



Research Article

The Relevance of the Cross-Border-Student Mobility along the Hungarian-Romanian Border Region

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Abstract

The settlements inhabited by the Hungarian minority in Romania have mixed (with Hungarian and Romanian language) and partly segregated (Hungarian) school network. After the Romanian integration to the European Union and the simplification of border crossing, the Hungarian minority along the Hungarian-Romanian border, a new process appeared: the cross-border commuting of university and secondary school students the two-step migration. This process fills some of the demographic deficit in the Hungarian education network, but, at the same time it is creating hiatus in the Hungarian school network in Romania. This process has a negative effect on the sustainability of minority institutions in the short term, and in the medium term it has a negative effect on the available human resources and limits the development opportunities of the local economy. Over the past four years, we have followed the process of choosing a high school with the help of quantitative and qualitative studies. The results are suitable for exploring the significance and proportion of the process of cross-border two-step migration.

Keywords: two-step migration, ethnic migration, demographic structure, cross-border-student

Introduction

In our paper we are trying to analyse the structure of the educational network system in the northern part of Bihor County and we would like to analyse the school choosing mechanisms also. This article is part of a research project which is focusing on different aspects of this process (see Pásztor et. al 2022., Szilágyi et. al 2022). The purpose of our paper is to identify the cross-border student migration and its relevance

in the region from two aspects: from the available statistical databases and from the authors' own data collection. This area is a border region along the Hungarian-Romanian border, so we consider that especially after the integration process to the European Union the cross-mechanisms are being renewed and, in this area, the cross-border student commuting has become a relevant process. And this process became really common all around the world. We can find several examples about this process from all around the

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globe like the US-Mexican border (where the US institution has clear advantage in the global ranking and the students cross a cultural border, so there is a clear advantage in the cross-border student mobility) (Orraca et. al 2017), the special case of China and Hong Kong (where more than 28.000 children cross the border each day and it is increasing (Chan 2018), and China-Myanmar (where the ethnic dimension of the cross-border student mobility is a relevant factor) (Zhang, 2020). Comparing the cross-border student mobility along the Hungarian borders (in our case the Hungarian-Romanian) significantly differs from the mentioned above. Most of the students who participated in this process are members of the Hungarian mobility and we can say that it is not a unique thing in the case of Hungary in the Carpathian Basin; several research studies focused on the cross-border commuting of the students in this area, for example Eróss et. al (2011), Horváth (2020), Takács et al. (2013). We are trying to analyse this process from the view of the Hungarian secondary education system in Romania, and also from the cross-border catchment areas along the Hungarian-Romanian border. In our opinion, this process is really important for the ethnic minority future from two aspects: firstly, those students who choose school from the Hungarian side of the border leaving this territory and the possibility that they come back to this area to continue their studies in the regional tertiary education is significantly falling. Secondly, we considered that in most cases it has been the first step of the two-step migration which can easily lead to the final migration, the moving abroad. Last but not least in this process, possibly has significant negative effect on the secondary school system in the area which is affected by this process. First of all, it can easily lead to a school-closing wave and as we mentioned above most of these students will not take part in the higher education in the sending country. This process (in a long term) is also affecting the size of the Hungarian minority community because their percentage in the area could fall under 20% and they will not be able to use their mother tongue in the area. Let's not forget to mention that it has also significant effect on the local labour market because relevant percentage of the young population leave this area. It possibly leads to a mismatch between the needs of the local economy and the structure of

the local society. But this effect can be analysed in further research; in this paper we only try to measure the relevance of the cross-border commuting (based on our database, in most cases it is represented weekly/monthly commuting not daily)/ migration in the delimited area. In this article, our aim is to determine the relevance of the process (and possibly make a relevant description of the process for example the policymakers) from the statistical databases and our own data collection. In the literature review section, we give an overview of the former and possible cross-border connection on different dimensions. Finally, we present our collected data from the teachers of the local schools, and we created a model about the delimited area.

