

<https://doi.org/10.52326/csd2022.25>

TRENDS AND PECULIARITIES OF RURAL DEPOPULATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Olga SÂRBU¹, *PhD., Assoc. prof.*

ORCID: 0000-0001-6333-0101

Cornel COȘER², *PhD., Univ.lect.*

¹*Technical University of Moldova, bl. Stefan cel Mare, 168, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova*

²*Technical University of Moldova, bl. Stefan cel Mare, 168, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova*

Abstract: In recent decades, the Republic of Moldova has registered a continuous process of population reduction, especially the rural population. The factors that led to rural depopulation are multiple, the main ones being: negative natural growth, population aging, youth migration, poorly developed infrastructure, low incomes, etc. The changes that have occurred recently are not enough to stop the process of rural depopulation. The policies promoted by the state are not coherent, and the change in demographic trends represent lasting problems, a fact that proves that we cannot expect radical changes in the coming years. The policies promoted by the state are not coherent, and the change in demographic trends represent lasting problems, a fact that proves to us that in the coming years we cannot expect radical changes.

Keywords: demography, population, depopulation, rural.

JEL classification: R23

Currently, the problems related to rural development in the Republic of Moldova are becoming more and more prominent and require a multilateral approach. Rural development implies a balanced development between the tendency to preserve the rural space from an economic, social and cultural point of view and that of the modernization of rural life. Thus, rural development faces the tendency of urban expansion, industrial development at the expense of the rural environment and the requirement to maintain the countryside at its current dimensions [1].

The demographic dimension of rural areas involves the analysis of the population as the main factor of action, as well as as a consumption factor, being a beneficiary of development. From this point of view, the evolution of the population is one of the most important topics regarding the rural area.

The population census, according to its dimensions, is one of the largest statistical works and offers the opportunity to obtain accurate and detailed data on the number of the population, its distribution on the territory of the country, the structure of the population by sex and age, marital status, the level of her education, nationality, livelihood and occupation [2]. The last general census of the population and housing in the Republic of Moldova was carried out in 2014 and raised many controversies because its results were published three years later and not in full. This being the first one in which the 10-year term was respected compared to the previous census, according to the recommendations of the United Nations regarding the organization of censuses. As in 2004, reviewers were not allowed to carry out work on the left bank of the Dniester, where, according to estimates, almost 500 thousand inhabitants were not reviewed. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the next census is planned to be held in the Republic of Moldova in 2024. Its estimated budget would be 329.2 million lei (about 16.4 million euros), including about 36.8 million lei for the agricultural module.

After studying the results of the censuses that took place on the current territory of the Republic of Moldova (table 1), a significant increase in the number of the population was observed during the years 1970-1989, where this figure increased from 3.5 million to 4.33 million inhabitants or with 766 thousand inhabitants. After 1989, there was a decrease in the number of inhabitants, thus, in 2004 it was 3.38 million. In terms of living environment, the rural population prevailed in the Republic of Moldova, whose share exceeded 60% in the total population.

Along with the numerical evolution of the population, the ethnic composition also underwent changes, the cause being not only the migration that gained momentum at the end of the 20th century, but also the territorial-administrative changes that the Republic of Moldova underwent during the period 1812-2014 [3].

Table 1. The population of the Republic of Moldova established at the censuses

Years	Total per country, thousands of people	Urban area		Rural area	
		Population, thousands of people	Share, %	Population, thousands of people	Share, %
1970	3 569	1 130	31.6	2 439	68.4
1979	3 950	1 533	38.9	2 417	61.1
1989	4 335	2 020	46.6	2 315	53.4
2004	3 384	1 306	38.6	2 078	61.4
2014	2 805	951	33.9	1 854	66.1

Note: 1970, 1979, 1989 - including the population on the left side of the Dniester and Bender municipality, 2004, 2014 - without the population on the left side of the Dniester and Bender municipality

Source: Prepared by the author based on data provided by the Statistical Data Bank, available online on [20]

The population of the Republic of Moldova has continuously decreased in the last nine years, from 2.869 million people in 2014 to 2.603 million in 2022, the depopulation of the country constituting 265.5 thousand people or 9.3%. The number of the urban population decreased by 34.6 thousand people or 3.1%. The number of the rural population decreased the most - by 230.9 thousand people or 13.4%. However, Moldova remains the most rural state on the European continent, with 58% of the rural population.

