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NAVIGATING MIGRATION CHOICES: UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUAL AND STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS IN MOLDOVA AND ESTONIA

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Navigating Migration Choices: Understanding Individual and Structural Determinants in Moldova and Estonia

Tatiana TABAC¹

Abstract

This study explores the individual and contextual determinants shaping migration intentions in Moldova and Estonia – two countries situated at the periphery of the European Union, yet characterized by contrasting demographic and economic trajectories. Moldova has experienced sustained depopulation over the past three decades, primarily driven by high levels of emigration that continue to this day. In contrast, Estonia, while initially affected by significant emigration flows post-EU accession, has recently recorded a shift toward a positive net migration balance. The empirical analysis draws on nationally representative microdata from the Generations and Gender Survey conducted in Moldova (2020) and Estonia (2021–2022). The study employs multinomial logistic regression to identify and compare the key determinants of emigration intentions within the next three years. A two-stage methodological strategy was applied: an initial exploratory analysis within each country to identify significant predictors, followed by a unified comparative model using the most robust variables identified in the Moldovan sample. The results reveal that in both Moldova and Estonia, young people are the most likely to express emigration intentions. However, the underlying motivations differ substantially. In Moldova, migration is largely constraint-driven, with financial hardship and economic instability acting as key push factors. In contrast, in Estonia, migration appears more aspirational and opportunity-oriented, driven by professional goals and the desire for personal development. Cultural influences diverge as well. In Moldova, lower religiosity is associated with greater migration intentions, suggesting more secular and individualistic values among prospective migrants. In Estonia, religiosity has no significant impact, reflecting a highly secularized society. These findings underscore the importance of both structural and individual factors, and point to the need for Moldova to shift from a survival-based migration model to one rooted in domestic opportunity and socio-economic cohesion.

Keywords: migration intentions; determinants of migration intentions; factors of migration; demographic changes; depopulation; Moldova; Estonia; Eastern Europe; GGS.

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Introduction

For several decades, international migration is a defining feature of Eastern European societies, shaping demographic trajectories, labour markets, and social structures across the region (Tóth, 2025; Kahanec & Zimmermann, 2009; Gagauz, Tabac & Pahomii, 2023; Otovescu C. & Otovescu A., 2019; Hazans, 2016; Botev, 2012). Within this Eastern European space, population mobility reflects a complex interplay between structural constraints and individual aspirations – a dynamic that characterizes both Moldova and Estonia. Yet, while Estonia has successfully integrated into the European Union and diversified its migration patterns – recording in recent years a positive net migration rate and emerging trends of return among young migrants (Toomistu, Annist & Murakas, 2024a; Toomistu et al., 2024b; Bugowski, 2025) – Moldova continues to experience large-scale emigration, driven primarily by economic disparities and limited domestic development opportunities (Tabac & Gagauz, 2020).

Understanding why people intend to migrate is just as important as analysing those who actually do. Migration intentions often serve as an early indicator of future mobility patterns and of emerging demographic and social transformations. As de Haas (2021) and other scholars point out, migration decisions are deeply rooted in individuals' perceptions of life chances, institutional trust, and social capital. In this sense, migration intentions reflect not only personal strategies for economic and social advancement but also collective responses to inequality and uncertainty.

This paper explores what data reveal about migration intentions in Moldova and Estonia, adopting a comparative perspective to identify similarities and differences in the factors shaping emigration aspirations. Drawing on microdata from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) – Wave I conducted in Moldova (2020) and in Estonia (2021-2022) – the study examines how socio-demographic, economic, and cultural determinants influence individuals' predisposition to migrate abroad.

The comparison between Moldova and Estonia is justified from both historical and analytical perspectives. The two countries share a common origin within the post-Soviet space, similar demographic structures of relatively small populations, and comparable challenges related to depopulation and population ageing. Both have undergone profound economic and social transformations during the post-Soviet transition; however, Estonia benefited from early European Union integration (since 2004), economic liberalization, and accelerated digitalization of public services, whereas Moldova continues to face economic and institutional instability.