Literature Overview

There is a significant number of research studies investigating the catchment area of the Hungarian-Romanian border region. One example is the collection of papers entitled Partium -Society and Spatial Structure (2013), edited by Ferenc Szilágyi and Zoltán Zakota. The collection contains several papers dealing with different segments of the Cross Border Cooperation. Czimre's (2013) paper focuses on cross-border cooperation categorization, Kovács (2013) discusses cooperation between large cities, Szilágyi (2013) and Péntzes (2013) provide an overview of the catchment area of large cities, while Teperics (2013) analyses the cross-border catchment area of Debrecen (specified to the tertiary education). These papers serve as an excellent starting point for the current research. In his article, Ferenc Szilágyi (2013) distinguishes six border sections along the Hungarian- Romanian state border which have been clearly polarized for infrastructural reasons by a county seat on either side of the border. One of these is Debrecen, which is the most accessible county seat 1 on a 57.6 km long border section (along Bihor and Satu Mare counties in Romanian). In his paper, Péntzes (2013) models cross-border catchment areas in depth, in the light of current situations and future (hypothetical) infrastructure developments. He presents six variants, all of which reflect a Debrecen dominance to varying degrees in the northern administrative territorial units of Bihor. The intersection of these variants covers the

¹ Applying the potential access time method to further two border sections (altogether 37.1 km), we found that other county seats are practically just as accessible as Debrecen: Nyíregyháza on the

Hungarian side of the border, and Oradea and Satu Mare on the Romanian side.

exact same four administrative territorial units that are investigated in the present study.

The second volume of the collection of papers on the Partium region (Szilágyi and Zakota (ed.). Partium – Society, Regional Development (2013)) also contains a number of papers relevant from the point of view of cross-border migration. These are Molnár – Péntzes – Polgár's (2013) research on cross-border employment, or Matula – F. Szilágyi's (2013) paper on the demographic aspects behind enrolment figures. Several chapters in Ferenc Szilágyi's 2019 work on the Partium region (Partium – Reintegration on the Hungarian-Romanian border region) focus on the issue of cross-border connection and catchment areas.

Methods and database

First of all, in our research we collected the available statistical database from the Internet (listed in the Table 2.), and then we made our own data collection by requesting the students' number from the heads of the classes in the relevant school. We also made some interviews

with the local school teachers on phone which are also represented in the article. All of the interviews were made in the schools and local municipalities of Bihor which are represented in Table 1.

Our paper is not focusing on the analyses of the interviews, we just present some of the results when it is relevant. In this article, we represent only one part of the interview which is about the number of students choosing a Hungarian school. After the data collection and the interviews, we combined the statistical databases (Table 1) and the information got from our interviews and all of these are represented in Figure 3. which also represent the actual flows of the students in the area of the analysis. Our methodology is based on two different approaches: firstly, we collect the statistical databases to find out how this process can be seen from the view of the authorities, secondly, we look for teachers from school, who can give us relevant information of these process in the area and we could compare these two approaches. And finally, we put into the context of the demographic situation of the area.

Table1. List of the schools where we collected data

Name of the School	Name of the Comuna
Școala Gimnazială Zelk Zoltán,	Valea Lui Mihai
-Liceul Tehnologic Nr. 1	Valea lui Mihai
-Școala Gimnazială nr. 1	Tarcea
-Școala Gimnazială "Kazinczy Ferenc"	Șimian
-Școala Gimnazială "Dr. Balasi Jozsef"	Curtuiseni

Source: Authors' own edition

Table2. Database used for the research

Database	Source
Demographic	
The number of 14-year-old children (2018-2021)	INSSE Tempo Online POP107D
Database of age groups by ethnicity (4-7 years)	2011 Census
Educational database	
Current school network data by class/group	Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research School Cartography, Retea Scolara

