian Federation, although it bears direct responsibility for human rights violations in the Transnistrian region, including through its illegal military presence and control over the unlawful Transnistrian bodies. At the same time, 18% of respondents were unable to identify the responsible actor¹¹³.

Educational and civic integration of young people from the Transnistrian region

Another important area for preparing for reintegration concerns the integration of young people from the Transnistrian region who choose to continue their studies on the right bank of the Nistru. In 2025, 856 young people from the region benefited from state-funded places in educational institutions on the right bank: 511 places in higher education and 345 in technical vocational education. At the same time, 270 young people were enrolled in the compensatory study year, a programme designed for 11th-grade graduates from the Transnistrian region, which provides them with additional preparation to sit the baccalaureate exams in accordance with national standards¹¹⁴.

Although these measures facilitate access for young people from the Transnistrian region to the national education system, they are not complemented by institutionalised programmes for academic, social, cultural and civic accommodation and integration, specifically tailored to the needs and particularities of this group. Responses from universities indicate that students from the temporarily occupied territory are treated equally with other students and integrated into the general activities of the institutions¹¹⁵. The MEC has, in turn, confirmed that their integration is achieved primarily through educational programmes and institutional activities intended for all students. A similar approach is also found in technical and vocational education, where there are no specific measures for students from the occupied territory.

However, this approach overlooks the fact that young people from the region have been educated within a profoundly different educational and informational system, which has kept them disconnected from the rest of the country. Under these circumstances, their

integration cannot be limited to inclusion in the general programmes of educational institutions. The authorities must develop dedicated interventions for the educational and civic integration of these young people. These should include familiarisation with the recent history of the Republic of Moldova, the legal foundations of the state, the functioning of public institutions, citizens' rights and obligations, media literacy, countering propaganda narratives about the Republic of Moldova and the Euro-Atlantic community, as well as an understanding of the Republic of Moldova's European path.

Such an intervention is important not only for the individual adaptation of young people, but also for preparing the reintegration process. Young people can be not only beneficiaries of reintegration, but also active promoters and future ambassadors of this endeavour. In the absence of dedicated programmes, the state risks failing to fully capitalise on this strategic opportunity.

A distinct component of educational integration must focus on proactively informing young people in the temporarily occupied territory about the opportunities available on the right bank of the Nistru. This intervention is necessary because access to information about the national institutional framework and the opportunities offered by the constitutional authorities is limited and fragmented. In this regard, public authorities must develop strategic and targeted communication, tailored to this group, to ensure rapid access to clear and verified information. Consistent and accessible information can help build trust and facilitate young people's effective access to existing opportunities.

Currently, the websites of the BPR and the MEC do not include separate sections dedicated to young people in the temporarily occupied territory, which would centralise answers to frequently asked questions, clear information on applicable procedures and relevant educational opportunities. In the case of the BPR, the "Useful Information" section focuses predominantly on the Transnistrian settlement process, without addressing the practical needs of citizens in the region. A model of good practice is the website of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, which includes a section dedicated to people in the occupied territories and internally displaced persons.

Figure 13. Example of a section dedicated to informing the target audience in the occupied territories on the official website of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine



Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, [2026](#)

Access to Romanian language learning and cultural resources

The integration of children and young people from the Transnistrian region depends directly on access to Romanian language learning and to cultural products and services in Romanian. Although interest in studying the Romanian language has grown in recent years, the opportunities available remain limited, particularly for children. A relevant indicator is the National Programme for the Study of the Romanian Language, launched in 2023 and aimed exclusively at adults. In 2024, the municipality of Tiraspol ranked fourth nationally in terms of the number of applications submitted (622). In 2026, 1,200 people from the Transnistrian region enrolled in the programme, representing 18.6% of the total number of applications nationwide¹¹⁶.

Interest in Romanian-language education is also evident among families with children. Over the past five years, the number of pupils in the eight Romanian-language schools under the jurisdiction of Chişinău has risen steadily, despite pressure from the occupying authorities. In September 2025, for the first time in the last 15 years, the total number of pupils enrolled in these institutions exceeded the 2,000 mark. Although the increase is modest in absolute terms, it is significant in the context of the region's sharp demographic decline and the restrictive, hostile and unpredictable environment in which these institutions operate.

Schools teaching in Romanian can serve as bridges between the national education system and children in the Transnistrian region. However, given their limited capacity, these institutions cannot, on their own, ensure widespread access to Romanian language learning for children in the region. For this reason, a broader intervention is required, such as the establishment of a national programme for the study of the Romanian language aimed at children in the region. The programme could be implemented with the support of these institutions, but also through digital platforms and other flexible educational formats. Such a programme, designed for the medium and long term, would facilitate the integration of generations raised exclusively under Russian military occupation into the educational, cultural and linguistic sphere of the Republic of Moldova.

This proposal is all the more relevant in the context of the amendments made to the Education Code at the beginning of 2026¹¹⁷, which provide for access to Romanian language programmes for children returning from the diaspora and for the children of foreign nationals. Extending these measures to children in the Transnistrian region, including non-native speakers enrolled in Romanian-language schools, is necessary because language support is an essential condition for educational inclusion. In 2024, 186 non-native speakers of Romanian, who were native speakers of Russian, were enrolled in the eight Romanian-language schools, and their linguistic integration depended largely on the individual efforts of the teaching staff¹¹⁸.