Although both countries experience comparable demographic pressures – a declining working-age population, youth emigration, and territorial imbalances – emigration from Estonia has eased as living standards improved and institutions strengthened, while in Moldova, emigration intentions remain persistently high.

The choice of Estonia as a reference country is also supported by the availability of comparable data within the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS), a methodologically harmonized instrument. This ensures the consistency of statistical analyses and allows for the identification of genuine differences in migration intentions and motivations between the two national contexts.

Literature review

Specialized literature on international migration and migration intentions highlights a significant evolution in how the determinants of population mobility are conceptualized. Classical studies based on push-pull models and gravity theories are frequently criticized in recent scholarship for their overly simplistic nature and their limited ability to capture the complexity of contemporary migratory processes. While these approaches emphasize the role of economic disparities, political conditions, and social networks, current research indicates a lack of clear empirical evidence supporting the primacy of one specific set of factors over others (de Haas, 2011). From this standpoint, the aspiration – capability framework (de Haas, 2021) offers a more comprehensive approach, arguing that migration intentions are shaped by macrostructural processes, social transformations, and institutional developments that reshape both actual opportunities and individual aspirations.

A broad synthesis conducted through a meta-analysis reveals that the most frequently analyzed migration determinants include income (or GDP per capita), education level, migrant networks, gender, age, and family characteristics (Soto Nishimura & Czaika, 2024). Similar conclusions are drawn in studies by the Institute of Labor Economics (IZA), which show that income disparities between countries often intensify migration flows and that migration can act as a household insurance mechanism, frequently accompanied by the intent to send remittances (Simpson, 2022). Another set of findings – provided by Docquier, Peri, and Ruysen (2018) – confirms the importance of pre-existing migrant networks and the income level in destination countries, indicating that migration is stimulated by economic growth in destination states, and that individuals with higher education levels exhibit greater emigration rates due to their stronger potential for integration into international labor markets.

To identify key drivers and potential barriers to migration intentions, Williams and colleagues (2018) developed a multilevel analytical model, demonstrating that both socio-economic factors (income, occupation, professional status) and non-economic factors (e.g., risk appetite or sensation-seeking) play essential roles in explaining migration intentions. Consequently, the literature underscores the multidimensional nature of migration decisions, which lie at the intersection of individual characteristics, opportunity structures, and subjective perceptions.

Individual characteristics – such as gender, age, education, occupational status, and prior migration experiences – are consistently cited in studies as central determinants of migration intentions. Research by the European Commission (2014) reveals that women are more inclined to migrate for educational purposes, while older individuals are less likely to migrate (Sjaastad, 1962; Netz, 2015). Migrants are often described as young, ambitious, risk-tolerant, and typically in a transitional stage of their life cycle (Braun & Arsene, 2009; de Haas, 2010). Moreover, employment status significantly influences intentions: unemployed individuals or those facing limited job opportunities are more likely to seek professional solutions abroad, while students – less constrained by family or professional responsibilities – exhibit higher migration intentions (van Mol, 2014).

Prior migration experiences and social networks also play a crucial role in shaping intentions. Literature shows that individuals who have migrated before are more likely to do so again, as they perceive lower psychological and informational costs. The residential environment (urban vs. rural) and the level of urbanization are additional key factors, suggesting that access to information and exposure to global opportunities increase the propensity to migrate (Thaut, 2009).

At a structural level, mismatches between the skills developed through the education system and the demands of the domestic labor market can drive migration (Thaut, 2009). Additionally, dissatisfaction with the quality of public services significantly influences the desire to migrate, with institutional dissatisfaction being strongly associated with increased migration intentions (van Dalen & Henkens, 2012). The literature notes that the forces triggering migration intentions are broadly the same as those driving actual migration (van Dalen & Henkens, 2012). However, migration aspirations should be understood as indicators of migration potential, rather than direct predictions of future behavior (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006).

