

# **SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF THE CITIES OF STRASENI FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND ZARNESTI FROM ROMANIA**

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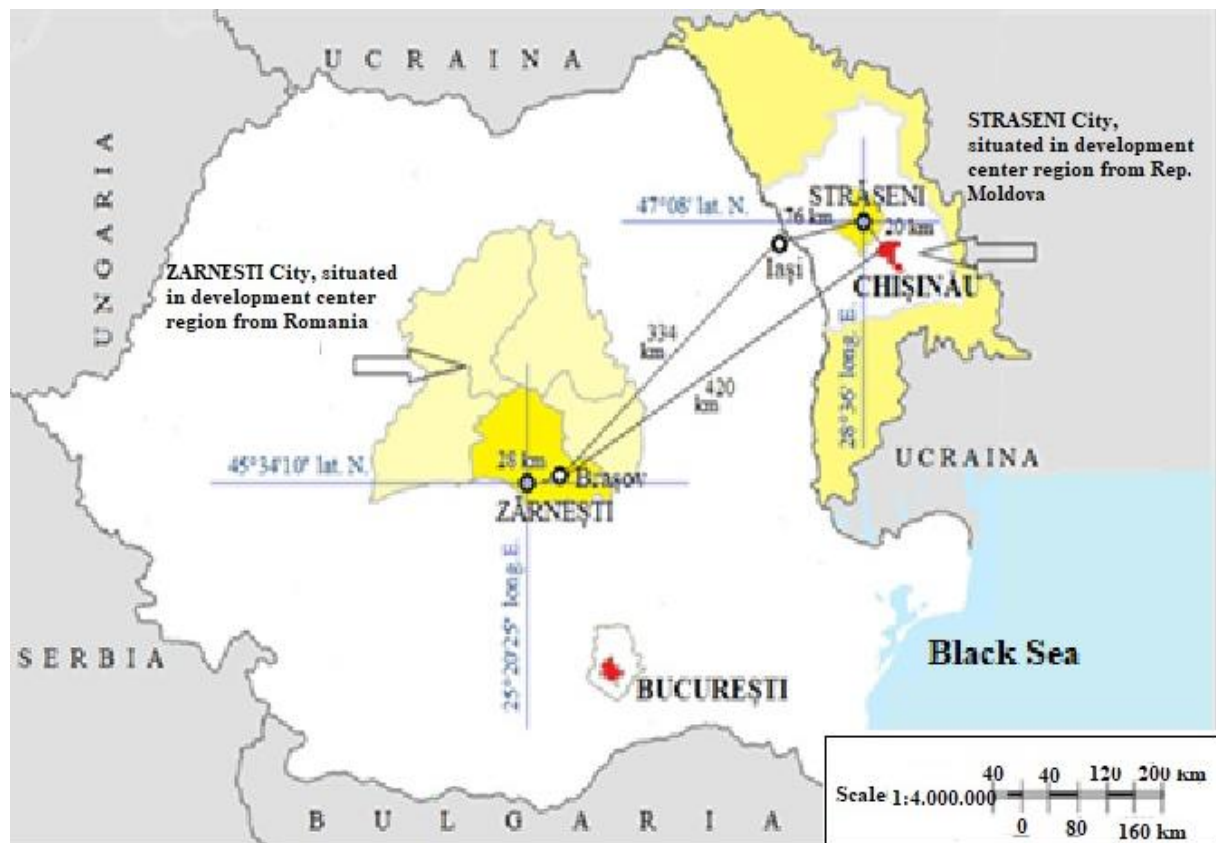
**ABSTRACT.** The socio-economic dynamics of small and medium-sized cities in the modern era, highlights the fact that their development and progress over time have been accompanied by many problems of socio-economic, territorial, ecological, etc., which have been intensified, or mitigated, to the extent that local public authorities have effectively monitored and administered them. Numerous development programs, plans and strategies have aimed to address these issues, most often in isolation, without relying on their ranking and prioritization in accordance with the severity of the event, or the impact on the community. Most of these actions were sporadic, being dictated by a risk factor, or conjunctural, without continuity, a report on long-term development strategies. The advantageous geographical arrangement, the proximity of important urban centers such as Chisinau (in the case of Straseni) and Brasov (in the case of Zarnesti), have greatly influenced their development trajectory, having several common features, both in terms of achievements and regarding the problems that arose in both situations.