In this context, a few clarifications are needed regarding Chişinău's proposal, formulated on 26 February 2026 and reiterated on 16 April 2026, during the 1+1 format meetings between political representatives in the negotiation process, regarding the transition of the 25 schools teaching in Romanian using the Cyrillic script to the Latin script, starting from 1 September 2026. According to the BPR's response, at this stage Chişinău's objective is to obtain guarantees that Tiraspol will not block this process, with the details of the transition to be developed subsequently, in coordination with the MEC¹¹⁹. This approach indicates that the proposal was formulated at a political and negotiating level, but is not currently supported by a clear operational concept. Thus, there is as yet no action plan, roadmap or any other public policy document to underpin the transition of these institutions to the Latin script from 1 September 2026. In the absence of such a framework, key elements of the process remain unclear, including the need for teaching staff, the adaptation of the curriculum, the development and distribution of textbooks and teaching materials, the preparation of pupils and teachers for the transition, as well as the estimation of the necessary financial, logistical and administrative resources.

In addition to language support measures, the integration of children and young people from the Transnistrian region also requires access to cultural resources in Romanian. In its response, the MC indicated its intention to expand the promotion of the national “Cultural Voucher” programme, aimed at young people who have turned 18, including through the MEC’s channels, in order to reach a larger number of beneficiaries on the left bank of the Nistru. A similar position was also communicated in 2024¹²⁰. However, given the information isolation and the high level of Russification of the cultural environment in the region, this instrument should be extended to broader categories of children, following the model of “Culture Pass”-type mechanisms applied in other European countries, such as France and Slovakia^{121,122}. Such a measure would enable the gradual integration of children in the region into the national cultural sphere and would support the strategic objective of reintegration.

Chapter 3.

The Way Forward

The current geopolitical context has brought the reintegration of the Transnistrian region back onto the public agenda. The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova's rapprochement with the European Union, the energy and economic crises in the region, and its growing dependence on the national and European markets create conditions that differ from previous periods. However, the authorities remain ill-prepared to manage a potential reintegration process and the effects of the Russian occupation. In the absence of prior preparation, the processes of de-occupation, demilitarisation, decriminalisation and democratisation of the region risk not being managed coherently and effectively. The institutional response must focus on risk anticipation, the development of action scenarios and the building of the necessary capacities for the formulation, coordination and implementation of sectoral reintegration policies.

Building on the vulnerabilities analysed above, the White Paper proposes a set of recommendations addressed to the relevant institutions, which can contribute to a structured approach to preparing for educational reintegration.

The Government of the Republic of Moldova

- ▶ To initiate, as a starting point, an assessment of the institutional architecture of reintegration, to obtain a clear diagnosis of legislative gaps, mandate deficiencies, gaps in accountability between institutions, inter-institutional coordination bottlenecks, and shortages of resources and capacities for analysis and strategic planning. The results of the assessment should inform concrete institutional strengthening measures, necessary for preparing for reintegration across sectoral areas and managing the consequences of the Russian occupation.
- ▶ To establish an inter-institutional working group on preparing for educational reintegration, bringing together the competent institutions in the fields of education, culture, reintegration, child protection, human rights and strategic communication. Its mandate should include analysing problems, identifying policy options and formulating preliminary courses of action.
- ▶ To examine the feasibility of establishing a consultative platform on reintegration, involving academia, civil society and independent experts, to contribute to deepening public debate on the reintegration process and to harnessing external expertise.
- ▶ To include on the Government's official website, for example in the "Useful Information" section of the Bureau for reintegration policies, centralised information on the educational opportunities available to residents of the Transnistrian region.

Ministry of Education and Research

- ▶ To initiate the development, in coordination with relevant institutional actors, of a national framework for education for reintegration, aimed at preparing society for this process by strengthening collective memory regarding the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war, developing knowledge about the effects of the post-1992 Russian occupation, and fostering informational resilience.

- ▶ To launch a Romanian language learning programme for children in the Transnistrian region, which could be implemented with the support of Romanian-language schools in the region, via digital platforms or other flexible educational formats.
- ▶ To provide language support measures for non-native-speaking pupils in the eight Romanian-language schools in the Transnistrian region, to facilitate their educational integration and full participation in the learning process.
- ▶ To launch a separate programme for the integration and accommodation of students from the Transnistrian region, which could include introductory modules on the history of the Republic of Moldova, the legal foundations of the state, national culture and the country's European path. Such a programme could also incorporate a cognitive de-occupation component, focusing on the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war and the effects of the post-1992 Russian military occupation, to address these young people's prolonged exposure to systematic propaganda and information isolation.
- ▶ To include on the institution's website a section dedicated to young people from the temporarily occupied territory, which would centralise relevant information regarding the programmes and opportunities offered by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the procedures applicable to this category, and answers to frequently asked questions, to facilitate quick and clear access to information.

Ministry of Culture

- ▶ To appoint, by internal order, a State Secretary and a senior civil servant responsible for Transnistrian issues, in accordance with the provisions of Government Decision No. 545/2016.
- ▶ To develop a distinct remembrance policy regarding the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war and the subsequent Russian occupation, aimed at fostering knowledge based on historical facts about the war, the effects of the occupation and the post-1992 realities in the Transnistrian region, as well as at strengthening public understanding of the reintegration process.
- ▶ To initiate a platform for inter-institutional discussion and consultation, including the participation of the academic community and civil society, on the opportunity to develop a cognitive de-occupation strategy as part of the process of political, informational, civic and cognitive reintegration of the population in the Transnistrian region.
- ▶ To promote the "Cultural Voucher" programme among the target audience in the Transnistrian region, using all available communication channels.
- ▶ To examine the possibility of launching a separate cultural voucher scheme aimed at children of various ages in the Transnistrian region, including those enrolled in the eight Romanian-language educational institutions, in order to facilitate their access to cultural products and services in Romanian.
- ▶ To support cultural initiatives, projects and products that address reintegration, the memory of the 1992 Moldovan-Russian war and the effects of the Russian military occupation.

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