

### Economic situation and migration trends of Eastern Slovakia and Transcarpathian Ukraine

Koroutchev, Rossen

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# ECONOMIC SITUATION AND MIGRATION TRENDS OF EASTERN SLOVAKIA AND TRANSCARPATHIAN UKRAINE

Rossen Koroutchev

Inst. of Geography, Fac. of Science, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Slovakia  
Group of Mediterranean Studies, Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, UAM, Madrid, Spain

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1105-156X>

[rkoroutchev\[at\]yahoo.es](mailto:rkoroutchev[at]yahoo.es)

**Abstract:** *In this paper we present our research about the economic situation in Eastern Slovakia based on official data and on own surveys in the region of Rožňava. We also present our results concerning the economic situation in Uzhgorod region, Ukrainian Transcarpathia. Additionally we discuss the migration trends in Eastern Slovakia and the Ukrainian migration to this part of Slovakia, and especially the one originated from Transcarpathia. Our results with students at the Universities of Košice and Prešov show the interest of the Ukrainian young people to stay in Slovakia or to emigrate to neighboring EU countries in order to have more professional opportunities, compared to Ukraine.*

**Keywords:** *Regional Economy; Labor; Migration; Eastern Slovakia; Ukrainian Transcarpathia*



## INTRODUCTION

The annual reports concerning the Institute of Economic Research of the Slovak Academy of Sciences publishes regularly the macroeconomic trends, economic performance level, internal and external balance, economic policy, labour and financial markets development as well as measures that have changed the economic environment (Morvay 2017). Concerning Eastern Slovakia and its comparison with the rest of the country we can observe a misbalance between high real estate prices and low employment rate. Moreover, this analysis shows that the least successful region in terms of labour market improvements is the Košice region (Eastern Slovakia). Comparative studies between the Eastern part of Slovakia and the Ukrainian Transcarpathia reported for 2015 a very similar natural increase (about 2,9‰) in both regions, as well as a similar net migration (about -2‰). For the same year, the reported unemployment rate in Prešov and Košice regions was 15,5% and 14,4%, respectively, while in Transcarpathia it was lower – 10,5% (Rajčák 2015).

The research of the recent economic and social transformations of Ukraine in general and in particular those from Transcarpathia mainly concern the high migration flows. This is especially observed towards the Czech and Slovak Republics, Poland and Hungary, due to their geographic situation and proximity, as well as to their ethnic and historical evolution (Drbohlav 2016, Eröss 2016, Iglicka 2008, Jaroszewicz 2018, Fedyuk 2016). The migration from Ukraine to Hungary shows special characteristics influenced by the ethnic composition in Transcarpathia as around 70% of the migrants' have Hungarian origin (Eröss 2016). Although the number of the Ukrainian immigrants in Slovakia is lower, compared to its neighbouring countries, there are some recent ascending trends of this phenomenon due to geographical proximity, linguistic closeness and cultural similarity (Drbohlav 2016).

In this paper we focus on the economic situation in Eastern Slovakia and Ukrainian Transcarpathia and the migration phenomena between the two regions and between Ukraine and Eastern Slovakia.

## ECONOMIC SITUATION IN EASTERN SLOVAKIA

The Eastern Slovakia Region is located in the east of Slovakia (Figure 1.) and consists of two self-governing regions: the Košice Region and the Prešov Region. It has an area of 15.729 square kilometers (EC Eastern Slovakia 2018).



Figure 1. Map of Slovakia provided by Google.

Eastern Slovakia is less developed in terms of regional income, employment and wage (Datacube). Actually the income, corresponding to 2017 for the Slovak Republic in average is 764,55 Euros. For the region of Bratislava it is 1010,08 Euros, for West and Central Slovakia - 769,91 and 723,80 Euros, respectively, while for Eastern Slovakia it is 694,72 Euros (Datacube - Average gross equivalised household income (EUR per month)). The registered averaged unemployment rate for 2018 is 5,04% for the Slovak Republic in average, which is lower, 2,62% for Western Slovakia, higher for Central Slovakia – 5,52%, and the highest for Eastern Slovakia – 8.40% (Datacube 2018, Eurostat 2018). The different sectors in Eastern Slovakia are distributed as follows: 52,4% belong to the services sector, 35,3% to the industry and construction and 7,8% - to the field of professional, scientific and technical activities. (Investment guide Easy Slovakia 2019). In 2017, Eastern Slovakia concentrated 18,2% of national high-tech sector employment (20.300), which represents 3% of the total employment in Eastern Slovakia (Eurostat 2018).