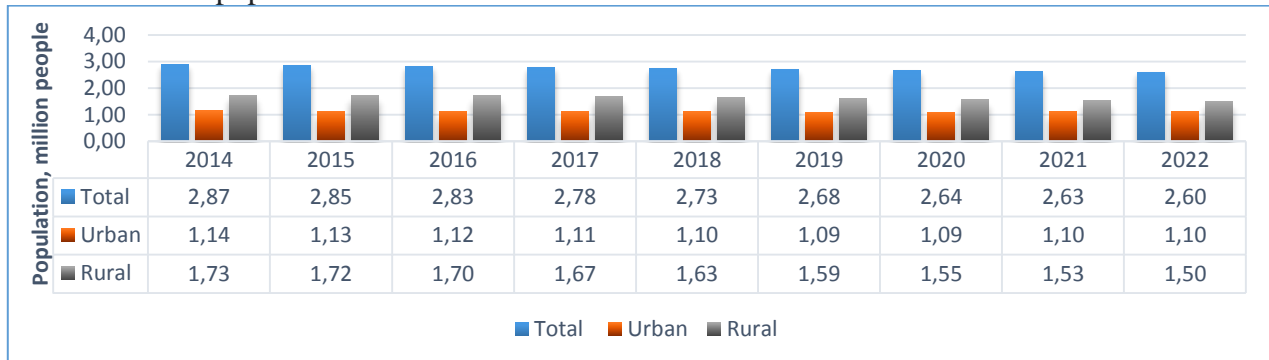


Figure 1. Number of the population with usual residence on average, at the beginning of the years 2014-2022

Source: Prepared by the author based on data provided by the Statistical Data Bank, available online on https://statbank.statistica.md/PxWeb/pxweb/ro/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice__POP__POP010/POP011300.px/?rxid=9a62a0d7-86c4-45da-b7e4-fecc260038

The reduction of the rural population, in recent decades, has become a normal phenomenon, designated in all countries [4]. In the Republic of Moldova, however, the rates of population reduction have exceeded the minimum limits of the demographic system and produce changes in the demographic balance. The main reasons are the increase in infertility rates, mortality, especially among men, and the migration of young people of reproductive age.

At the same time, according to NBS data, in 2021, 29,230 people were born, decreasing by 1,604 children or by 5.2% compared to 2020. Of the number of children born alive, 51.6% were boys, the male ratio being 106 boys to 100 girls.

In 2021, 11,838 children were born in urban areas (or 40.5% of total live births) and in rural areas – 17,392 live births (making up 59.5% of total live births). Thus, by residence, the number of live births in the year 2021 in the urban environment was 31.9% more or 5554 children compared to the rural one. At the same time, the share of first-rate live births in the total number of live births in rural areas was 32.0%, with 1.3 p.p. higher than that in the urban environment (30.7%) (Figure 2).

Also, in the cities, a smaller proportion of families with four or more children is observed, the majority of children born in these families returning to mothers from the countryside. Thus, of the total of 2527 live births of rank IV and above, 77.3% were born in rural areas.

In 2021, the average age of the mother at the first birth was 25.1 years, remaining constant compared to 2020. In this context, the cousins presents the analysis of the average age of the mother at the first birth depending on the area of residence. Thus, rural mothers give birth at a younger age (23.8 years) than urban mothers (27.1 years).

