UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | Moldova

AAP TASK FORCE

PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL COHESION AND INTEGRATION

November 2025 - Q3 Report

The Social Cohesion Survey is part of UNHCR's broader community-based protection framework in Moldova, designed to monitor and understand the evolving relationship between Ukrainian refugees and Moldovan host communities. This exercise has been started in mid-2025 and conducted quarterly to capture trends in mutual perceptions, integration, participation, and inclusion.

METHODOLOGY

Chisinău, North/Balti hub, Central districts, Southern districts, Gagauzia and Transnistria.

632 forms, from Green Line interviews and self-administered forms

85% Ukrainian refugees
15% Moldovan host communities

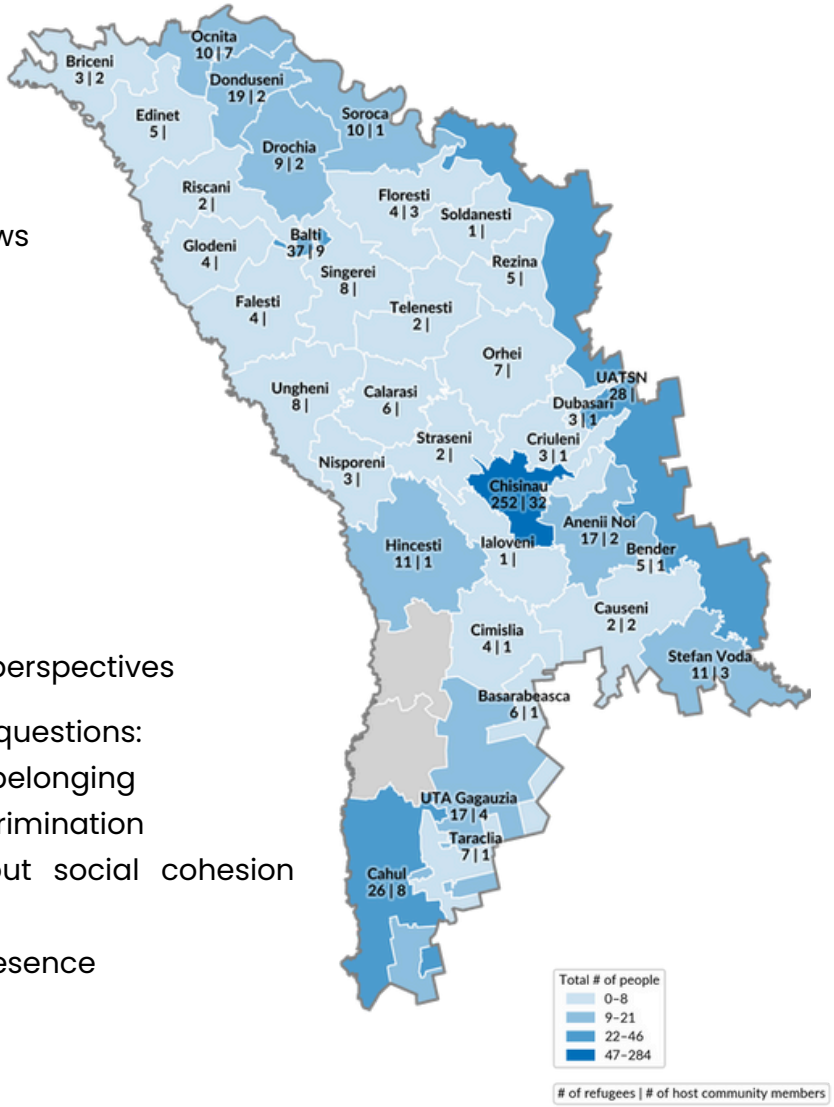
65% living in Urban areas
35% living in Rural areas

The limitations of the study are:

- Self-selected sample
- Results may not fully reflect all perspectives

The interviews are covering **5** core questions:

- Perceptions of integration and belonging
- Experiences of exclusion or discrimination
- Awareness and opinions about social cohesion activities
- Perceived impact of refugee presence
- Quality of intergroup relations



The *boundaries* and names shown on this *map* do *not* imply official *endorsement* or acceptance by the *United Nations*

Overview of Refugee Perceptions

Refugees continue to report strong feelings of safety and welcome in Moldova, especially in Chișinău and the Centre, where daily interaction supports a growing sense of belonging. Participation in community life remains limited overall, yet when refugees do engage in local activities, it significantly strengthens cohesion and mutual understanding. Experiences of discrimination are rare and usually isolated, reflecting stress or misunderstanding rather than widespread hostility.