The national database of the 2020/21 academic year by class/group	Ministerul Educației Ministry of Education
Database on the enrolment proposal in Bihor County for the 2018/19 academic year	Rețea Școlară – Inspectoratul Școlar Județean- Bihor County School Inspectorates
Databases on the National Test between 2018 and 2021	Evaluarea Națională- National Evaluation
Databases on high school entrance examination between 2018 and	Ministerul Educației Ministry of Education
Number of pupils graduating grade 8 (2018-2021), number of dropouts, number of pupils applying to schools in Romania and Hungary	Own collection
Number of cross-border commuting high school pupils	Own collection
School network	
REȚEAUA unităților de învățământ preuniversitar cu personalitate juridică care funcționează în anul școlar 2021-2022 [The NETWORK of legal-entity secondary educational institutions in the 2021-2022 school year],	Inspectoratul Școlar Județean- Bihor County School Inspectorates
Ghidul admiterii în învățământul liceal, profesional de stat și dual, Județul Bihor, Inspectoratul Școlar Bihor [High School and Vocational School Admission Guide in the Public and Dual Education System, Bihor County School Inspectorate], Oradea 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021	Inspectoratul Școlar Județean- Bihor County School Inspectorates

Source: Authors' own edition

Ethnic composition and mother language

The area under scrutiny comprises one urban and three rural administrative territorial units. The micro catchment area with a total population of 20,000 individuals is characterized by three ethnic groups (Hungarian, Roma and Romanian), and two linguistic groups (Hungarian and Romanian) ² with an unquestionable Hungarian dominance. As a result, there is a cultural similarity (ethnic, linguistic, ethnographical and historical) to Debrecen, the nearest large city, located on the other side of the border. Consequently, there are no cultural barriers to migration and integration. Illegal cross-border migration occurred even before the change of regime. At times, entire families or young people at the start of their career tried to cross the

border in large numbers in order to escape from the dictatorship in Romania. Those who managed to start a new life in Hungary or further north, however, many unsuccessful endeavours ended tragically ³. The period following the political transition in Romania was characterized by permanent emigration. After 2007, with the acceleration of the European integration of the country, borders became permeable to the degree of commuting (to school) (Teperics 2013). Today, this can be deemed a process with a historical past.

The ethnic age structure diagrams of the area show a mixed picture. Besides the slow decline in the two traditionally dominant groups: the traditionally Hungarian majority and the significant Romanian minority, the age structure

² The Roma population in the area of interest is predominantly Hungarian-speaking. The Romanian-speaking (Vășad) and Romani-speaking Roma population together make up less than 10% of their community (Szilágyi 2016).

³ Szökési kísérletek 1989 decembere előtt a diktatúrából [Attempts Made before December 1989 to Escape Dictatorship] (erdelyinaplo.ro);

Transindex - Határon 1988-89: sok egykori illegális határátlépő ma is fél beszélni történetéről [“On the

Border 1988-89; Many Illegal Migrants of the Time are Still Afraid to Tell Their Stories”]; Dramele oamenilor care au vrut sa fuga din Romania comunista [“The Drama of People Who Tried to Escape Communist Romania”]. Povestea tipografului fugar, dat in urmarire de Securitate la granitele cu Ungaria si Iugoslavia [“The Story of the Fugitive Printer Pursued by the Securitate on the Border with Hungary and Yugoslavia”] (ziare.com)

diagram also shows a decrease in the number of generations. By contrast, a different trend can be observed in the predominantly Hungarian-

speaking Roma population. This is characterized by a “pyramid” shape age structure reflecting a fast growing, expanding population.