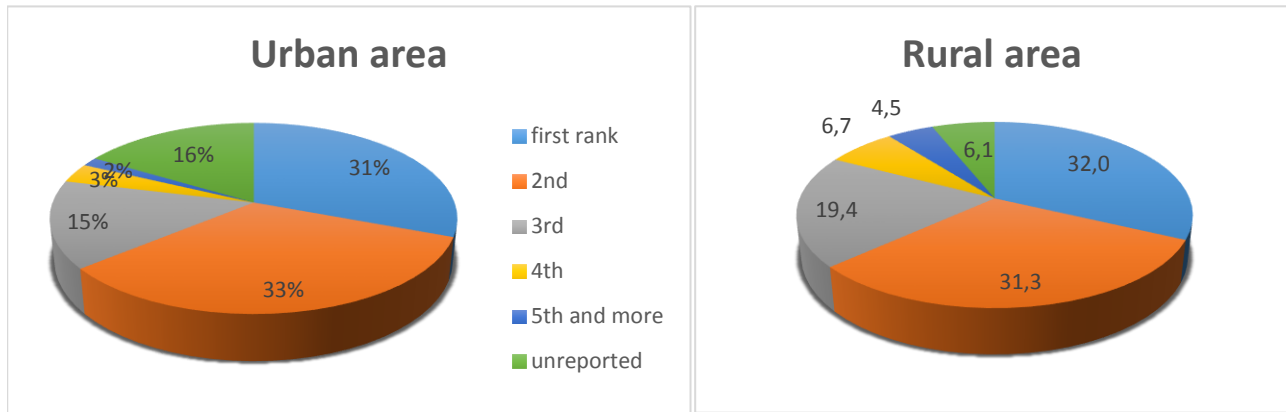


Figure 2. Share of live births by rank and place of residence in 2021, %

Source: Prepared by the author based on data provided by the Statistical Data Bank, available online on https://statbank.statistica.md/PxWeb/pxweb/ro/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice__POP__POP010/POP011300.px/?rxid=9a62a0d7-86c4-45da-b7e4-fecc260038

Significant differences in this chapter are also registered in the territorial profile. Thus, the mothers who gave birth at a younger age are those from the Center and South region (24.1 years), and at district level in Călărași and Șoldănești, the average age at first birth recorded the value of 22.8 years, and the mothers who gave birth at an older age are those from the municipality of Chisinau (28.2 years). At the same time, in Basarabasca, Balti municipality and Chisinau municipality, the average age of the mother was more than the average value of the indicator for the country (25.1 years).

The natural growth of the population of the Republic of Moldova during the last two decades is negatively determined by the fact that fewer people were born than died. Only in 2021, the number of those who died exceeded the number of those born by 16.2 thousand. However, during the period 2014-2019, the natural increase of the population in urban areas was positive, but from 2020 it decreases from year to year. At the same time, the continuous natural decrease of the population was attested in the rural environment throughout the analyzed period.

