



Understanding Social Tensions in Moldova:

An Expert Assessment of
Community Dynamics Wave II

2025

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Executive Summary

The 2025 wave of the Expert Community Scoring Tool (ECoST), conducted under Moldova’s Social Tensions Monitoring Mechanism (STMM), provides a comprehensive and unprecedented picture of local wellbeing, institutional performance, and social cohesion across twenty urban and rural localities. This year’s expansion into rural areas allows for the first systematic national comparison of territorial dynamics, revealing a landscape of moderate stability but persistent structural vulnerabilities.

1. Strong local capacities contrast with uncertainty around national-level processes.

Results show that the local social fabric remains robust. Essential services such as schools, communal infrastructure, and mayor’s office services are consistently among the strongest-performing indicators across both urban and rural settings. Participants consider that the local capacities are able to take care of the local challenges and to ensure local wellbeing and deliver essential services.

However, structural constraints continue to weaken long-term prospects. Economic opportunities remain the weakest-performing indicator, reflecting limited job creation, dependence on narrow economic sectors, and persistent migration pressures. Confidence in the future has declined sharply in most localities, driven by concerns about demographic decline, inflation, and insufficient economic diversification. Perceptions of national authorities remain cautious, although 2025 marks a notable improvement in the visibility and responsiveness of central institutions, partly influenced by the electoral context.

2. No clear pattern of “urban always better” or “rural always struggling”: the decisive factor is often local context, not locality type.

The urban–rural comparison reveals far narrower gaps than expected, challenging the assumption of universal rural disadvantage. Locality-specific factors such as leadership quality, presence of development projects, territorial collaboration, civic environment—prove more decisive than administrative status. Several rural localities, such as Sălcuța, Sadaclia, and Dezghingea, outperform their urban counterparts in essential services, institutional capacity, and intergroup cohesion. Conversely, some urban centres including Basarabeasca, Ștefan-Vodă, and Orhei—show persistent governance, service, and confidence challenges that lower overall performance.

3. Gradual yet fragile progress: improvements are visible but hindered by deeper structural pressures

The longitudinal comparison with 2024 indicates a gradual positive evolution, particularly in areas influenced by targeted interventions or strong municipal leadership. Gains are most evident in perceived national authorities’ care, access to social welfare, and institutional capacities. Yet economic stagnation and declining optimism overshadow these improve-

ments, revealing an urgent need for interventions that address structural drivers of vulnerability.

4. Implications for policy and programming

Drawing on the empirical evidence from the 2025 ECoST cycle, several priority directions emerge for strengthening local resilience and reducing territorial disparities:

Invest in economic diversification and youth opportunities. Localities consistently identify economic stagnation and youth out-migration as critical threats. Support for small and medium enterprises, vocational pathways, and localised youth livelihood initiatives is essential. Rural areas with clear economic anchors (e.g. Purcari, Sadaclia) show that even small territories benefit significantly when a stable economic driver is present.

Strengthen local institutional capacity and administrative readiness for EU reforms. Low scores on EU-readiness and local authority capacity in weaker localities (e.g. Basarabeasca, Călărășeuca, Albota de Sus) highlight the need for targeted administrative training, reform communication

hubs, and technical assistance. Strong performers such as Cahul, Durlești, and Comrat illustrate the gains achieved when local administrations are well-supported.

Expand community infrastructure and inclusive public spaces. Several urban and rural localities suffer from limited community assets and public spaces, undermining civic participation and youth engagement. Investments in multifunctional community centres, youth hubs, and accessible public infrastructure can significantly strengthen cohesion.

Improve healthcare access and environmental risk management. These two domains consistently emerge as weaker areas across multiple localities. Targeted interventions in frontline healthcare, preventive services, and environmental management (waste, flooding, water systems) would alleviate pressure on already vulnerable communities.