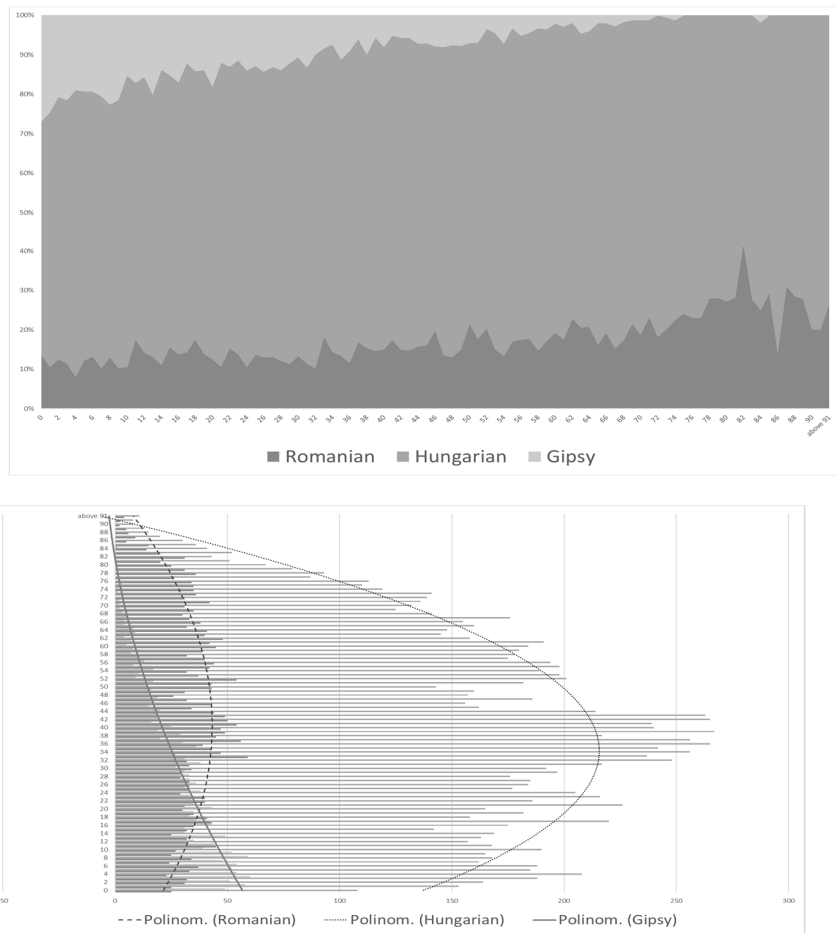


Fig 1. Ethnic distribution by age group in the analysed area (above) ethnic age structure diagram (down)

Source: (Authors' own edition based on the INNSE demographic data)

The Hungarian school network system in Bihor County, Romania

In the 2021-2022 academic year, the school network of the 101 administrative territorial units in Bihor County comprised 705 public schools and 26 private institutions⁴. The institutions which provide Hungarian- medium education as well as cover a continuous area of

the 20 administrative territorial units situated north of the county seat and can be found in isolation in the other 15 administrative territorial units of the county. As a rule, schools in rural areas are mixed medium schools (Romanian-Hungarian), with a few exceptions in administrative territorial units where the percentage of the Romanian population is insignificant and the schools are homogeneous

⁴ REȚEAUA unităților de învățământ preuniversitar cu personalitate juridică care funcționează în anul școlar 2021-2022 [The NETWORK of legal-entity secondary educational institutions in the 2021-2022 school year], source: REȚEAUA unităților de învățământ preuniversitar

cu personalitate juridică și arondate care funcționează în anul școlar 2021- 2022 - Inspectoratul Școlar Județean BIHOR (isjbihor.ro) 2022.02.22.