In 2018, Eastern Slovakia registered a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of 10,630 Euros. The same indicator for Slovakia is 16.600 Euros, while for the neighboring countries it is as follows: Austria – 50.250 Euros, Hungary – 13.500 Euros, Poland – 16.640 Euros and Ukraine – 3.110 Euros.

Among the private industries in the region, one can cite the Košice-based U.S. Steel, dedicated to manufacture of metal, the ZTS VVU, dedicated to machinery, automation and robotics, the Spinea Prešov, dedicated to machinery, the VUKOV Extra Prešov, dedicated to automation and robotics, and the VUCHV Svit, dedicated to chemical fibers (EC Eastern Slovakia 2018).

### ***Economic Situation Perceived by Real Business Players in Eastern Slovakia (Rožňava District)***

In order to research in deep the challenges of the economic situation in Eastern Slovakia, we have performed surveys with 25 participants from the Rožňava District, which is one of the least developed districts of Eastern Slovakia. The participants were dedicated to different Business areas some of them owners of the businesses, managers or other employees at least partly responsible for business strategies. According to the different sectors, to which the participants belong, there were respectively 5, 2 and 18 from the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors.

The majority of the responders runs small business have a small number of employees, 5 are self-employers, 12 have between 1 and 5 employees, 6 - between 6 and 25 employees and finally 2 businesses have between 26 and 100 employees. The last two belong to the service sector and the agricultural one. The creation of the businesses was mainly at the beginning of years 2000, while 4 have been created at the 1990's during the transition period. 7 businesses have been created after 2010 and only one in 2018.

Regarding their opinion about the economic situation and how their business turnover changed compared to the previous year, 5 participants reported that it was negative, 9 reported that it was positive and the rest said it was the same. With respect to their plan to further develop the company, 9 participants responded negatively and the rest positively, pointing the value in today's business environment such as, for example, new production capacities being built or the manufacturing of local products and growth in general.

According to the surveys, the biggest challenges their businesses have to face is the demand for serving and purchasing power, the bullying by the administration and the competition (service sector) and the interest on locally produced goods (agriculture sector) and in general, the bureaucracy, the corruption, the financial crisis and the lack of customers, the gypsies and the competition. Almost all participants had the opinion that the bureaucracy is hindering the development of their business and insist that it should be reduced to a minimum.

Similar are the opinions of the majority of the participants regarding the lack of workforce with an adequate education or experience, which seems to be a big problem in Eastern Slovakia. The majority of the responders said that they suffer of lack of adequate workforce and they are willing to drastically increase the salaries in order to improve this situation. However, the majority of the participants were pessimistic that their business will remind competitive after this increase.

*L. 45 years old (Man): It is impossible to find good workers in the region. They don't have the necessary experience, neither education.*

Regarding the question of using workforce from abroad, all of the responders were unanimous that they are not willing to hire people from abroad, while only 4 responded that would be interested to hire workforce from Hungary because of proximity and no language gap. However, the majority of them responded positively to the question related to employing more foreigners, if the taxes and social contributions were reduced. This might be explained by the fact that hiring foreigners is related to more bureaucratic difficulties, a special selection process, linguistic and cultural differences among others.

*M. 50 years old (Man): If the bureaucracy is less, I would be interested to hire a foreigner with a suitable background to work in my business.*

Finally, making specific suggestions for improving the business environment, the participants proposed a lowering of the taxes/levies/social contributions, reduction of corruption and bureaucracy, support for the farmers and release of the finance of the EU funds, and in general, more support from the state.

### ***Economic Situation Perceived by the Local Population in Eastern Slovakia (Rožňava District)***

In order to complement our results in the Rožňava District, we have also performed surveys with 145 participants (64 men and 81 women); 26 aged between 18 and 30 years, 57 aged between 30 and 50 years, 32 aged between 50 and 65 years and the rest, 38, were above 65 years old. 27 among the participants have higher (University) education, 9 have primary education, while the rest, 109, have a secondary one.

Regarding their actual job, 19 from the 145 participants are unemployed. This in average gives about 13% of unemployment for our statistical sampling, which is greater than the average unemployment rate for Eastern Slovakia (8.40%). Additionally there are 38 participants who were retired, as well as other 38 public workers, 6 students and the rest, 44, are business owners or are working in the private sector. Regarding the question about their personal economic activity, the majority responded that they found it rather good, followed by those, who find it rather bad, while the numbers of those who find it very bad or very good are practically very few and almost equilibrated, as shown in Figure 2.