Through the present study, the author aims at an evaluation of the socio-economic and socio-demographic problems from a comparative perspective, of the way their management by A.P.L. (Local Public Authorities), as well as to propose certain solutions in the eventual diminution, or solution of them, as well as to see the “possibilities” that the two cities have and what they can offer to the population to pursue the opportunities they offer to the population. This scientific approach is part of a doctoral study "Integration of small and medium-sized cities in the regional urban system".

**KEY WORDS:** *socio-demographic problems, socio-economic problems, Straseni, Zarnesti*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Through this study, the author aims to assess the geodemographic and geoeconomic component of two cities comparable in terms of demographic and economic potential: Straseni in Moldova and Zarnesti in Romania. Both cities are located in the central part of the countries to which they belong, respectively the city of Straseni - located in the Central Development Region of the Republic of Moldova, the city of Zarnesti - in the Central Development Region of Romania (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Geographical position of the cities of Strasenii (Republic of Moldova) and Zarnesti (Romania)**

*Source:* Map outline: [https://ro.Romania\\_location\\_map.svg](https://ro.Romania_location_map.svg) Map processed by the author

From the point of view of human potential, both are part of the category of small / medium cities [2],[1] (19,200 inhabitants. Strasenii and 26,000 inhabitants. Zarnesti), having several features in common and differentiated characteristics. The centralized development system of the past, the rigid economic structures, the reduced adaptability to the current system of the transition to the market economy, the poor capitalization of the economic and human potential are just some of the common features of these two cities. Both cities are developing quite dynamically, with the intention of adapting to the regional competition of cities, in the current context of decentralization applied by the regional development policy, the transition being marked by both successes and failures. [5].

Although apparently the situation in these cities is relatively good compared to other cities in the regions they belong to, they face a number of common but also specific problems in the current context of socio-economic transition that both cities are going through. Among the socio-demographic problems of the compared cities are: slow population dynamics, an accentuated migration both nationally and internationally, an accentuated aging of the population, a decrease, on the one hand, of the indicators that ensure the sustainability of the demographic system and the increase of indicators attesting to the increase of demographic insecurity, on the other hand. [4]. The author tries to identify to what extent these two close cities as geodemographic and economic potential, can adapt to the new conditions of socio-economic development, as well as to what extent the regional and local development policy allows them to develop their own identity and highlight their local potential in the context of urban competition. Among the economic problems can be mentioned: insufficient capitalization of the economic potential, poor adaptability to the requirements of the internal and external market, the presence of poorly competitive economic entities, lack of well paid

jobs, large number of unemployed people of different types, where the current situation of global pandemic uncertainty is added. [5]. The emphasis is on the study, knowledge and evaluation of the human and economic potential existing in these two localities, located in different countries, which, although at a considerable distance, are linked by certain common features related to geodemographic and geoeconomic evolution.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The author aims to make a comparative study of the two cities, how to integrate them in the urban system of the Republic of Moldova and Romania, respectively, in the context of decentralization of the economy through regional development policy and highlight the problems faced by these medium-sized cities, their origin, and how to solve them.

In this study, the method of comparison was used, emphasizing the similarities, but also the differences in terms of geodemography and geoeconomics between the two cities, the potential they have and what they can offer the population. Among other methods specific to Human Geography, the following methods were used in the evaluation process: analytical, historical, mathematical and geographical description, and statistical data were taken from the National Bureau of Statistics, Public Services Agency of the Republic of Moldova [11], from the National Institute of Statistics in Romania - through the Braşov County Directorate of Statistics [12], as well as from the City Halls of the two localities [9], [10]. The period of time studied for both cities was the period covered, for the most part after 1991 until now, a sufficient period to follow the trajectories of the two cities. In some cases, data from the pre-1990s were used to track the dynamics for a longer period, or for the post-1990s in accordance with the availability of data from state structures that provided official information.