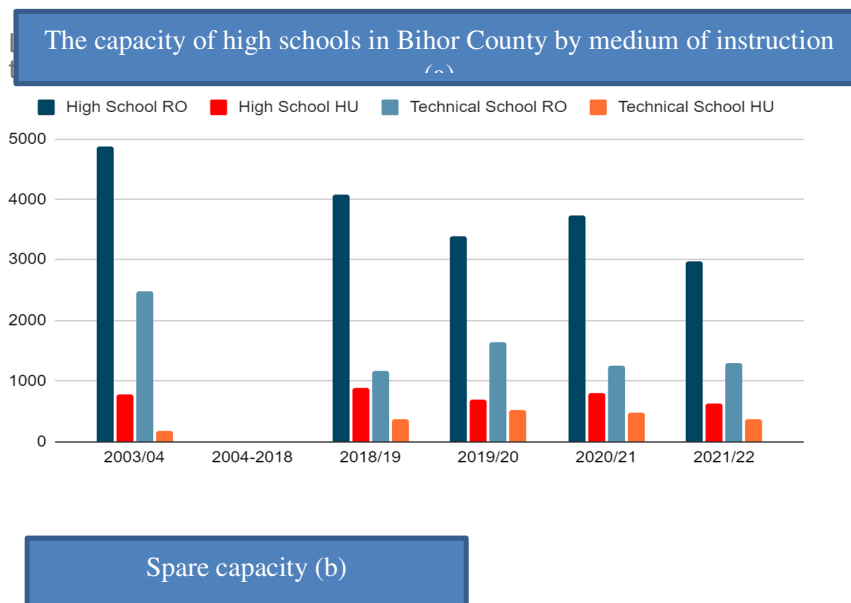
Hungarian-medium schools (e.g., Cherechiu, Sălacea, Buduslău, etc.), or in the Hungarian villages of mixed communes operating homogeneous schools as independent legal entities (e.g., Mișca -Chișlaz commune). Three of the four municipalities have independent Hungarian-medium education institutions (Oradea, Salonta and Marghita). In the county seat, Oradea, the overall picture is mixed: we find one- medium (e.g., Ady Endre High School) and mixed-medium institutions at all levels. There are also independent Hungarian ecclesiastical institutions (e.g., Lorántffy Zsuzsanna Reformed High School or Szent László Roman Catholic High School).

For the aim of this study, secondary school capacity is more relevant as interviews also reveal that student migration generally becomes more significant at secondary school level.

The main components of the current network of institutions emerged in the 20th century. Secondary school capacity was adjusted to higher youth generation at the end of the socialist era; however, this capacity has become oversized due to the decrease in population. In the past two decades, spare capacity was demonstrably present. Firstly, the system reacted slowly then it tried to reduce capacities to suit the demand. For example, there was a significant almost 40% decrease in the 9th grade enrolment capacity in Romanian schools between 2003 and 2021 (from nearly 5000 individuals per year of study to less than 3000 individuals). This proportion is only around 20% in the Hungarian-medium education.

In the Hungarian-medium education, the enrolment capacities around the turn of the millennium were much lower as compared to the community. According to the 2002 census, the Hungarian population made up 26.9% of the total population, however, in 2003 Hungarian-medium education represented only 13.5% of 5699 places available in secondary schools and 6.7% in vocational education (2661 places available). The subsequent period saw an increase in the Hungarian enrolment capacity, meeting the shortage resulting from the proportion of the Hungarian community. On the other hand, demographic effects and cross-border migration also started to produce results which halted the development of the network of institutions and the extension of the capacity. Though the capacities have never reached the proportion corresponding to the Hungarian community, in the 2010s, further extension was hindered by the fact that even the Romanian-medium schools could not be filled to capacity. In the past four years, the spare capacity in Hungarian-medium secondary schools was between 17-24%; while in Romanian-medium schools, it ranged between 15-18%.

If we consider the numbers, we can speak of 150 to 300 unfilled places per year of study in Hungarian-medium institutions. The lowest value was recorded in 2021 (157 unfilled places) and it was due to the significant capacity reduction as compared to the previous years (23% capacity reduction).