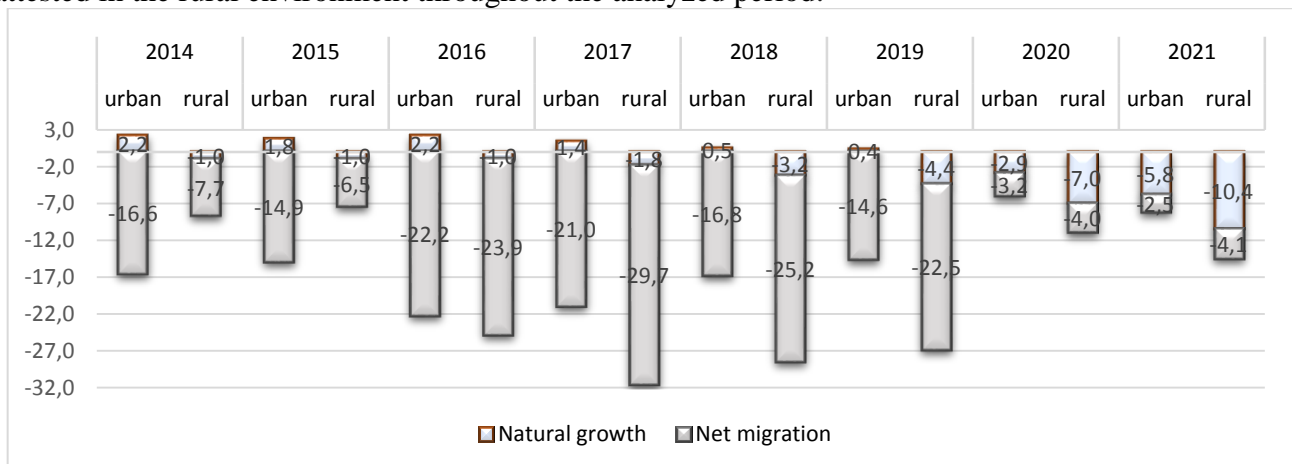


Figure 3. Dynamics of natural increase and net migration of the population on average, years 2014-2021, thousands of people

Source: Prepared by the author based on data provided by the Statistical Data Bank, available online on https://statbank.statistica.md/pxweb/pxweb/ro/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice__POPrec__POP020/?rxid=b2ff27d7-0b96-43c9-934b-42e1a2a9a774

Population reduction is also determined by external migration. The data in Figure 3 show a considerable increase in negative net migration in the rural environment from 7.7 thousand people in 2014 to 22.5 thousand people in 2019, the maximum value being recorded in 2017, reaching a negative net migration of 29.7 thousand people. The city of Chisinau, the districts of Ialoveni, Cahul, Hâncești and Orhei were the most affected by international migration, and the least - Găgăuzia, Taraclia, Dondușeni and Râșcani. Most of those who go abroad are young.

Also, internal migration has intensified recently, which includes 13,200 people in 2021. The data show an increase of 10% in the municipality of Chisinau and 5% in Bălți and minus 8% at the opposite pole - in Telenești. At the same time, there are other districts that are losing their population due to internal migration: Hâncești (-0.6 thousand people), Ștefan Vodă, Fălești, Florești and Ungheni (-0.6 thousand people).

The negative natural growth, which has intensified in the last three years, external migration and internal migration are depopulating the districts. And the share of Moldovans in the world has decreased dramatically in recent years. From independence until now - 1.6 times. In 1991 we represented 0.08% of the world's population, and in 2021 - 0.05%.

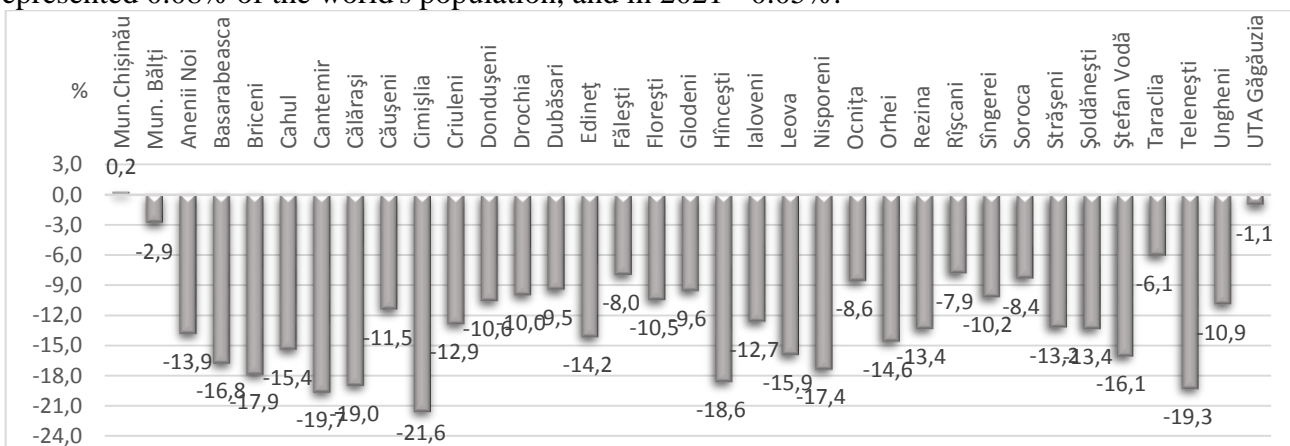


Figure 4. Change (increase +, decrease-) in the number of the population with usual residence in 2022 compared to 2014, in territorial profile