The study was based on several research hypotheses:

- both cities are marked by similar socio-demographic and socio-economic problems;
- the city of Straseni has a higher degree of polarization in relation to the capital, than Zarnesti, in both cases due to the super centralized development policy of the Soviet period and its current reminiscences.
- the city of Zarnesti has a more advanced degree of local autonomy, and the experience of this city could be a model of good practice for the city of Straseni;
- the city of Straseni has socio-demographic and socio-economic structures with a higher degree of instability, given the longer-term transition that the Republic of Moldova is going through;
- migration is accentuated both at national level but, especially, at international level, the migration flows in / from the city of Straseni are more intense;
- both cities show a decrease in indicators that ensure the sustainability of the demographic system, on the one hand, and an increase in indicators that show an increase in demographic insecurity, on the other hand.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Through this study, the author aims to evaluate the geodemographic component of two cities located in the Republic of Moldova and Romania, which both in terms of geodemographic and economic potential fall into the category of cities mentioned above. The surface of

Zărnești city is about 3.4 times bigger, the human potential is approximately the same, and the population density is almost 3 times smaller than that of Straseni city (tab. 1).

**Table 1. General characteristics of the cities of Straseni and Zarnesti**

	<b>Straseni</b>	<b>Zarnesti</b>
Surface, km <sup>2</sup>	60,82	204,75
Number of inhabitants 01.01.2019	19 200	27 436
Population density, place, / km <sup>2</sup>	345	136

*Source:* Straseni City Hall and Zarnesti City Hall; BNS, INS

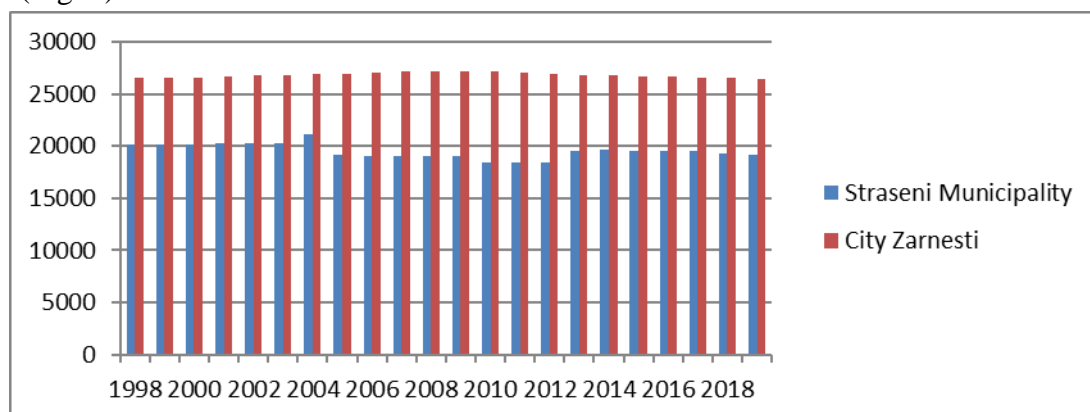
From an administrative-territorial point of view, both the city of Straseni and the city of Zarnesti have a village, located in both cases 5 km away from the two cities that do not bring a considerable demographic and economic contribution to these cities ( tab 2).

**Table 2. Population of Straseni Municipality and Zarnesti City, 2019, (number of inhabitants)**

Years	<b>Straseni</b>	<b>Fagureni</b>	<b>Zarnesti</b>	<b>Tohanul Nou</b>
1998	20 100	890	26 518	1 520
2007	19 100	832	27 222	1484
2019	19 200	800	26 436	1 460

*Source:* NBS of the Republic of Moldova, Straseni City Hall, INS, Romania and Zarnesti City Hall

Following the comparative analysis of the human potential of the two cities, it was found that they have approximately the same share in the regional system of which they are part, their population being 19,200 [9] places for Straseni and 26,436 places for Zarnesti [10] (in 2019). From the data of the population dynamics of the cities of Straseni and Zarnesti in the analyzed time interval, it can be noticed that in the time interval taken into account, both cities had small fluctuations regarding the present population, which remained around 20,000 places. for the city of Straseni and 26,000 for Zarnesti. According to official statistics, the population of the two cities in the period 1998-2019 had linear dynamics. During this time, the population registered small fluctuations for each locality. This decline is insignificant compared to the large downward trend recorded by both states and is due to the situation of these cities compared to Chisinau and Brasov, respectively - important polarizing centers at the national level (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2. The present population of the cities of Straseni and Zarnesti, between 1998-2019**

*Source:* based on NBS, Republic of Moldova and INS, Romania

The population dynamics was mostly ensured by the positive natural balance for both cities, even if the migration balance was negative in the analyzed time interval. (tab. 3, 4).