International migration is a significant demographic process in both Moldova and Estonia, with major implications for population stability. In Moldova, the drastic population decline is overwhelmingly attributed to migration, driven primarily by low wages, labor market dysfunctions, and low labor productivity (Gagauz et al., 2021; Bîrcă et al., 2023). At the same time, remittances serve as a major economic benefit for migrant families, both in the form of cash and goods (Roșca, 2023). The consequences include depopulation, demographic aging, and a shrinking working-age population.

In Estonia, the literature explores both migration to the EU and specific migratory relations with countries like Finland. Due to geographical proximity, Estonia–Finland migration often takes the form of incomplete migration, which can have positive effects for Estonia by maintaining economic links with return migrants and reducing pressure on public services (Anniste, Pukkonen & Paas, 2017). Studies show that in the post-EU accession period, Estonia did not experience significant brain drain; however, emigration increased among lower-educated segments of the

population (Aniste et al., 2012). More recently, a noteworthy shift from negative to positive net migration balance has been observed in Estonia, driven by both return migration and increased immigration from abroad (Bugowski, 2025).

Other research examines the identity dimension among Estonian youth in the diaspora, revealing conflicting perceptions – one unfavorable perception of Eastern Europe, and another that influences the desire to return to Estonia (Toutomitu, Annist & Murakas, 2024a). Furthermore, well-educated young adults from the Baltic region tend to migrate for a mix of economic, career, lifestyle, and personal development reasons, often expressing ambivalence about whether and when they might return (King et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, studies providing clear empirical evidence on the determinants of migration remain limited. In Estonia, unfavorable macroeconomic conditions – such as low income, low GDP per capita, and high unemployment – are frequently identified as primary drivers (Galstyan, Grabowska & Bačiulienė, 2022). In the case of Moldova, socio-demographic factors are shown to play a central role (Ivan & Tabac, 2022). This research aims to contribute to the literature by offering a comparative analysis of migration motivations in the two countries.

Methodology

Data Source

The analysis is based on microdata from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS), Wave I, a harmonised international survey focused on demographic behaviour, family dynamics, intergenerational relations, work trajectories, and wellbeing. The study uses the nationally representative samples collected in Moldova in 2020 and Estonia in 2021-2022, which allow for a robust comparative examination of emigration intentions in two post-Soviet societies with distinct socio-economic trajectories.

Research Objective and Purpose

The objective of the study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the factors influencing emigration intentions among the populations of Moldova and Estonia. The purpose of the research is to highlight the contextual specificities of emigration intentions in the two countries – which share a common historical legacy but diverge significantly in their institutional and economic development – in order to deepen the understanding of the mechanisms shaping migration behaviour.

Variables and Operationalization

The dependent variable DEM20 (“Do you intend to emigrate in the next three years?”) was dichotomised to distinguish clearly between respondents with and without emigration intentions. The response categories definitely not and probably not were recoded as 1=no, while definitely yes and probably yes were recoded as 2=yes. More than 50 independent variables capturing demographic characteristics, socio-economic conditions, labour market status, wellbeing, intergenerational relations, and cultural attitudes were initially considered.

Research Method

Multinomial Logistic Regression, used to model the determinants of emigration intentions, allowing the identification of statistically significant predictors and the estimation of their effect sizes. For the regression analysis, the reference category was set as “international migration intentions: yes.”

Methodological Strategy

The methodological approach followed two distinct stages. Exploratory Stage: The effect of a comprehensive set of over 50 demographic, economic, social, and cultural variables was tested independently for each country. This exploratory analysis aimed to identify the factors significantly associated with the likelihood of intending to emigrate within the next three years.

Comparative Modelling Stage: Based on the first-stage results, the variables with the strongest predictive power in the Moldovan context were selected. These variables were subsequently included in a unified regression model applied to both countries. This strategy ensures cross-country comparability while maintaining the analytical relevance of the predictors.