Source: Prepared by the author based on data provided by the Statistical Data Bank, available online on https://statbank.statistica.md/PxWeb/pxweb/ro/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice__POP__POP010/POP011300.px/?rxid=9a62a0d7-86c4-45da-b7e4-fecc260038

Depopulation trends are typical for all level II administrative-territorial units. The biggest losses in the number of population were registered in the districts: Cimișlia (by -22%), Cantemir (by -20%), Călărași, Telenești, Hâncești (-19% each), Briceni and Nisporeni (about -18%). The demographic processes, which took place in the period 2014-2021 to a lesser extent, influenced the decrease of the population, namely in the municipality of Bălți (-2.9%) and UTA Gagauzia (-1.1%).

However, the depopulation of the villages was done by going outside the country, not inside the country. Of course, the negative trends do not stop there, and the most worrying ones are related to the aging of the population, since the demographic aging index has increased, and so has the average age. The share of people aged over 60 is continuously increasing. In the Republic of Moldova, at the beginning of 2022, 593.0 thousand people aged 60 and over lived, which is 22.8% of the total population with usual residence. In the last five years, the share of the elderly in the 70-74 age group increased the most - by 8.4 p.p. (from 12.3% at the beginning of 2018 to 20.7% at the beginning of 2022). At the beginning of 2022, the population aging rate was 22.8%, which corresponds to a high level of demographic aging. Compared to the beginning of 2018, it registered an increase of 2.8 percentage points. In 2021, of all households, 41.0% had at least one person aged 60 and over, of which 74.6% were households made up only of the elderly, and the rest of the households also had other people in their composition . Of the total households consisting only of the elderly, 66.2% lived in rural areas and 33.8% in urban areas, respectively.

Another factor that contributes to rural depopulation is low incomes [4]. Thus, the average monthly incomes of the urban population in 2021 were on average 1324.0 lei or 1.4 times higher

compared to the incomes of the rural population. For households in rural areas, as in urban areas, the most important source of income is salary activity - 40.0% of total income, but its share is 22.1 percentage points lower than in urban areas. At the same time, the incomes obtained from the individual agricultural activity ensured 15.3% of the total available incomes. It is necessary to note that the rural population is more dependent on transfers from outside the country compared to urban ones, the share of these incomes being 15.4% in rural areas and 9.5% respectively in the case of the urban population. Apart from this, the rural population is also characterized by a higher contribution of social benefits - 20.9% of total income, compared to 16.0% in the urban environment.

Another aspect concerns the structure of consumption, which also varies depending on the environment of residence [5]. The analysis of the structure of expenses in the rural environment shows us the difficulty of subsistence in the country, where 44% of the structure of consumption expenses per inhabitant in the rural environment is spent on meeting basic food needs, while in the urban environment they occupy only 37%. The quality of food consumption also makes a difference. In the countryside, they mainly consume flour products, having a deficit of meat, eggs and dairy products. For recreation, those from the rural environment allocate only 1.4% compared to the urban where the weight reaches 4.3%. For studies in the rural environment, 0.7% is allocated, while in the urban environment, twice as much (1.6%).

Rural depopulation is also determined by living conditions. If in terms of the area belonging to a member of the household, the rural environment is more privileged (32m² against 22m² in the urban environment), then in terms of quality it gives way. Cheap, low-quality and even harmful to health building materials are often used. Dwellings have a reduced energy efficiency, a poorer endowment in durable goods. According to NBS data, ¾ of the urban population has computers or other gadgets, while less than 50% of the rural population enjoys these goods. Living conditions, access to amenities in the countryside leaves much to be desired. Half of the rural homes do not have an indoor aqueduct, 70% have a garden shed, half of the rural population do not have an indoor bathroom, they do not have a sewage system, 90% of the houses are heated with stoves. Only internet and telephone access are almost at the same level.