**Table 3. Dynamics of the natural movement of the population in the cities of Straseni and Zarnesti, 1998-2019**

Year	Births (alive)		Deaths		Natural balance		Birth rate		Mortality rate	
	Straseni	Zarnesti	Straseni	Zarnesti	Straseni	Zarnesti	Straseni	Zarnesti	Straseni	Zarnesti
1998	228	246	166	207	62	39	11,3	9,3	8,3	7,8
1999	197	274	178	220	19	54	9,8	10,3	8,9	8,3
2000	177	274	183	196	-6	78	8,8	10,3	9,1	7,4
2001	200	269	174	212	26	57	9,9	10,1	8,6	7,9
2002	211	248	216	240	-5	8	10,4	9,2	10,6	8,9
2003	209	279	196	220	13	59	10,3	10,4	9,7	8,2
2004	234	262	195	202	39	60	11,1	9,7	9,2	7,5
2005	220	320	216	225	4	95	11,5	11,9	11,3	8,4
2006	220	323	198	205	22	117	11,3	11,9	10,4	7,6
2007	221	261	216	248	5	13	11,6	9,6	11,3	9,1
2008	233	317	193	253	40	64	12,2	11,7	10,1	9,3
2009	214	277	198	229	16	48	11,2	10,2	10,4	8,4
2010	223	272	179	227	44	45	12,1	10,1	9,7	8,4
2011	224	234	179	233	45	1	12,2	8,7	9,7	8,6
2012	271	229	201	245	70	-33	14,7	8,5	10,9	9,1
2013	210	279	184	246	26	23	10,7	10,4	9,4	9,2
2014	217	234	180	259	37	-25	11,0	8,7	9,1	9,7
2015	215	259	169	265	46	-6	10,9	9,7	8,6	9,9
2016	208	286	150	246	58	40	10,7	10,7	7,7	9,2
2017	179	266	157	232	22	34	9,2	10,0	8,1	8,7
2018	181	273	183	301	-2	-28	9,4	10,3	9,5	11,3
2019	228	246	166	207	62	39	11,3	9,3	8,3	7,8
<b>Total sau media</b>	<b>4 720</b>	<b>5928</b>	<b>4077</b>	<b>5118</b>	<b>643</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>10,9</b>	<b>10,6</b>	<b>9,5</b>	<b>8,7</b>

Source: Calculated and adapted according to NBS and INS data.

In the period 1998-2018, 4,720 inhabitants were born in the city of Straseni and 4,077 inhabitants died, the city registering an increase of 643 inhabitants, with an average birth rate of 10.9 ‰ (Table 3). The highest number of live births in the city of Straseni was registered in 2012 (271), and the minimum number of live births was in 2000 (177 children), in total in this analyzed time period was they gave birth to 4,720 children. The average annual number of deaths was 185 people. During the analyzed time, the city of Straseni had a positive natural balance of 643 people, and the average birth rate of 10.9 ‰ exceeds the average for the Republic of Moldova. The average mortality rate was 9.5 ‰, being below the mortality rate in the country. The positive natural balance is due to the position of the city of Straseni in relation to the country's capital, but also to the opportunities that have arisen for economic and social development, which stimulated internal migration, especially of young people, but also of positive natural growth. A similar situation was registered in the dynamics of the natural movement of the population for the city of Zărnești. A higher number of children were born here (5,928), and the number of deaths was (5,118 people), which means a positive natural balance of 810 children. The average birth rate of 10.6 ‰ and the mortality rate of 8.7 ‰ also attest to a higher natural population growth than in the city of Straseni. The greater difference between the birth rate and the mortality rate for the city of Zărnești attests to a relatively better situation, as well as a greater stability in the natural movement, a fact confirmed by the analysis of other demographic indicators. Regarding the migratory flows for both cities, we find a population decline due to the mechanical movement of the population, a similar situation for smallest and medium-sized cities in the Republic of Moldova and Romania (Table 4).