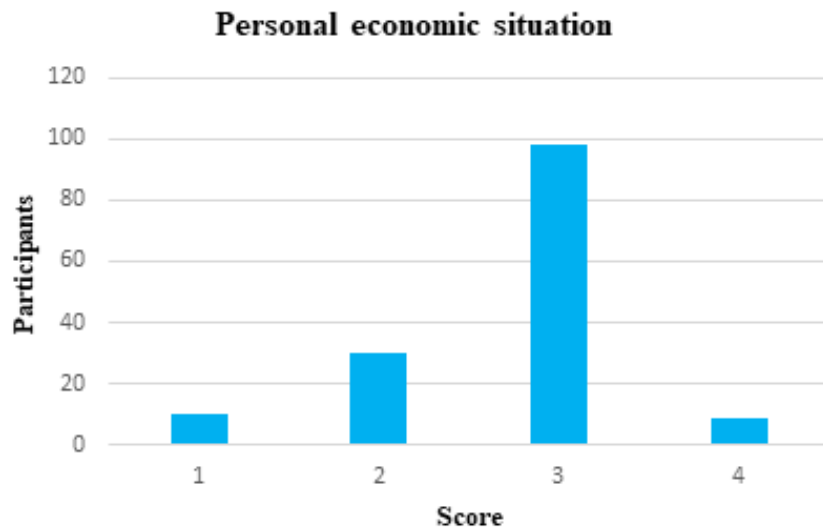


Figure 2. How do you see your personal (family) economic situation?  
(1: very bad, 2: rather bad, 3: rather good, 4: very good).

The participants see the economic situation of their municipality mainly rather good, followed by those who considered it rather bad, and bad. Only 3 responders have expressed that they consider it very good (Figure 3).



Figure 3. How do you see the economic situation of your municipality?  
(1: very bad, 2: rather bad, 3: rather good, 4: very good)

Similar results are observed concerning the question how the economic situation in general has changed during the last 10 years. Again there is the dominance of those who considered it a bit better now, followed by those, who find it a bit worse now. At the third place are the participants whose opinion is that it is much worse now, and finally only 5 participants expressed their opinion that it has been much better now (Figure 4).

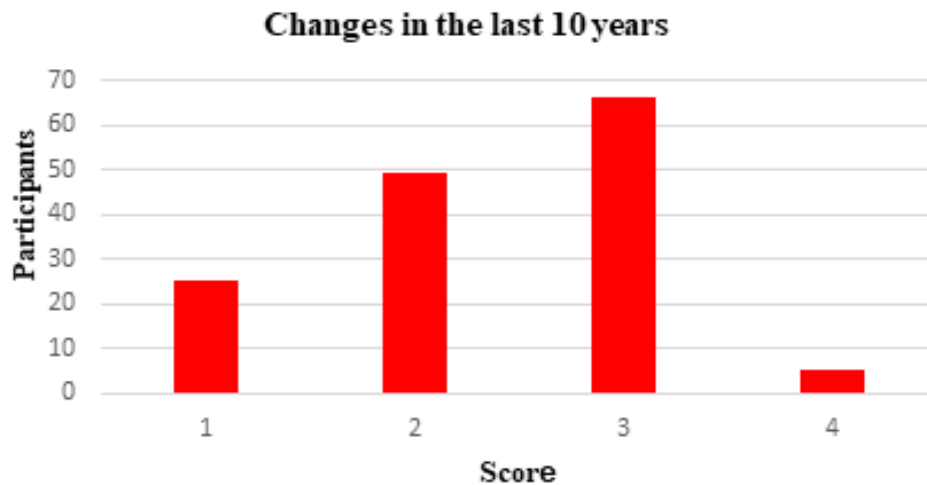


Figure 4. How has the general economic situation changed during the last 10 years? (1: it is much worse now, 2: it is a bit worse now, 3: it is a bit better now, 4: it is much better now).

A more careful observation of the data gives us an idea if there is some correlation between the answers in the previous three questions. About 84% of the participant found some relatively strong correlation between their own situation and that of the municipality and the changes in the last 10 years. Actually, very few, around 6%, have responded that despite the bad or regular regional situation and the lack of positive trends during the last 10 years, their own situation improved substantially. Only 2% responded that their own situation worsened compared to the regional although there were good tendencies in the last 10 years.