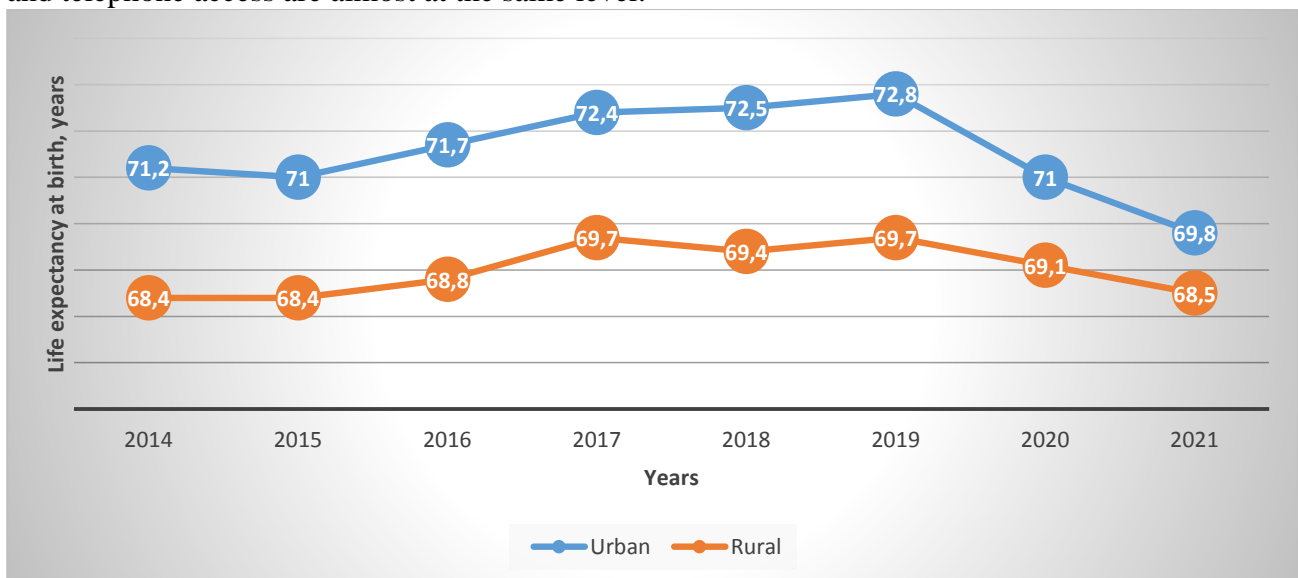


Figure 5. Life expectancy at birth by years and areas in the Republic of Moldova

Source: Prepared by the author based on data provided by the Statistical Data Bank, available online on https://statbank.statistica.md/pxweb/pxweb/ro/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice__POPrec__POP020/?rxid=b2ff27d7-0b96-43c9-934b-42e1a2a9a774

Low and unstable incomes, indecent living conditions, low-quality food consumption, health status leave their mark on the duration and hope of life. Almost 19% of rural residents consider their health to be bad or very bad, compared to 13% in urban areas. This fact is also confirmed by the life expectancy of 71.4 years in rural areas and 75.7 years in urban areas.

Life expectancy at certain ages is an important benchmark for designing policies that take the life cycle into account, such as employment policies, health policies. At the same time, life expectancy

at old ages is an indicator that reflects the influence of the living conditions of the population on the number of years a person can live [6].

Another factor contributing to rural depopulation is education. The closure of schools in villages, the need to move to neighboring villages, the bearing of additional costs for travel contribute to the creation of major discrepancies in the level of education of the urban and rural population. The data of the official statistics confirm that 54% of the rural population has secondary general, secondary and high school education. In the urban environment, however, approximately 70% of the population has secondary specialized, secondary professional or higher education. It is certain that some of these townspeople were once residents of the countryside, but preferred a higher level of education and better living conditions. In addition, in villages, where the population engages in agriculture or the provision of some not too complicated services, a high level of education is not an advantage.