The final regression models were evaluated using the Nagelkerke Pseudo R-Square, which reached a value of 0.338 for Moldova and 0.173 for Estonia, indicating a moderate explanatory power for Moldova and a lower but meaningful explanatory power for Estonia.

Comparative Analytical Approach

The results of the regression models were interpreted through a comparative lens, emphasising both convergences and divergences in the determinants of emigration intentions. This approach provides insights into the structural and contextual factors shaping migration aspirations in two countries with shared historical legacies but contrasting institutional environments.

Results

Understanding Emigration Intentions in Moldova

The findings for Moldova underscore the significant role of socio-demographic factors in explaining emigration intentions (Table 1). The data reveal that men are 1.6 times more likely than women to express an intention to emigrate. Additionally, individuals without a partner are 27% more likely to consider emigration compared to those in a relationship.

Age emerges as the most powerful predictor: all age groups under 60 exhibit significantly higher probabilities of intending to emigrate relative to the reference group (60+ years). Notably, youth aged 15-19 and 20-29 are over 13 times more likely to express emigration intentions, while those aged 30-39 are approximately 12 times more likely. As age increases, the intention to emigrate progressively declines, with individuals aged 40-49 and 50-59 showing a notably lower propensity for mobility. These results confirm the generational selectivity of emigration intentions, with young people constituting the primary group inclined toward international mobility.

Educational attainment also plays a differentiating role: individuals with lower levels of education tend to express fewer emigration intentions. This suggests a positive selectivity in migration, typically driven by individuals with higher educational attainment and more pronounced professional aspirations. Another noteworthy finding is the strong predictive value of internal mobility: those intending to move within the country are about six times more likely to also express intentions to emigrate abroad.

The analysis of economic factors reveals a clear correlation between perceived economic conditions in Moldova and emigration intentions. Individuals who report managing expenses with great difficulty or difficulty have approximately a 33% higher likelihood of intending to emigrate. Those who cope with some difficulty show an even greater likelihood – 58% higher – compared to individuals who report managing expenses easily or very easily. These findings confirm that economic pressure and financial insecurity are key drivers in the decision to emigrate.

In terms of expectations regarding personal income, individuals who anticipate no change in their financial situation are 41% less likely to intend to emigrate. Interestingly, the perception of a potential worsening of one's financial condition ("worse" or "much worse") does not significantly influence emigration intentions. These results suggest that migration is more closely linked to aspirations for economic advancement than to perceptions of financial decline. Overall, individuals do not appear to emigrate solely due to material constraints, but rather out of a desire to improve their standard of living and to leverage their economic and professional capital in different socio-economic contexts.

The influence of cultural factors was assessed using the variable of religiosity, introduced into the regression model. The analysis reveals an inverse relationship between religiosity and emigration intentions. Compared to highly religious individuals, those identifying as slightly religious are approximately twice as likely to intend to emigrate. Those who consider themselves moderately religious and religious exhibit 1.27 and 1.24 times higher probabilities, respectively. Thus, lower levels of religiosity are associated with greater openness to mobility and reflect a more secular value orientation, centered on individualism, autonomy, and change. In this respect, less religious individuals appear more willing to explore opportunities abroad, being more flexible in relation to traditional norms and communal attachments – traits that facilitate adaptation to new social and cultural environments.