It is interesting to see if the opinions related to the perception of the border opening are related or not to the corresponding perceptions regarding the changes during the last 10 years. In order to work with binary variables in both cases, we have grouped together the answers 'it is a bit better now' and 'it is much better now' from the question regarding the trends during the last 10 years. Doing this comparison, one can see that around 30% of the participants agree that the economy has improved during the last 10 years and that the changes due to easy border crossing without passport (since 2007) has improved the situation. However, 29% of the participants responded the opposite and 20% have seen that



despite of the lack of improvement of the economic situation during the last 10 years, they see positive changes due to the border opening. In general, the participants see that the good points of the actual situation of the municipality is related to the increased number of services, such as pharmacy, post office, medical care, schools, roads in good conditions, new street lights and sewage, the business development and the good neighbors' relations, which exist in the settlement. Many of the participants pointed out the importance of the nature for the peaceful environment and the attraction of the tourists. Many as well reported that these improvements have been introduced by the new Mayor. However, more than 20 participants expressed their opinion that nothing was good in the actual situation of the settlement.

Regarding the question what is bad in the actual situation of the municipality, some of the participants responded that the pollution has increased after the construction of an incinerator, the reduced services and a transportation still lacking of efficacy due to the cancelation of train services. They also cited the insufficient educational institutions, cultural events and children facilities and the insufficient support by the State for the enhancement of the tourist sector. The majority of the participants expressed their opinion about the high unemployment, the little industrial development in the region and the presence of a large Roma community and high criminality. Due to the few job opportunities, several participants expressed their concern about the exodus of the young people, who are emigrating abroad.

*A.40 years old (Woman): I find the situation has improved during the last years, but we still need improvement especially in the infrastructure and the children facilities.*

In order to understand the people's opinion concerning the immigration, we complemented our analysis asking the participants about their decision to emigrate. The results of the analysis are represented in Figure 5.

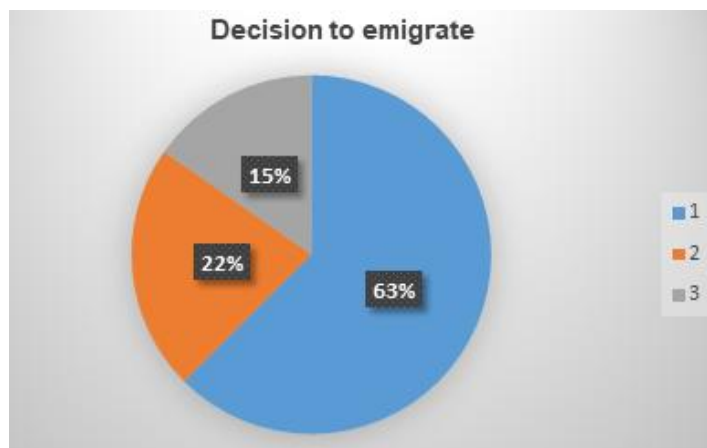


Figure 5. Decision to emigrate: 1 - not willing to emigrate (63%), 2 - emigrate inside the country (22%), 3 - emigrating abroad (15%).

From the last figure one can easily see that the majority of the participants don't have plans to emigrate within the country neither abroad. In a second place are the participants who are willing to emigrate within the country and in the last place are those who are willing to go abroad. This last community is mainly formed by young participants, predominantly aged 18-30 years and followed by 30-50 years old ones.

*M. 22 years old (man): I want to move to another country. I don't see good opportunities here for me in the future.*

From the above results one can conclude that the majority of the local population doesn't have plans to emigrate. However, the high unemployment rate among the young people pushes them to take the decision to move to another region within the country or to emigrate abroad. As we will see in the next chapters, similar opinion with respect to emigration abroad is also observed in Transcarpathia, where the opportunities are also limited.

## ECONOMIC SITUATION OF TRANSCARPATHIA

Transcarpathia is located in southwestern Ukraine and has an area of 12.753 square kilometers, which is of a similar size, compared to East Slovakia (15.729 square kilometers). It is the only part of Ukraine which is separated from the rest of the country by the Carpathian mountain range. It is accessible from the rest of Ukraine through numerous mountain passes and connects Ukraine with East-Central Europe. Its administrative centre is the city of Uzhgorod. Other major cities within the region include Mukachevo, Khust, Berehove and Chop.



