



BRIDGING THE GAP

Migration Policies and People’s Policy Perspectives in Balti and Cahul (Republic of Moldova)

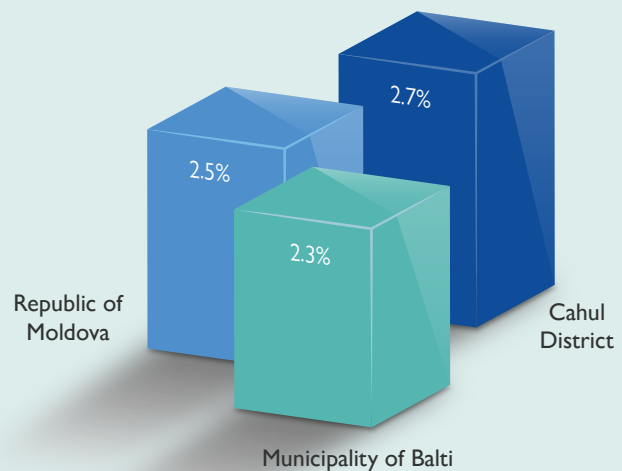
Migrant needs and the policies aimed at supporting them are often evaluated in isolation, making the formulation of effective policies that respond to the reality on the ground more difficult. Seeking to bridge this gap, two major IOM global initiatives have been identified as crucial data sources to enable a comprehensive assessment of the needs of migrants in order to inform policy and programmatic responses: the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and the Migration Governance Indicators (MGIs). These two methodologies have been combined to develop an innovative approach in two municipalities of the Republic of Moldova – Balti and Cahul – selected based on their geographically strategic positions on main migration corridors, socioeconomic profiles and local authorities’ close collaboration with IOM.

The goal of this report is to analyse the extent to which migration policies and services available in Balti and Cahul address the needs of migrants, directly from migrants’ perspective. Specifically, the evaluation considers the characteristics and needs of migrants and the local migration governance landscape. The analysis is based on data collected from a DTM survey¹ in Balti and Cahul in February and March 2023 and the local MGI assessments conducted in both municipalities² between September 2022 and August 2023. The results of the simultaneous analysis of data from both tools are used to inform tailored policy and programming recommendations, effectively bridging the DTM’s operational humanitarian approach with the policy-focused perspective of the MGIs.

MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT TRENDS

Between February 2022 and August 2023, the equivalent to 34 per cent of the Moldovan population (over 890,000 people) entered through the Moldovan–Ukrainian State border. While many of them stayed only temporarily, as of August 2023, Ukrainian refugees living in the country represent approximately 4 per cent of the total population. No migrant flow statistics are available at the local level.

International immigrants as percentage of the population, 2020



¹ The survey involved 661 individuals above 18 years old: 99 per cent of the respondents are Ukrainian citizens, 84 per cent are female, and approximately 50 per cent reported having children. For more information, see *Surveys with Foreign Populations in Cahul and Balti Municipalities: Joint MGI–DTM Initiative*.

² See the 2023 Local Migration Governance Indicators Profile for the Municipality of Balti and the 2023 Local Migration Governance Indicators Profile for the Municipality of Cahul.