Table 1. Predictors of emigration intentions in Moldova

	B	Sig.	Exp. (B)
Gender_Male	.480	.000	1.616
Partner_no	.245	.004	1.278
Age_15-19	2.600	.000	13.466
Age_20-29	2.596	.000	13.406
Age_30-39	2.477	.000	11.900
Age_40-49	1.967	.000	7.146
Age_50-59	.982	.000	2.670
Edu_Primary education	-.312	.180	.732
Edu_Lower secondary education	-.492	.000	.611
Edu_Upper secondary education	.089	.476	1.093
Edu_Post-secondary non tertiary education	-.373	.003	.688
Edu_Short cycle tertiary education	.141	.277	1.152
Internal migration intentions_yes	1.769	.000	5.863
Can make expenses_with great difficulty and difficulty	.290	.003	1.336
Can make expenses_with some difficulty	.455	.000	1.576
Expected_income_the same	-.525	.000	.592
Expected_income_worse and much worse	-.112	.374	.894

Religiosity_slightly religious	.704	.000	2.021
Religiosity_moderately religious	.243	.039	1.275
Religiosity_religious	.217	.046	1.243

Note: Reference category: Gender=female, Partner=yes, Age=60+, Edu=bachelor, master, doctoral, Internal migration intentions=no, Can make expenses=quite easily, easily, very easily, Expected_income=much better and better, Religiosity=very religious.

Understanding Emigration Intentions in Estonia

The regression model for Estonia indicates that emigration intentions are not influenced by gender, as no statistically significant differences were found between men and women (Table 2). In contrast, family status emerges as a relevant determinant: individuals without a partner are 1.7 times more likely to express an intention to emigrate, underscoring the link between external mobility and the absence of family constraints.

Age remains a strong predictor of emigration intentions. All age groups under 60 exhibit significantly higher likelihoods of intending to emigrate, particularly those aged 15-19 (Exp=17.45) and 20-29 (Exp=12.55). These results confirm that youth represent the core demographic driving emigration intentions, while the propensity for mobility decreases with age.

Regarding educational attainment, no category exerts a statistically significant effect on emigration intentions. This lack of differentiation may indicate a homogenization of migratory motivations, driven by similar economic and aspirational factors across educational groups.

Another noteworthy finding concerns internal mobility, which proves to be a significant predictor of international emigration intentions. Individuals who intend to relocate within the country are 4.5 times more likely to also consider emigrating abroad. This supports the hypothesis that internal mobility often serves as a preliminary stage of international migration, reflecting a broader disposition toward change and adaptability.

Economic factors show a clear association between economic vulnerability and the intention to emigrate. Those who report coping with expenses with great difficulty or difficulty are nearly twice as likely to intend to emigrate (Exp=1.929), confirming that direct economic pressure stimulates the desire to leave. In contrast, the category “somewhat difficult” does not yield statistically significant results, suggesting that emigration intentions are triggered more by critical economic hardship than by moderate financial stress.

Expectations regarding income development also play a crucial role. Respondents who anticipate that their income will remain unchanged are 36% less likely to intend to emigrate, while those expecting a financial decline (“worse” or “much worse”) show no significant variation in emigration intentions. This

indicates that, in the Estonian context, migration is not primarily perceived as a strategy to avoid decline, but rather as a means of economic advancement. In other words, individuals who aspire to improve their standard of living and professional status are more likely to consider migration a viable option.

Religiosity does not appear to be a significant differentiating factor in explaining emigration intentions in Estonia. Religious values do not display statistical relevance in the regression model, suggesting a neutralization of cultural influence on migration behavior. This absence of correlation likely reflects a cultural homogenization regarding emigration decisions and the predominance of economic and pragmatic considerations in the decision-making process.

Table 2. Predictors of emigration intentions in Estonia

	B	Sig.	Exp. (B)
Gender_Male	-.003	.981	.997
Partner_no	.546	.000	1.726
Age_15-19	2.859	.009	17.451
Age_20-29	2.530	.018	12.551
Age_30-39	2.028	.057	7.600
Age_40-49	2.053	.054	7.793
Age_50-59	1.885	.077	6.590
Edu_Primary education	-13.170		1.907
Edu_Lower secondary education	.243	.201	1.275
Edu_Upper secondary education	-.062	.720	.940
Edu_Post-secondary non tertiary education	-.007	.970	.993
Edu_Short cycle tertiary education	-.185	.528	.831
Internal migration intentions_yes	1.503	.000	4.495
Can make expenses_with great difficulty and difficulty	.657	.000	1.929
Can make expenses_with some difficulty	.173	.251	1.189
Expected_income_the same	-.453	.005	.636
Expected_income_worse and much worse	.098	.631	1.103
Religiosity_slightly religious	-.200	.544	.819
Religiosity_moderately religious	.051	.885	1.052
Religiosity_religious	-.012	.975	.988