Taken together, these insights identify where support is most urgently needed and where interventions are likely to produce the highest returns. The 2025 ECoST cycle reaffirms that Moldova's territorial development requires targeted, locality-specific solutions that reinforce local institutions, expand economic opportunities, and deepen social cohesion.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Social Tensions Monitoring Mechanism (STMM), implemented by UNDP Moldova, is designed as an integrated system for continuously observing and analysing the drivers of social cohesion, institutional trust, and community wellbeing across Moldova. It serves as both an early-warning platform and a strategic learning mechanism, enabling policymakers, development partners, and local authorities to anticipate risks, identify emerging trends, and design timely interventions. The STMM comprises three complementary components: the Expert Community Scoring Tool (ECoST), which gathers localised expert perceptions; a household survey that captures the views of the general population; and the eMonitor tool that provides digital insights and thematic intelligence. Together, these components offer a holistic understanding of local dynamics and the structural issues affecting communities.

The ECoST represents the most participatory of the three components. It brings together diverse members of local communities to reflect on developments in their locality, evaluate institutional performance, and assess the quality of social relations. Unlike a classical household survey, which focuses on citizens' individual perceptions and personal experiences, the ECoST is rooted in expert-based, collective assessments. Participants draw on their direct involvement in community life, whether through local government, civil society, social services, education, or the private sector, to provide informed, context-sensitive evaluations of local dynamics. This approach allows the tool to capture structural issues, institutional capacities, and community-level trends that may not be visible through household surveys alone. As such, it provides an invaluable lens into the lived realities of Moldovan communities and the ways in which national-level challenges manifest differently across territories.

1.2 Purpose of the 2025 Wave

The 2025 ECoST cycle was designed with several key objectives. First, it provides an updated, detailed picture of local wellbeing and institutional performance across Moldova. Second, it offers the first systematic comparison between urban and rural areas, which is essential for understanding territorial inequalities and identifying opportunities for strengthening resilience beyond major cities. Third, the 2025 wave allows for a direct comparison between the 2024 and 2025 results, capturing early signs of improvement or decline in a range of social, institutional, and economic indicators. Finally, the data collected serve as an evidence base for informing UNDP programming, government policy, and donor-supported interventions in areas such as decentralisation, local governance reform, community development, and social cohesion.

1.3 Structure of the Report

The report unfolds across six substantive analytical sections that correspond to the core analytical priorities of the STMM. The first section provides a comprehensive overview of the 2025 results across all twenty localities. The second examines changes in perceptions and performance between the 2024 and 2025 waves. The third contrasts rural and urban dynamics, identifying both commonalities and territorial differences. The fourth section offers a deeper exploration of selected key indicators that are of particular relevance to current policy debates. The fifth presents locality-specific snapshots, each offering a concise half-page overview of performance, challenges, and opportunities. The sixth section provides a series of potential interventions and policy recommendations based on ECoST re-

sults. Together, these sections offer a detailed yet accessible understanding of Moldova’s local social dynamics and their implications for future policy and programming.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 The ECoST Approach

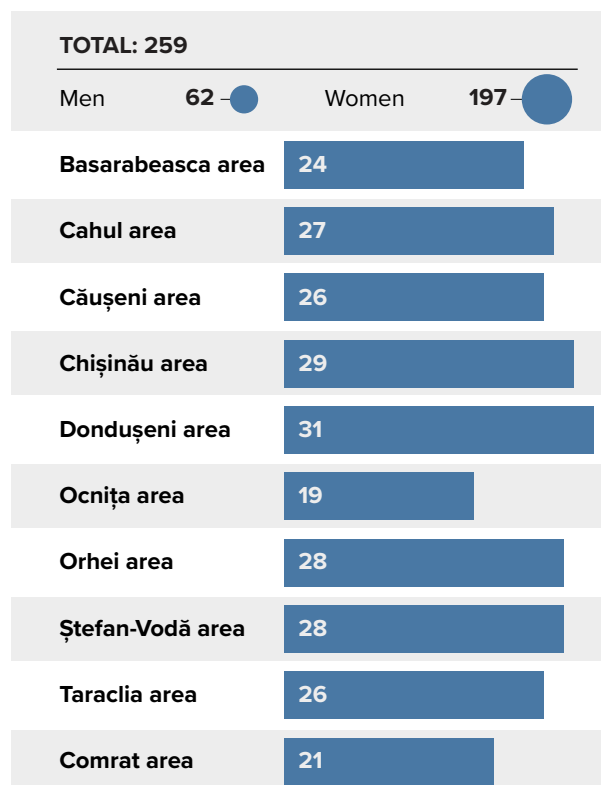
The Expert Community Scoring Tool is a participatory assessment method that brings together a diverse group of community actors to jointly reflect on the conditions within their locality. Participants include educators, civil society activists, local officials, youth representatives, service providers, and other community leaders. Each session begins with an open, facilitated discussion in which all participants are invited to share their observations, experiences, and knowledge on the theme or indicator being examined. This deliberative phase, guided by two trained facilitators, allows for a broad exchange of viewpoints, clarification of misunderstandings, and the integration of different forms of local expertise.