Feeling welcomed by Moldovans

Most refugees continue to describe Moldova as a safe and hospitable country. In Q3, 74% said they feel welcomed by people in their community. Refugees in Chișinău (78%) and Central Moldova (76%) feel especially accepted, thanks to frequent interaction and visible engagement from municipalities and NGOs.

"People in our town are kind. The market seller always asks how my children are doing."
"At first, no one talked to us, but after school events we started to feel part of the neighborhood."

By contrast, Southern districts (63%) and Gagauzia (59%) report a more cautious atmosphere, not openly hostile, but marked by distance and limited familiarity.

"People here are polite, but they don't really invite you into their lives"

Refugees repeatedly linked their sense of welcome to opportunities for social contact, informal conversations at local markets, children's school activities, or community events. Where such contact exists, feelings of isolation decrease significantly.

For refugees, inclusion happens in everyday spaces.
When asked "Where do you usually interact with local Moldovans?", the top five answers were: markets and shops, community centres, schools, health facilities, and parks or cafés. Markets emerged as the single most mentioned venue.
Urban respondents added workplaces and cultural events, while rural ones emphasized schools and clinics as key contact points with Moldovans.

"We started talking to neighbours when we met at the market and later at the community centre."
"At the clinic, doctors were kind, and we got to know local families in the waiting room."

Belonging and participation in community life

70% of refugees said they feel part of their local community, though belonging is uneven across regions. In Chișinău and the Centre, refugees described progressive acceptance, while in smaller rural areas, many still felt "guests rather than neighbors."

"We have been here for two years, and now it feels like home."
"I know my neighbours by name, but we rarely visit each other."

Only 42% of refugees reported participating in community events or social activities, yet among those who do, the effect on perceptions is profound. Among them, 66% said such activities helped improve cohesion and mutual understanding.

The most active areas are Chișinău and the North/Bălți hub, where community centres, language courses, and municipal festivals provide structured opportunities to meet.

"After a children's festival, neighbours started greeting us; it changed the mood."
"At the community centre we met Moldovans who invited us to their birthday party — it felt normal again."

In the South, participation remains limited which is may be due to fewer events, distance, and economic hardship.

"We would like to join events, but everything happens far from our village,"

Participation often transforms passive coexistence into shared community life, reinforcing the message that belonging is not only granted, it is built through interaction.

Safety and discrimination

82% said they feel safe expressing they are from Ukraine, whether by speaking Ukrainian, displaying cultural symbols, or interacting publicly. Still, 9% described discrimination or hostility, primarily verbal.

"They said my accent is strange and were cold at the counter."
"Once a man told us to go back, but others helped us later."
"People get impatient when we speak Russian."

Incidents were slightly more frequent in the North and South, while Chișinău and Central Moldova remain the safest and most welcoming. Importantly, Refugees' testimonies suggest that discrimination often reflects stress, misinformation, or social fatigue, not widespread hostility.

Host Community Perceptions

Moldovan respondents generally maintain positive and pragmatic views of refugee integration, especially in Chișinău, Bălți and Central districts where daily contact in shared public spaces fosters trust. Perceptions are more reserved in Gagauzia, Transnistria and rural areas, where interaction is limited and economic pressure shapes attitudes. Even so, most Moldovans describe relations as good, and those who participate in joint activities overwhelmingly report stronger cohesion and better understanding.

Views on integration

Among Moldovan respondents, 63% felt that Ukrainian refugees are integrating well or very well. The sense of coexistence is strongest in Chișinău (69%), Bălți and the northern districts (65%) and Central districts (61%).

"Refugees bring skills and new ideas to our community."

In Gagauzia (46%) and Transnistria (47%), optimism is lower, reflecting both reduced program presence and more reserved public attitudes.

"We see refugees often, but we don't talk much."

The data suggest that perceived fairness in access to aid and services influences attitudes toward refugees as much as personal interaction does rather than cultural difference.