Reference category: Gender=female, Partner=yes, Age=60+, Edu=bachelor, master, doctoral, Internal migration intentions=no, Can make expenses=quite easily, easily, very easily, Expected_income=much better and better, Religiosity=very religious.

Comparative Insights from Moldova and Estonia

The results of the multinomial logistic regressions for the two countries reveal a shared core of determinants, alongside notable differences shaped by each society's socio-economic and cultural context.

In both Moldova and Estonia, age emerges as the strongest predictor of emigration intentions. Young people under 30 constitute the group with the highest propensity to migrate, being more than 12-13 times more likely to consider leaving compared to adults and those approaching retirement age. This pattern confirms the generational nature of external mobility and aligns with the scholarly literature on the transition to adulthood and the search for professional opportunities abroad. However, the magnitude of the effects varies slightly between countries: in Moldova, high emigration intentions persist up to the 30-39 age group, whereas in Estonia the intensity declines earlier, suggesting a faster stabilization of young adults within a more consolidated economic environment.

With respect to gender, only in Moldova do men exhibit a significantly higher probability of intending to emigrate. In Estonia, gender differences are not statistically significant, which may reflect the greater gender equality in the labour market and in access to international mobility opportunities typical of Nordic-influenced societies. Education also emerges as a differentiating factor only in Moldova. Higher educational attainment significantly increases emigration intentions, indicating positive migrant selectivity – individuals with higher qualifications display greater mobility. In Estonia, educational level has no significant effect, possibly reflecting a homogenization of economic motivations and similar access to internal opportunities across educational groups.

Family status has a similar effect in both countries: being without a partner significantly increases the likelihood of intending to emigrate (by roughly 1.3 times in Moldova and 1.7 times in Estonia). Another important shared factor is internal mobility – intentions to move within the country strongly correlate with international emigration intentions ($\text{Exp}(B)=5.86$ in Moldova and 4.49 in Estonia).

In both countries, perceptions of one's economic situation significantly shape emigration intentions, though with nuanced differences. In Moldova, emigration intentions increase with perceived financial hardship, indicating that economic pressure is a driver of mobility. At the same time, optimistic expectations regarding future income correlate with higher emigration intentions, suggesting that migration is viewed not only as a survival strategy but also as a pathway to socio-economic advancement.

In Estonia, the effect of economic difficulties is similar ($\text{Exp}=1.93$), but expectations regarding income function somewhat differently. Individuals who anticipate financial stagnation are significantly less likely to intend to emigrate, whereas expectations of economic decline do not influence the decision. This pattern may reflect that in more economically stable societies, migration is not a crisis response but a strategic choice linked to professional diversification

and capital accumulation. Thus, in comparative terms, migratory motivations in Moldova are more constraint-driven, while in Estonia they are more aspirational, oriented toward maximizing personal opportunities.

The religiosity – also reveals notable differences among countries. In Moldova, lower levels of religiosity are associated with a higher likelihood of intending to emigrate, pointing to a more secular and individualistic value orientation among those predisposed to mobility. In contrast, religiosity has no statistically significant effect in Estonia, reflecting an advanced degree of social secularization and the neutralization of cultural influences on emigration decisions.

Discussions

The comparative analysis between Moldova and Estonia highlights both common explanatory factors and significant differences that reflect the historical, economic, and cultural particularities of the two societies. Although both countries share a common past as former Soviet republics, their post-independence trajectories have diverged considerably, with visible implications for the migration behaviors of their populations.