1.4.2 Composition of Local Expert Groups

Local Expert Groups (LEGs) were established in each locality to participate in the ECoST sessions. These groups consisted of ten to fifteen individuals representing a wide spectrum of sectors and demographic categories. Efforts were made to ensure gender balance, representation of youth, inclusion of public service professionals. This composition helps ensure that the scores reflect a broad range of experiences and insights rather than the perspective of a single sector.

1.4.3 Scoring Process

Each ECoST session followed a structured process. Participants were first introduced to the twenty indicators and their definitions, after which they engaged in a guided discussion to share observations, debate interpretations, and clarify how local developments should be understood. Once the collective dialogue concluded, each expert independently and anonymously scored all indicators on a 0–10 scale, ensuring that assessments reflected individual judgements free from group pressure. This combination of collective reflection and private scoring produces a robust dataset that captures both the contextual nuance emerging from discussion and the quantitative rigour needed for comparison across localities and over time.



1.4.4 How to read a score

The scale can be structured into four performance ranges to ensure consistent interpretation across localities: scores between 7.5 and 10 indicate very good or strong performance; 5.0 to 7.5 reflects moderately good or mostly satisfactory conditions; 2.5 to 5.0 signals problematic areas requiring improvement; and 0 to 2.5 denotes critical or failing situations that may require urgent action.

All indicators are positive meaning higher scores represent better conditions except for “Vulnerability to manipulative narratives and mis/disinformation.” For this indicator, a high score reflects greater vulnerability, while a low score indicates resilience. It is therefore the only “negative” indicator in which lower scores are desirable.

1.4.5 Selection of Localities

In 2025, the ECoST was implemented in an expanded set of twenty localities. Ten of these are urban centres (municipalities, towns, or small cities) while the remaining ten are rural communities. The selection of rural localities followed a structured screening process that considered several characteristics of each commune. Each criterion was chosen because it reveals an important aspect of local capacity, vulnerability, or representativeness. The criteria used were:

By combining these criteria, the sampling ensured a balanced mix of rural localities with different demographic profiles, governance capacities, civic dynamics, and development challenges. This approach strengthens the representativeness of the rural sample and enhances the analytical value of the ECoST findings.

1.4.6 Updated Indicators' List in the 2025 ECoST

For the 2025 cycle, the set of indicators used in the Expert Community Scoring Tool was refined to improve the tool's analytical depth and alignment with the broader Social Tensions Monitoring Mechanism (STMM). Several indicators from the previous edition were removed, while new ones were introduced to capture more specific and actionable community dynamics.

Indicators removed:

- Polarisation of society and Intergroup relations were removed because they offered only broad, aggregate insights. They have been replaced with more granular indicators that focus on specific social groups (such as ethnolinguistic and cultural minorities or socioeconomically vulnerable groups) allowing for a clearer understanding of where tensions or cohesion emerge.
- Absence of social tensions was removed because it did not reveal the sources of tensions and therefore offered limited value for targeted interventions.