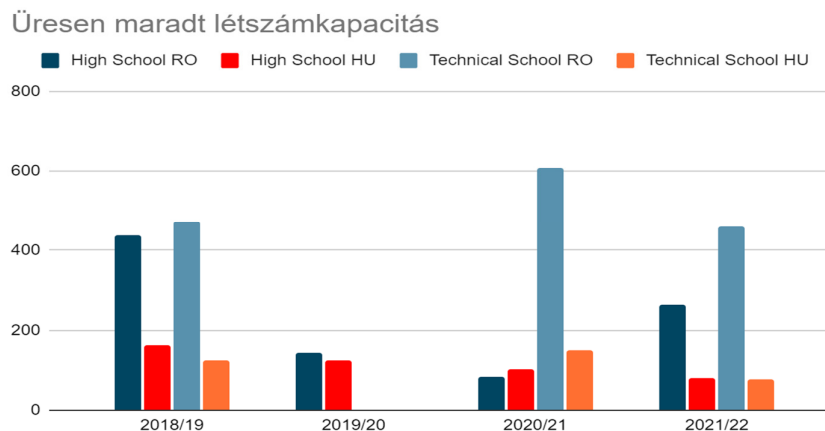


Fig. 2. The capacities of the institutions in Bihor County

Source: Authors' own edition based on the official publications of the Bihor County School Inspectorate 5.

The structure of vocational education differs in Hungarian and Romanian-medium programmes - not so much in terms of the limited choice of subjects and areas covered, but most notably in the form of education - e.g., in the case of dual and specialized education.

Results

For a better understanding, the data gathered during the research are presented with the help of a single flowchart. The flowchart displays data in a chronological order but focuses mainly on the 8th graders and on their choice of high school. Horizontally, the chart is divided into four sections: starting with the demographic data on 14-year-olds, followed by 8th graders, then pupils attending the National Test and finally pupils enrolled in secondary education. The middle horizontal section, which presents the population enrolled in the Romanian education system, has been divided by medium of instruction starting from the 8th grade. Further two sections, on the two sides of the chart, present the population leaving for Hungary and the population believed to disappear permanently from the system/dropouts. Our research did not focus on measuring dropout rates; however, the proportions can be deduced from the figures on the chart. As regards dropout, we concentrated on the characteristic times and

groups. The results show that the transition between the vertical sections is unidirectional: children dropping out of any of the sections will not return to education, and those leaving for Hungary will not return to the Romanian education system. There is also a one-way transition between the two sections of the education system. Many Hungarian children attend Romanian-medium education from the earliest stage on (not only children from mixed-language families - one of the interviewed members of school mentioned this process). The inverse of this occurs only in some exceptional cases (in the case of some mixed-language families). At the transition from one stage of education to another (e.g., admission to high school or admission to university), more pupils leave the Hungarian-medium education for Romanian-medium education due to the wider choice of specialisations and larger capacity. The inverse is practically unimaginable.

Interviews conducted with elementary and high school teachers in Valea lui Mihai revealed that Hungarian children attending Romanian-medium education are a minority in elementary school but they form a majority in Romanian-medium high schools. There is only one case mentioned during the interviews when the child switched from Romanian-medium education to Hungarian-medium education as part of the

⁵ Ghidul admiterii în învățământul liceal, profesional de stat și dual, Județul Bihor, Inspectoratul Școlar Bihor [High School and Vocational School Admission Guide in the Public and Dual Education System, Bihor County School Inspectorate], Oradea 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021

cross-border migration. In the years under consideration, there were two children enrolled in the Romanian-medium education in Valea lui Mihai who continued their studies in Hungarian high schools in Debrecen. This represents 2% of the total number of current commuters.

One of the most important aspects of this research is that, with the help of the interviews, we revealed the number of pupils leaving the four administrative territorial units for schools in Hungary, during this four-year period. This number (as long as there has not been further -territorial or natural- population mobility or dropout since then, represents the population actively participating in secondary education across the border) is suitable for determining the proportion of cross-border mobility in Romania in terms of the total age group or in terms of children enrolled in Hungarian-medium education. The result is also useful in relation to Hungary as the accuracy of the database of the Educational Authority can be tested and the correction allows estimates to be made of the actual impact pupils from outside the borders have on the Hungarian education system.