The modernization and further development of the rural area depends a lot on the efficiency of the national policy of regionalization of public services and on the efforts of local public authorities for inter-community cooperation [7].

The rural area is often associated with agriculture, but it is still necessary to point out that rural is much broader and includes agriculture. Agricultural development policy must be a component part of rural development policy. The target of state policies should be rural development, and the development of agriculture should be seen as a tool to achieve this target. For this purpose, the development and valorization of human capital in the rural area must be a primary objective. State policy requires orientation towards the creation of jobs, the diversification of the economy and the economic stability of rural localities [8].

In the end, we can conclude that in the Republic of Moldova, a revision and reorientation of the demographic policy is necessary, aimed at managing the negative effects of demographic changes such as the aging of the population, the reduction of the workforce and that it contributes to the mitigation of demographic trends, which aim to increase life expectancy, reduce the gap gender in life expectancy and increasing fertility rates. The remaining of a large part of the young population in the countryside can be a decisive factor for the revitalization of the countryside, for economic diversification, for alleviating demographic imbalances. Thus, the effectiveness of the rural development policy can be reflected in the stabilization of this population segment in the rural environment, dimensioned in accordance with the natural, economic and social possibilities of each area.

References:

1. GAVRILESCU, D., FLORIAN, V. Rural Economy in Romania. Iași: Editura Terra Nostra, 2007. 288 p. ISBN 978-973-8432-77-2.
2. BODEA, Carmen. Rolul turismului în dezvoltarea rurală. Strategie de dezvoltare a turismului în Beliș, județul Cluj, România. In: Revista Transilvană de Științe Administrative. 2014, nr. 1(34), pp. 10-24. ISSN 1454-1378.
3. ZAHARCO, Silvia. Dezvoltarea rurală durabilă a Republicii Moldova în contextul integrării europene. In: Materialele conferinței „Tendințe moderne de dezvoltare economică și financiară a spațiului rural”, 27 septembrie 2012, Chișinău: UASM, pp. 71-77. ISBN 978-9975-64-235-4
4. PRISĂCARU, Veronica. Evoluția spațiului rural al Republicii Moldova prin prisma indicatorilor economici. In: Știința agricolă. 2011, nr. 1/2011, pp. 104-106. ISSN 2587-3202.
5. MIRON, Svetlana. Meșteșuguri populare tradiționale moldovenești. Chișinău: Centrul editorial-poligrafic BNRM, 2017, 168 p. ISBN 978-9975-3096-2-2.
6. RUSALI, Mirela-Adriana. Dezvoltarea economică a ruralului în România. Cluj: Editura Digital Data, 2013, 220 p. ISBN 978-973-7768-84-1.
7. CARADJA, Alina. Managementul performanței învățământului profesional agrar și impactul acestuia asupra dezvoltării durabile a mediului rural al Republicii Moldova: tz. de doct. în șt. economice. Chișinău, 2021, 130 p.
8. CHIȚIGA, Georgiana. Meșteșugurile tradiționale, antreprenoriatul în dezvoltarea spațiului rural. In: Materialele conferinței teoretico-practice internaționale „Economic growth in conditions of globalization: competitiveness, innovation, sustainability”™. 11-12 octombrie 2018, Chișinău: INCE, pp. 308-313. ISBN 978-9975-3202-8-3.
9. BNS. Banca de date. [accesat 10.10.2022]. Disponibil:
https://statbank.statistica.md/PxWeb/pxweb/ro/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice__POP__POP010/POP011300.px/?rxid=9a62a0d7-86c4-45da-b7e4-fecc260038
10. BNS. Banca de date. [accesat 10.10.2022]. Disponibil:
https://statbank.statistica.md/pxweb/pxweb/ro/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice/20%20Populatia%20si%20procesele%20demografice__POPrec__POP020/?rxid=b2ff27d7-0b96-43c9-934b-42e1a2a9a774