On the one hand, the observed convergences – particularly the role of age, internal mobility, and family status – indicate the presence of shared patterns in emigration intentions. Young people under 30, regardless of national context, exhibit a strong predisposition toward external mobility, underscoring the importance of the transition to adulthood and the pursuit of professional fulfillment. Additionally, the correlation between emigration intentions and the absence of a partner illustrates the influence of individual autonomy and the relative ease with which people without familial obligations consider leaving their country of origin.

On the other hand, differences in the influence of gender, education level, and religiosity reveal important structural and cultural divergences. In Moldova, men are significantly more likely to express emigration intentions – a trend that may be explained by persistent gender inequalities in the labor market and economic opportunities. In contrast, this relationship is not statistically significant in Estonia, reflecting a higher degree of gender equality, typical of Nordic societies. Similarly, the fact that educational attainment significantly influences emigration intentions only in Moldova suggests that the migration pattern there is more selective – individuals with higher educational capital may find it harder to integrate into the domestic labor market. By contrast, the lack of a significant effect of education in Estonia may indicate a more inclusive labor market, where individuals are better integrated regardless of their educational level.

The interpretation of migratory motivations thus reveals a meaningful gradient between what can be described as “survival migration” – more dominant in Moldova – and “opportunity-driven migration,” more characteristic of Estonia. In

the former, direct economic pressures, financial hardship, and uncertainty about the future fuel the desire to emigrate, with migration perceived as an escape from a restrictive environment. In the latter, emigration appears to be a voluntary, strategic choice, driven by professional aspirations, a desire for diversification, and the maximization of personal capital in an international context.

A key cultural component in this equation is religiosity. In Moldova, lower levels of religiosity are associated with a higher likelihood of emigration intentions, suggesting a tension between traditional values and modern aspirations among young, mobile individuals. In Estonia, however, religiosity does not function as a differentiating factor – likely a reflection of a high degree of social secularization, where mobility decisions are less tied to personal value systems and more influenced by pragmatic considerations.

Overall, the comparison illustrates that, despite some shared traits related to age and individual flexibility, migration remains a deeply contextualized phenomenon, shaped by the institutional, economic, and cultural specificities of each country.

Conclusion

The study of emigration intentions in Moldova and Estonia was conducted using data from the Generations and Gender Survey (Moldova 2020; Estonia 2021–2022), based on nationally representative samples and multinomial logistic regression models. The comparative approach made it possible to capture both the general patterns of emigration intentions and the variations associated with distinct socio-economic and institutional contexts.

The findings indicate that emigration intentions follow systematic patterns within the analyzed population and are closely linked to the life course stage. In both countries, young people represent the segment with the highest propensity for external mobility, confirming the role of migration as a strategy connected to the transition into adulthood and the shaping of professional trajectories.

At the same time, the comparative analysis highlights clear differences in how socio-economic conditions translate into mobility aspirations. In Moldova, emigration intentions are more strongly associated with material hardship and vulnerable positions in the labor market, suggesting a more constrained character of migration decisions. In Estonia, emigration intentions are less closely tied to immediate economic pressures and more frequently relate to internal mobility and the anticipation of future career development.

Differences observed by gender and educational level underscore the presence of distinct patterns of migration selectivity. In the case of Moldova, emigration intentions display a more pronounced social stratification, whereas in Estonia they are distributed more evenly across socio-demographic groups.

The cultural dimension further enriches the comparative analysis, pointing to a differentiated role of value orientations in shaping emigration intentions. In Moldova, the decision to pursue external mobility is associated with a distancing from dominant traditional norms, while in Estonia emigration intentions appear to be less influenced by such value frameworks and are driven primarily by functional considerations.

Overall, the results suggest that emigration intentions reflect both shared individual-level factors and structural specificities unique to each society examined. The differences observed between the two countries indicate that international mobility is shaped by distinct combinations of opportunities, constraints, and institutional frameworks, underscoring the importance of comparative approaches in understanding the complexity of migration behavior.

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