**Table 4. Dynamics of mechanical movement in the cities of Straseni (Moldova) and Zarnesti (Romania), in the period 1998-2018, persons**

	Number of emigrations		Number of immigrations		Migration balance		The total balance of the population	
	Straseni	Zarnesti	Straseni	Zarnesti	Straseni	Zarnesti	Straseni	Zarnesti
1998	228	10	166	2	-62	-8	0	31
1999	208	8	186	6	-22	-2	-3	52
2000	192	12	189	-	-3	-12	-9	66
2001	211	-	183	3	-28	3	-2	54
2002	217	8	224	2	7	-6	2	2
2003	219	5	199	3	-20	-2	-7	57
2004	239	13	200	1	-39	-12	0	48
2005	227	17	218	1	-9	-16	-5	79
2006	234	17	202	-	-32	-17	-10	100
2007	233	16	221	8	-12	-8	-7	5
2008	242	20	197	2	-45	-18	-5	46
2009	222	16	211	3	-11	-13	5	35
2010	233	3	192	6	-41	3	3	42
2011	232	19	185	1	-47	-18	-2	-17
2012	283	15	212	6	-71	-9	-1	-42
2013	224	15	191	3	-33	-12	7	11
2014	231	12	187	4	-44	-8	7	-33
2015	215	23	169	2	-46	-21	0	-27
2016	208	21	150	11	-58	-10	0	30
2017	179	27	157	13	-22	-14	0	20
2018	181	32	183	10	2	-22	0	-50
<b>Total</b>	<b>4658</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>4022</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>-636</b>	<b>-222</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>588</b>

*Source:* Adaptation according to NBS data and the Public Services Agency of The Republic of Moldova and INS Romania

In the current period of transition to a market economy, accompanied by economic, social and political instability has determined the large number of flows of people moving both inside and outside the country [7]. The migration, as a whole, for the city of Straseni, in the analyzed time interval was about 3 times higher than that of the city of Zarnesti, this fact indicates a lower degree of population stabilization than, even if both states face periods of crises, amplified in the current period by Covid 19. The high rates of migration of the population of the Republic of Moldova, in general, were driven by the Free Trade Agreement and Comprehensive, one of the provisions aimed at visa liberalization for Moldovan citizens which entered into force on 28 April 2014, which facilitated the movement of people within the EU on the basis of a biometric passport migration. To this is added the large number of citizens of the Republic of Moldova who have obtained Romanian citizenship that allows them free movement in the community. These events, adjusted by the political and economic and social instability in the country, the lack of opportunities in the labor market served as basic factors in the movement of people both in Western and Eastern Europe. The highest intensity of migration was registered in 2012 - 283 emigrants, in the same being registered the highest negative migratory balance of - 71 people. The amplitude of the mechanical movement for the city of Zărnești was much lower and insignificant in the total balance of the population (tab. 4). In the total balance of the population for the analyzed time interval we find insignificant positive dynamics for both cities, especially for Straseni which had a positive balance of 7 people and slightly higher for Zarnesti 588 people.

Regarding the socio-economic issues, there are several similarities between these cities, even if the political events (Romania's integration into the European Union, the signing

of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement with its deep and comprehensive free trade area), the crisis structural changes during the transition period that both states are going through, as well as the cruise of the global Covid pandemic 19, significantly influenced the socio-economic evolution of the analyzed cities.

Among the common features for the cities of Straseni and Zarnesti on the socio-economic dimension are the centralized development system of the past, rigid economic structures, reduced adaptability to the current system of transition to market economy, poor capitalization of economic and human potential all influenced the structure and socio-economic dynamics of the given cities.

In the city of Straseni are registered and active about 2780 economic agents (2019). Of these, the largest number is peasant households, which total 1,590 units (several of them did not indicate income, representing more subsistence households). Enterprises with the right of legal entities make up 305 units [9]. An important place is occupied by the food industry, especially the wine industry. Agricultural production in the two cities only partially meets urban requirements, although there are much greater possibilities. In both cases, a large part of the agricultural land is used improperly or uncultivated. Urban demand and the local agri-food market would be met by regional producers and distributors, which would reduce their dependence on imports as the agricultural sector intensifies.

