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# CASE-STUDY: THE STUDENT POPULATION OF A UNIVERSITY IN AN ECONOMICALLY DISTRESSED REGION

## A b s t r a c t

The access to higher education in Romania has been growing in the past decades, the communist regime contributed by creating a path towards massification of higher education. This trajectory was continued in the post-communist era. Private universities were opened, state universities were enlarged, and both paths increased access to higher education in Romania. On the other hand, economic, political, and social changes can negatively impact access to higher education. This was the case of the University of Petroșani, a university strongly tied to studying the mining processes in the communist era.

However, in post-communism, the University of Petroșani did not follow the expected path paved by closing down the mines and opened two new faculties, leading to a significant growth in the student population of as many as 6520 students in 2002. Additionally, the structure of the student population changed, the gender balance was influenced, and international students were attracted. However, after 2010, the University of Petroșani faced a decline in the student numbers, from 4311 students in 2010 to 3352 in 2009, following a constant decline until 2354 in 2015. After 2016, the proportion of students above the 30 increased massively being constant around 30% of the total student population. This change in the age of the student population affected the student experience at the University of Petroșani, leading to absenteeism and an unsatisfactory student experience.

This milestone aims to explore the changes in the student population structure in the post-communist era at the University of Petroșani and analyze the current student experience. This article relies on quantitative data publicly available in the Rector's Report and at INS corroborated with semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face with the students of the University of Petroșani enrolled in the university year 2023-2024