Though theoretically the maximum number of children in the target group is 1068, the actual number is most probably smaller. In the 2011 Census, 70% declared themselves Hungarian, 19% Roma and 11% Romanian. The majority of the Roma population speaks Hungarian as their mother tongue and they are enrolled in Hungarian-medium education, apart from Vășad. The number of the bilingual population (Hungarian- Romanian) cannot be accurately defined but they form a significantly large group. According to respondents, the majority uses

Hungarian but is enrolled in Romanian-medium education. From the theoretical 1068 maximum, we could identify 808 8th graders in the past 4 years. Evidently, dropout affects all groups up to this age, and there are even pre-schoolers commuting to Hungary (interview), however, we cannot speak of a mass phenomenon. Three quarters of the population comprising 808 individuals attend Hungarian-medium education (603), i.e., the majority of the Hungarian and Roma population. The number of pupils enrolled in the Romanian-medium education (205 individuals) is almost double the number of the Romanian population. Due to the significant number of bilinguals, sometimes there is no clear dividing line between the Hungarian and Romanian communities. It can be assumed that bilinguals, Hungarians and Roma people (especially in Vășad) amount to half of the total number.

By the end of grade 8 significant changes occur. Pupils who wish to continue their studies in Romanian educational institutions have to take the National Test. Those who decide to continue their studies in Hungary do not need to take this test though the interviews reveal that the majority sits for the exam, and at the same time the majority does not prepare for the test. Some of the pupils who wish to continue their studies in Hungary do not take the test. Those who do not wish to pursue further education do not register for the test or they do not show up. Consequently, the number of pupils taking the test is significantly lower than the number of 8th graders. Strategies might differ from one year of study to another or from one settlement to another.

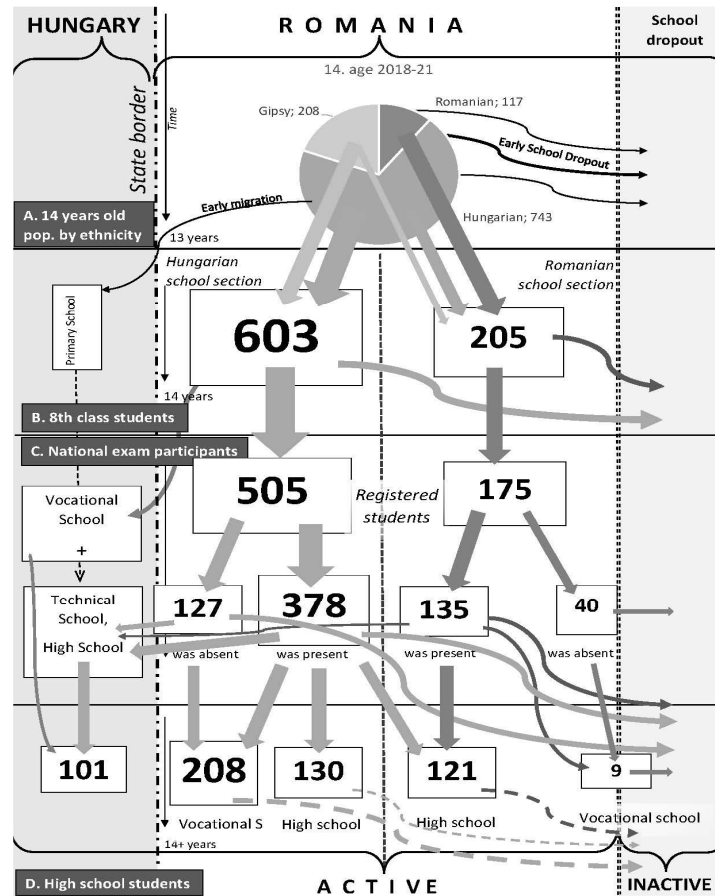


Fig 3. Numbers and processes representing the educational institution choice of 14-year-olds and 8th graders in the administrative territorial units under scrutiny (2018-2021)