When Moldovans were asked "Where do you usually interact with refugees?", most referred to markets, health centres, and schools, the same spaces mentioned by refugees. These are shared infrastructures of everyday life where interaction unfolds naturally.

"We mostly meet refugees at the clinic and school, sometimes at festivals."

Such encounters, although brief, build trust through repetition. They humanize "the other" and create a sense of normal coexistence.

Relations and social distance

Overall, 68% of Moldovans described relations with refugees as "good" or "very good," while only 6% rated them negatively.
Many pointed to daily contact and shared experiences, for example, using the same public transport, attending the same schools, or participating in community events.

"I see the same people every week at the market; we talk about prices, not about nationality."

However, several respondents referred not to hostility but to a growing "social fatigue," linked to the pressure on already limited local resources.

"We understand the situation, but it has been long time, and life is hard for everyone now."

About 36% of Moldovan respondents said they participate in community activities involving refugees. Among those, 74% felt such events improved social cohesion.

"Joint events helped us see refugees as ordinary neighbours."
"After cleaning the park together, we started to greet each other."

Participation was highest in Chișinău and Bălți, and lowest in rural southern areas and Gagauzia, where probably both logistical constraints and community fatigue reduce involvement. Still, the majority agreed that shared activities are the best tool to sustain social cohesion.

Perceived impact of refugees on Moldova

When asked about the impact of refugees on host communities, responses were mixed but leaned positive:

56% positive: cultural enrichment, community solidarity, and revitalization of local economies

"Refugees bring energy and culture."

30% neutral/mixed: appreciation for humanitarian assistance but concerns about service pressure.

"We like to help refugees, but clinics are crowded."

14% negative: competition for jobs and overcrowding in clinics.

"Pressure on jobs in our town is real."

Regional Insights

Chisinău

Chișinău stands out as the most cohesive area, characterized by strong participation, high perception of safety, and higher social networks for both refugees and host community members.

Community centres and other initiatives have enabled refugees to build friendships and professional networks, contributing to the sense that "integration is happening naturally."

"We attend the same courses and see each other as part of the same town."

North / Balti

Active engagement and multiple contact points (markets, workplaces, events) define the northern region.

While generally positive, there are pockets of tension where economic uncertainty fuels mild resentment.

"We work together in the same company; there are no problems, but some people feel the competition."

Central districts

Central Moldova remains stable and inclusive. Local authorities and NGOs collaborate effectively to host school activities, festivals, and information sessions that include both refugees and Moldovans.

"Children make friends easily; adults follow their example."

Southern districts

The south presents lower participation and slightly more cautious attitudes. Economic strain and fewer interaction opportunities lead to social distance.

"We have good people, but sometimes they think refugees take jobs."

Gagauzia

A culturally distinct context where Russian language is common and facilitates contact. However, social ties remain mostly transactional, limited to markets, clinics, and administrative interactions.

"We see refugees often, but we do not talk much."

Transnistria Region

Refugees in Transnistria reported mixed experiences: while some appreciate hospitality, others feel unsafe or excluded. There are few joint initiatives, and local narratives about the war remain politically sensitive.

"We are fine here, but some prefer not to say they are from Ukraine."

Programmatic Implications and Recommendations

Strengthen inter-community initiatives in the South, Gagauzia, and Transnistria, where cohesion is fragile and participation opportunities limited

Support language and communication projects (Romanian and Ukrainian/Russian) to overcome linguistic barriers and ease service interactions.

Expand use of schools, health centres, and markets as social bridges, with joint visibility campaigns showing positive stories of cooperation.

Continue anti-discrimination efforts targeting both public service providers and communities through awareness and empathy-based campaigns.

Empower local NGOs and community centres as trusted connectors — where refugees and Moldovans can participate as equals.

Sustain positive examples in Chișinău and Bălți through mentorship and replication models for smaller districts.

Include host-community communication efforts in humanitarian programming to prevent fatigue and resentment.

Programmatic Implications and Recommendations

Findings from Q3 2025 confirm that Moldova continues to maintain a generally cohesive social fabric despite protracted displacement and economic pressure.
Both refugees and Moldovans show resilience, pragmatism, and growing mutual understanding.

Cohesion grow through everyday encounters, in schools, clinics, markets, and community events, where shared experiences turn coexistence into community.

"At the beginning, we were strangers. Now, we borrow sugar from each other."

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