Figure 6. Map of Transcarpathia provided by Google.

Zakarpattia Oblast (Transcarpathia) was established on 22 January 1946, after the resignation of Czechoslovakia on the territory of Subcarpathian Ruthenia (Slovak: Podkarpatská Rus), annexed by the Soviet Union to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, under a treaty between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. The population of Transcarpathia is 1.259.000 (2016), which is also similar to that of East Slovakia (1.620.413). The most settled areas are the Tysa Lowland (120–145 persons/sq km) and the Maramuresh Basin (75–95 persons/sq km). The average gross income in Transcarpathia is 230 Euros, while the average unemployment rate is around 9% (2017), the lowest one in all Ukraine. The capital investment for the same year is around 200 million of Euros, while that in residential construction - 65 million of Euros (Statistical yearbook of Ukraine 2017). The Transcarpathian's economy is basically dominated by the natural resources. The mountainous part of Transcarpathia, occupying 80% of the region is dominated by forestry and animal husbandry, whereas in the rest of the region is covered with crops, orchards, and vineyards. The region is rich in minerals including salt, lignite, building materials, and some metal ores, and there are numerous sources of mineral and thermal water. As an economic region Transcarpathia generates a surplus of lumber and forest products, wine, fruits and vegetables and tobacco. The mineral springs and picturesque landscapes still represent a largely undeveloped potential that is rapidly gaining popularity as an area for resorts and tourism (Encyclopedia Ukraine on Internet).

### *Economic Situation Perceived by the Local Population in Transcarpathia*

In order to understand the real economic situation in Transcarpathia, a field research has been performed in that region. The choice has offered the opportunity to compare two closely situated regions: Rožňava region in Eastern Slovakia and Uzhgorod region in Transcarpathia. Our observations show that although the region is one of the most favored regions of Ukraine in geographical terms (close to many rich regions of the European Union, favorable climatic conditions for agriculture and living, many mineral springs, etc.) its economic development is below the average of Ukraine. This limited economic activity of Transcarpathia is also probably due to the road infrastructure, which in general is very bad.

During the field work, we have performed interviews with 20 participants from different ages, living in the oblast capital of Uzhgorod and the transportation hub of Mukachevo, both known by their economic development above the average of the region. 5 of the participants were aged between 18 and 30 years, 7 aged between 30 and 50 years, 4 aged between 50 and 65 years and 4 were above 65 years old. Regarding their actual job, 15% were unemployed, 20% were retired, 20% were students 35% were public workers and the rest worked in the private sector. According to the surveys, the majority of the participants (70%) see their personal economic situation rather bad, while 25% see it rather good. At the two extremes are the 10% stating that it is very bad and 5% stating that it is very

good. Similar is their opinion about the economic situation changed during the last 10 years. Again, the biggest group of about 75% stated that for them the situation is rather bad, 22% expressed their opinion that it is rather good and the rest, 10% responded that they found it very good.

*S. 58 years old (Man): so many people have left Transcarpathia to work abroad that I cannot find two young men (qualified workers) in order to finish building the bathroom of this building.*

*M. 72 years old (Woman): She sat near me and tried to sell me walnuts. She told me that her pension is 1500 hrivnya; not Euros. She could not afford to buy anything with that money. At the end she was crying.*

*I. 62 years old (Man)(ethnic Bulgarian, tour guide): the pension is too low. I would like to visit Bulgaria again, but don't have enough money for the journey.*

Transcarpathia has been a place from where people have emigrated during a long time. Even during the Soviet Union, the people were going to work to other regions of the Former Ukrainian SSR or to other republics of the USSR. About 100.000 Ukrainians from Transcarpathia immigrated exclusively to the United States before 1914. Through the years 1920–1938, the number of emigrants was approximately 40.000, thus showing an emigration rate higher than in any other region of Ukraine. In 1988 in the United States there were about 450.000 persons of Transcarpathian origin, who make up about 30% of all Transcarpathian Ukrainians or 45% of all western Transcarpathian Ukrainians (Encyclopedia Ukraine).