Compared to the number of 8th graders, the number of pupils taking the National Exam decreased by one sixth in the case of pupils enrolled in the Romanian-medium education and by one fifth in the case of pupils enrolled in Hungarian-medium education. Of course, there are dropouts in both cases (especially among Roma children, though their number has increased in the past years in the high school in Valea lui Mihai – interview). Choosing schools in Hungary for further education also accounts for dropouts in the Hungarian-medium education. A significant number of pupils choose theoretical and technical high schools located at a greater distance (e.g., in Oradea). This hardly ever occurs in the case of vocational schools which end without a baccalaureate. Pupils opting for vocational school usually choose the nearest one, which is in Valea lui Mihai. The catchment area of this extends to a number of other communes as well (Sălacea, Cherechiu and Sanislău) besides the four administrative territorial units investigated.

A large proportion (23-25% per section) of those who registered for the national test did not show up at the exam in the past years (127 individuals in Hungarian-medium education and 40 individuals in Romanian-medium education). There are three factors that might account for this: further dropouts, choosing vocational education and in the case of Hungarian-medium education -choosing to continue studies in Hungary. The majority of the pupils enrolled in Romanian-medium education who took the test continued their studies in theoretical or technical high schools in Romania (121 out of 135 pupils), while a small proportion (2 individuals - interview) left for Hungary. The 378 pupils enrolled in Hungarian-medium education choose between at least four alternatives. Some of them continue their studies in theoretical or technical secondary education in Romania in Hungarian-medium classes (130 individuals) or in Romanian-medium ones (interview). Some opt for vocational education and they are partly complemented by a share of those pupils who did not take part in the exam (altogether 208

individuals). A significant part of students enrolled in Hungarian-medium education choose to continue their studies in Hungary. Results show that currently there are 101 pupils commuting to Hungary from the four administrative territorial units investigated. On the whole, in the past 4 years, 72.8% of the 8th graders in Hungarian-medium education continued their studies in Hungarian (altogether 439 individuals), 23% of these chose to study in educational institutions on the territory of Hungary. According to the respondents, children choosing Hungary often have a strong academic record and/or come from well-situated families. It has also been mentioned that in the past years the trends in choosing schools in Hungary have changed. The interest shifted from elite theoretical educational institutions to technical high schools (e.g., law enforcement training).

Conclusion

The educational migration to Hungary (Debrecen in particular) is related to the weakening of border controls in the past decades and it also has a historical past. Due to geographical reasons, the central stage of the northern part of the Hungarian-Romanian border region is mostly connected to Debrecen (e.g., time of access), which used to be the commercial, cultural and religious centre of the region in the past. Thus, the phenomenon is in line with the present-time integration process characteristic of Northern-Europe and it can be considered a subtype representing the revival of local relationships. Debrecen, the fast-growing big city in eastern Hungary, is using natural mechanisms to reintegrate the Romanian border region, which has become peripheral in the past century. The process is facilitated by the fact that the two sides of the border share the same dominant ethnic, linguistic and cultural features (Hungarian).

Less than 15% of the Hungarian community of Bihor County lives in the four administrative territorial units investigated. This represents only one seventh of the Hungarian community in Bihor County; however, the international educational migration is probably the most intense in these administrative territorial units. Our empirical analysis shows that this community contributes at least 100 pupils to the current active number of high school pupils in Hungary.

According to our estimates, in the past four years, the spare capacity in Hungarian-medium high schools in Bihor County amounted to 1000

unfilled places. The question to what extent this migration is responsible for the decline of the Hungarian high school network needs further research; nonetheless, the current research shows that migration has a significant impact on the appearance of spare capacities and the decline of the Hungarian high school network in Bihor County.

Overall, in our opinion, these processes are represent the first step of the two-step migration from this are which need further analysis in the future and not forget to mention that it could have significant effect on labour market and the future society in the north-eastern part of the Bihor.

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