In the secondary sector operate 156 units as follows: 17 units with profile of machine building and metal processing industry; 37 units with construction profile; 43 units with energy profile; 47 units with wood processing profile; 5 units with light industry profile; 7 units with chemical industry profile. In the tertiary sector, 90 units operate as follows: 23 units with a transport profile; 31 units with service profile; 36 units deal in fuel trade. Also here there is 1 unit with communal profile, and the rest are economic agents with various other activities [9]. The largest share of the population is employed in the tertiary sector: trade, transport, banking, education and health. A considerable part of the economically active population of the city commutes daily to the capital, being primarily involved in the tertiary sector. The population employed in the secondary and primary sectors is quite small, even if the relaunch of a free economic sub-area which would create a large number of jobs is foreseen.

Currently, several companies have been closed indefinitely, unemployment is quite high, and the lack of jobs is felt everywhere, a similar situation is registered in Zarnesti [10].

The European legislation implemented by Romania during the over 10 years of presence in the EU is felt in the urban development of small and medium cities in the context of territorial decentralization, the experience of Romanian cities could serve as an example of good practice for Moldova [3].

Zarnesti locality since its appearance and until now, it has evolved economically from a predominantly agricultural profile (former Zărnești village), to an industrial profile (current city) [6], [8]. Economic development of Zarnesti took place mainly between 1960-1970 and lasted until the 1990s. [6], [8]. The population of Zarnesti stands out from an occupational point of view in industry, partly in agriculture, as well as in tourism (mountain and leisure tourism), which is currently stagnant.

Zarnesti has known several stages of economic development: a stage of development, during the communist period from 1960-1990, then a period of decline, between 1990-2000 and again a stage of "pre-economic" between 2000 and until now. Between 1960-1990, a forced industrialization [6], [8] took place throughout Romania, including Zarnesti. The city

experienced a development of industry, until the 1990s, then there is a period of decline that lasted until around the 2000s. During this period, a number of economic units were disbanded, many reduced their activity, and others they reshaped themselves. Because there is an Industrial Park on the territory of the city, established around the 2000s, a series of new units were created here. The Industrial Park offers cheap labor and qualified staff in various fields, here activating several companies with different profiles [8], [10]. In recent years, part of the Zarnesti industry has refocused on the processing of resources, but also of existing products locally. At present, the labor force is qualified for the industrial field, but this requires a specialization for the tertiary sector (the field of services), which currently has prospects for the future (natural tourism potential). Today, the city's population is growing, after the dizzying decline between the last two censuses, which leads to the intensification of economic activities, which have led to major changes in the landscape [10].

Both are developing quite dynamically, with the intention of adapting to the regional competition of cities, in the current context of decentralization applied by the regional development policy, the transition being marked by both successes and failures. Although the situation in these cities is apparently relatively good compared to other cities in the regions they belong to, they face a number of common but also specific problems in the current context of the socio-economic transitions they are going through.

## CONCLUSIONS

The cities of Straseni and Zarnesti have a series of common features, but also distinct in the geodemographic and geoeconomic evolution, in the current transition period that both states are going through. The transition to a market economy has marked the population in terms of demographic evolution in the direction of slow growth, against the background of increased migration.

1. Both the city of Straseni and Zarnesti had a slightly linear geodemographic evolution, even if the geodemographic trends in the Republic of Moldova and Romania had a period of constant decline, caused by the economic and social transition they have already gone through more than 20 years;

2. The positive natural balance for both medium-sized cities is due, rather, to their favorable geographical and geoeconomic position in relation to the cities of Chisinau and Brasov, important polarizing centers at national level in both states;

3. The statistical data on the geodemographic evolution in these cities show relatively stable situations, but which require continuous monitoring and management in the context of the pronatalist policies promoted by both states, as well as return migration, which will become possible after stabilization. socio-economic situation at national level, and currently at European and global level in the context of the global pandemic [4].

4. Several demographic indicators have evolved, some even very sharply, which will determine the demographic insecurity of cities, especially on the dimension of migration [7].

5. The most acute problem is the demographic aging, in the case of both cities the threshold of the demographic aging of 12% being far exceeded, which means the increase of the demographic pressure [3, 2].

6. The lack of well-paid jobs exacerbates the seriousness of the employment problem and, correspondingly, of economic growth, which has worsened during the global pandemic;



7. Economic recovery is possible in both cases through major capital investments both from within, but especially from outside [5].

8. The city of Straseni has socio-demographic and socio-economic structures with a higher degree of instability, given the longer-term transition that the Republic of Moldova is going through.

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