Nowadays the emigration trend is even higher, but mostly towards European Union countries in central Europe. The most popular destinations for emigration are Hungary for the ethnic Hungarian Transcarpathians, the Czech Republic and to a lesser extend – Slovakia (Migration Transcarpathia 2017). In 2016, the biggest proportion of remittances came from Russia, Czech Republic and Slovakia, thus representing about 66% of all remittances sent by Transcarpathian immigrants (Strielkowski 2016). This wave of emigration reflects on the demographic structure of the region, observed during the field work in Transcarpathia. For example, in cities like Khust, Rakhiv, Beregove, Solotvino, Tyachiv, Volovyets, Vinogradiv or Irshava, mostly men up to around 19 years old, women with small children and people of over 50 years old can be seen. In the capital Uzhgorod it is possible to see people of all ages, while in the mountain villages, only young people up to the age of around of 16 and elderly people (over 60 years old) have been seen. This demographic structure, confirmed by official data, clearly states the absence of people in productive age (State Statistic Service of Ukraine 2018). According to the interviews performed during the field work, about half (52%) of the interviewed expressed their interest to immigrate into another European country, mainly Poland and Czech Republic. Target countries are also Germany and Russia among others.

*M. 27 years old (Man): I cannot reach the end of the month with my current job. I want to immigrate to Germany. I have experience in the construction sector, although it would be difficult for me, because I don't speak German.*

*O. 35 years old (Woman): I am working in the service sector, but it is hard to maintain the family even more being divorced. I am planning to immigrate to Spain, as I have relatives working there and they can help me.*

This phenomenon is supported by official data from 2017, stating a negative net migration of 66 persons for 2017 (Statistical yearbook of Ukraine 2017). During the field work, it has been observed that in small towns there are even more work/visa agencies for employment abroad than shops. Most of them will arrange a working visa for around 100 Euros. Most of the work offers abroad are of around 2,5 to 3,5 Euros/hour, so basically, in order to save money a long working day is usually practiced.

### MIGRATION OF UKRAINIANS TO EASTERN SLOVAKIA

Slovakia has the lowest immigration rate of all of the European Union countries. (Eurostat Migration 2018). The share of immigrants in Slovakia is 1,3 per 1000 inhabitants, while, for example, for Sweden and Germany it is 14,4 and 11,1 respectively (Eurostat Migration 2018).

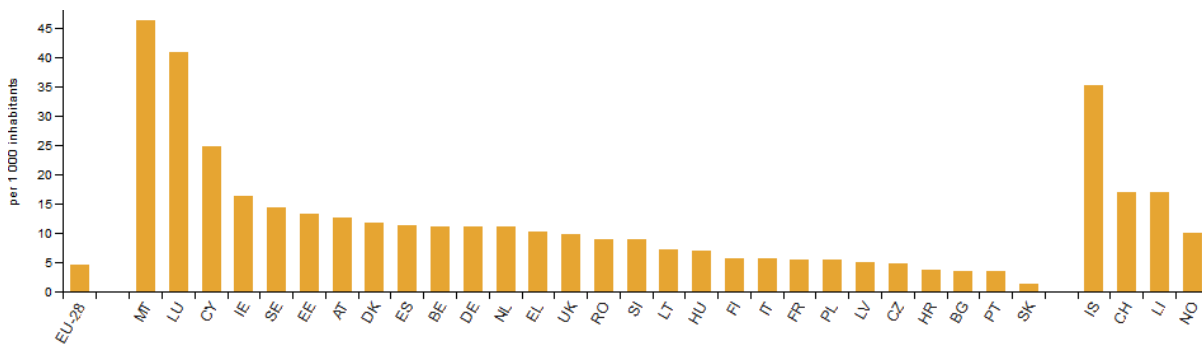


Figure 7. The number of immigrants per 1000 inhabitants. Eurostat Migration (2018).

The top 5 third nationalities in Slovakia with valid residence permit in 2018 are represented by the Ukrainians (24.913), followed by Serbians (14.208), Russians (4.698), Vietnamese (4.008) and Chinese (2.561), while the 5 nationalities with illegal immigrants in the country, corresponding to the same year were: Ukrainians (1.934), Serbians (207), Vietnamese (201), Moldavians (66) and Afghans (56) (Ministry of Internal Affairs of Slovakia 2018).

The migration phenomena in Eastern Slovakia show tendencies similar to that at national level. According to the census from 2011, regarding the Ukrainians inhabitants in Eastern Slovakia, the highest number of Ukrainians lives in Prešov district (751), Snina district (604); Humenné district (526), Bardejov district (470), Svidník district (399); Michalovce district (369), Medzilaborce district (314) and Košice I district (306). In the city of Košice, the highest number of ethnic Ukrainians resides in Ťahanovce city district (188), Košice – Západ city district (108) and Dargovskýchhrdinov city district (103) (Onufrák 2017).