KEY FINDINGS

Migration and asylum assistance	The Provision of Temporary Protection, approved in January 2023 and overseen by the General Inspectorate for Migration, allows Ukrainian refugees to regularize their status. In Balti and Cahul, the Regional Integration Centres for Foreigners coordinate services pertaining to migrants. In 2022, Balti and Cahul established Crisis Cells (functional until March 2023) to manage the flow of asylum-seekers, create temporary accommodation for refugees and act as focal point for information. With support from IOM, Balti and Cahul also opened Information Centres for Refugees in early 2022, to increase community outreach and information awareness of the availability of assistance. In the two municipalities, more respondents reported using the Migration and Asylum Office services (in 2023, the name was changed to General Inspectorate for Migration) than the Town Hall's services; and the majority reported as having been satisfied with the services from both.
Information provision	Despite the availability of 24-hour services from the Crisis Cells and the establishment of Information Centres for Refugees in Balti and Cahul, the main sources of information among survey respondents in both municipalities were information shared on messaging apps and through word of mouth from family and friends. A significant portion of respondents expressed the need for more information in Ukrainian.
Health services	Starting in 2023, displaced populations entering the country are granted equal access as Moldovan citizens to Government-funded health-care services. As of May 2023, the displaced population should have legal status, i.e. apply for temporary protection or asylum. Access to health services, medicine, and personal hygiene and sanitary supplies are the top three immediate health needs reported by survey respondents in both municipalities. Most respondents who used health services in Balti and Cahul were satisfied with them. Difficulties accessing services are primarily due to long waiting times and perceived staff performance issues.
Food and non-food items	Most of the respondents in Balti and Cahul expressed a need for assistance with food, clothing and shoes. Local initiatives supported refugees with food, alongside aid provided through the World Food Programme, private donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Crisis Cells managed the flow of migrants and related issues, including housing. In order to cope with the demand, public institutions with furnished bedrooms were made available, such as university dormitories and municipality-owned hotels. Respondents in both municipalities primarily stayed in private accommodation, followed by Refugee Accommodation Centres.
Children's development	Since February 2022, there have been three schooling options for Ukrainian children: local school in Romanian, online school, or in-person school in Russian or Ukrainian. In both municipalities, most children either attend online classes through a school in Ukraine or receive in-person education in local schools using the Ukrainian or Russian language. A small number of school-age children do not attend any schooling. Almost half of the respondents expressed the need for extracurricular spaces and activities for children.
Protection	Both municipalities lack local strategies to combat human trafficking, although they occasionally disseminate information on their websites and participate in relevant campaigns. Legal services for migrants in both municipalities are typically offered on an ad hoc basis, often through channels like the Integration Centres. In 2023, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Law Centre of Advocates (<i>Centrul de Drept al Avocaților, CDA</i>) concluded an agreement to provide these services at the local level. All individuals, regardless of their immigration status, can place complaints about rights violations with the national-level Ombudsman.
Socioeconomic well-being	Immigrants possessing the required documentation can receive assistance to access formal employment through the National Employment Agency (NEA), and in 2022 the requirement for a temporary residence permit for Ukrainians to access employment was eliminated. From 2023 the displaced population should have legal status in Moldova, i.e. apply for temporary protection or asylum. Job fairs were organized in both Balti and Cahul to facilitate the inclusion of migrant workers, including Ukrainian refugees, yet only a few respondents reported using NEA services since their arrival. There are no local programmes to promote gender equality for migrants in the labour force in the municipalities of Balti and Cahul. Accordingly, the need for assistance in accessing employment was predominantly reported by female respondents.
Government partnerships	The Municipal Councils of Balti and Cahul cooperate with the United Nations on migration issues and refugee response, as well as with civil society organizations (CSOs) in the implementation of programmes concerning migration. A considerable proportion of respondents reported using services from international organizations, with a relative disparity in access to international NGO services – more than half of the respondents in Balti claimed to have accessed these services, compared to only 18 per cent in Cahul. Considering the limited collaborations between local authorities and CSOs, access to services provided by these organizations remains the least prevalent.

SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Further empower local authorities through capacity-building and local-level action plans, thereby enhancing vertical policy coherence with the Programme on Managing Migration Flow, Asylum and the Integration of Foreigners.
2. Complement existing channels of official information for migrants and refugees with new services (e.g. text messages), particularly in Ukrainian. Develop a referral pathway for migrants and refugees in coordination with United Nations entities and NGOs.
3. Strengthen regular training for public officials, particularly at the local level, in migration-related matters, such as relevant legislation, to enhance the assistance provided by local authorities.
4. Bring health-care services closer to migrants by providing information on how to access health care, such as on the website of municipalities.
5. Identify gaps in resources and staff necessary to provide the services needed most by migrants, which can inform future calls for funding. In particular, increase the capacity of Integration Centres and implement programmes to support access to longer-term accommodation and housing.
6. Provide Romanian classes for non-Romanian school-age children as much as needed to facilitate integration in schools. Enhance access to services provided by childcare facilities to allow for parents' participation in social, cultural and economic life.
7. Launch an information and awareness campaign regarding the legal services accessible to migrants and the forcibly displaced. Raise awareness of the risk factors and indicators of human trafficking.
8. Increase coordination between government entities, United Nations entities, NGOs, CSOs and the private sector in agenda-setting and the implementation of migration-related and refugee response policies and programmes.