The number of university students who are Ukrainian nationals has been growing significantly, particularly after 2011. In 2016, 1.258 Ukrainian students studied in Slovakia, of which 723 studied in Košice and in Prešov regions. Slovakia is selected as a country of destination due to the closeness to homeland (31%), existing links such as family, friends (24%), similar language (15%), historic, cultural and religious links (6,7%) and other reasons (22%)(Onufrák 2017). To contribute to the above analysis with new and specific data, we have performed a survey with 10 Ukrainians skilled immigrants working in Košice, 6 of them researching at the University of Košice on their PhD thesis or postdoctoral projects.

All participants have elected Slovakia to immigrate due to the geographic, cultural and linguistic proximity of the country to Ukraine, although the majority of them came from Central and Eastern Ukraine. The majority of the participants feels well appreciated at their work and seems integrated. Their all coincided on the opinion that at the end of their scholarship or visit, they will look to find opportunities to continue their research in Central European countries such as Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Germany, or to extend their stay in Slovakia.

*S. 31 years old (Man): I am doing my PhD thesis since 5 years at the University of Košice and I am very satisfied with my work. I will try to find a position in Slovakia. I don-t like to go back to Ukraine as there is no opportunities for doing research.*

We have also focused on the Transcarpathian Ukrainians living in Eastern Slovakia. For this aim, we have performed an analysis with different representatives from Transcarpathia studying or working in the Košice region. Although limited in statistics, they show similar characteristics, regarding their will to stay in Slovakia or in another EU country after finishing their studies or working contracts.

*M. 22 years old (Man): I feel well integrated into the Slovak society and I speak fluently. For me it would be a good opportunity to make career here or in the surrounding European countries. I don't want to go back to Ukraine, because the opportunities there are very limited.*

*P. 30 years old (Man): I come periodically to Košice to work in the construction sector, as I gain more and I can maintain my family and my two children.*

Similar were the opinions of students from Transcarpathia, who are studying and working in the Prešov region. During the interviews, they expressed their willing to graduate from a European University in order to obtain European Diploma, which will offer them more opportunities, compared to the Ukrainian University Diplomas. In general they were satisfied with their current situation of study and work and from the local people attitude towards them.

*A. 22 years old (Woman): I like my small job at the restaurant as it gives me the opportunity to study at the University and not to be dependent from my parents.*

*B. 21 years old (Man): I want to graduate in Slovakia and to obtain an European Diploma This will open many doors for a future professional realization.*


In general, the interviewed were more linguistically flexible and were willing to speak Russian or English, which is not a common phenomenon, compared to their respective compatriots, interviewed during our field work in Transcarpathia.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper we have researched the economic situation in Eastern Slovakia, the Ukrainian Transcarpathia and the current trend of emigration of Ukrainians towards Slovakia and its eastern part. In order to carry out our research, we have gathered data from different official institutions in Slovakia, Ukraine, other EU countries such as Poland and Hungary as well as from different International Organizations. We have also performed field trips to the areas of study (Rožňava and Košice districts in Eastern Slovakia and Uzhgorod region in Transcarpathia) in order to obtain important data from the surveys and interviews with the local population and from representatives of the business sector in both regions.

Our results regarding Rožňava region show that the majority of the participants have a concern about the high unemployment, the little industrial development in the region and the high criminality. Due to the few job opportunities, an exodus of young people emigrating abroad is observed, although the majority of the local population does not have plans to emigrate. Similar is the situation in the Transcarpathia, where the emigration trend is higher, compared to the Rožňava region, due to the bad economic situation, perceived by the majority of the population. Thus, although improving in the recent years, the economy in both regions is still behind the average of the EU and Europe.

Finally, concerning the Ukrainians in Eastern Slovakia, we have reported their recent increasing growth and we have paid attention to the attractive Eastern Slovakia's Universities in Košice and in Prešov regions for Ukrainian students. Even more, Eastern Slovakia could be more attractive for Ukrainians, than Polish or Hungarian regions bordering with Ukraine due

to the higher Eastern Slovakia's GDP. Our surveys clearly show the interest of the Ukrainian young people to stay in Slovakia or to emigrate to neighboring EU countries after finishing their education in order to have more professional opportunities, compared to Ukraine. 



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