New indicators added:

- Vulnerability to manipulative narratives and disinformation was introduced to strengthen synergies with the eMonitor, the digital monitoring component of the STMM, and to better understand how information environments shape community trust and cohesion.
- Collaboration and proximity with neighbouring villages was added to support ongoing discussions around amalgamation prospects, helping to identify localities with strong inter-communal cooperation.
- Acceptance toward ethnolinguistic and cultural minorities and Acceptance toward socioeconomically vulnerable groups provide a more detailed picture of intergroup dynamics, replacing previous broad measures with indicators that more accurately pinpoint areas of inclusion or exclusion.
- Youth-friendly community was included due to the increasing importance of youth wellbeing, migration pressures, and the need to understand the local conditions that shape young people's decisions to stay, leave, or engage in community life.

Together, these updates make the ECoST more precise, policy-relevant, and better aligned with the evolving social landscape in Moldova.

Table 1. Selection criteria for rural localities.

Criterion	Justification
Population size	This criterion ensured the inclusion of rural communes with a sufficiently large population to provide meaningful and diverse community perspectives.
Ethnic composition	This criterion ensures that selected localities include the presence of multiple ethnic groups, so that intergroup relations can be meaningfully assessed and compared.
Administrative structure and local relevance	Only communes with a basic level of services (specifically a school and a healthcare facility) were included. This ensures that rural localities can be meaningfully compared with urban areas on core welfare and institutional indicators.
Presence of NGOs and community initiatives	Rural communes were selected only if they had an active CSO or community initiative in place, ensuring that they can be compared meaningfully with urban areas that typically have stronger civic sectors.
Distance from the rayon centre	Communes were selected at an intermediate distance from the rayon centre (neither too close nor too remote) to avoid including areas that are either unusually advantaged in service access or excessively isolated compared with typical rural conditions.

Section 1. Overall Results Across the 20 Localities

The 2025 ECoST results present a picture of moderate stability across Moldova’s 20 assessed localities, with most indicators clustering in the upper mid-range. While communities ex-

press confidence in several key local dynamics, a number of persistent, structural challenges continue to constrain well-being and long-term development.

Table 2. Mean scores for ECoST indicators.

Indicator	Dimension	Score
Quality and accessibility of schools	Welfare & Essential Services	8.1
Mayor's office services and essential communal infrastructure	Welfare & Essential Services	8.1
Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees	Intergroup Relations	8.0
Collaboration and proximity with neighbouring villages	Intergroup Relations	7.9
Access to community assets and resources	Welfare & Essential Services	7.8
Tolerance towards ethnolinguistic and cultural minorities	Intergroup Relations	7.8
Assessment of local authorities' capacities	Institutional & Civic	7.7
Citizen participation in the decision-making	Institutional & Civic	7.5
Community mobilization potential	Institutional & Civic	7.5
Tolerance towards socioeconomically vulnerable groups	Intergroup Relations	7.5
Availability of social welfare support	Welfare & Essential Services	7.3
Vulnerability to manipulative narratives and mis/disinformation	Institutional & Civic	7.3
Assessment of the associative sector	Institutional & Civic	7.2
Confidence in the locality's future	Intergroup Relations	7.2
Quality and accessibility of the healthcare system	Welfare & Essential Services	7.1
Youth friendly community	Intergroup Relations	7.1
Management of Environmental risks	Welfare & Essential Services	7.0
National authorities care	Institutional & Civic	6.8
Readiness for EU reforms	Institutional & Civic	6.8
Availability of economic opportunities	Welfare & Essential Services	6.6

■ Welfare & Essential Services
 ■ Intergroup Relations
 ■ Institutional & Civic

1. Positive National Trends

One of the clearest strengths emerging from the 2025 assessment is the continued reliability of essential services and local-level institutions. Schools, community centres, and, in many cases, mayor’s offices receive some of the highest scores across the tool. These structures are visible, accessible, and directly engaged with community needs; factors that contribute to consistently positive evaluations.



1.1. Confidence in local institutions.

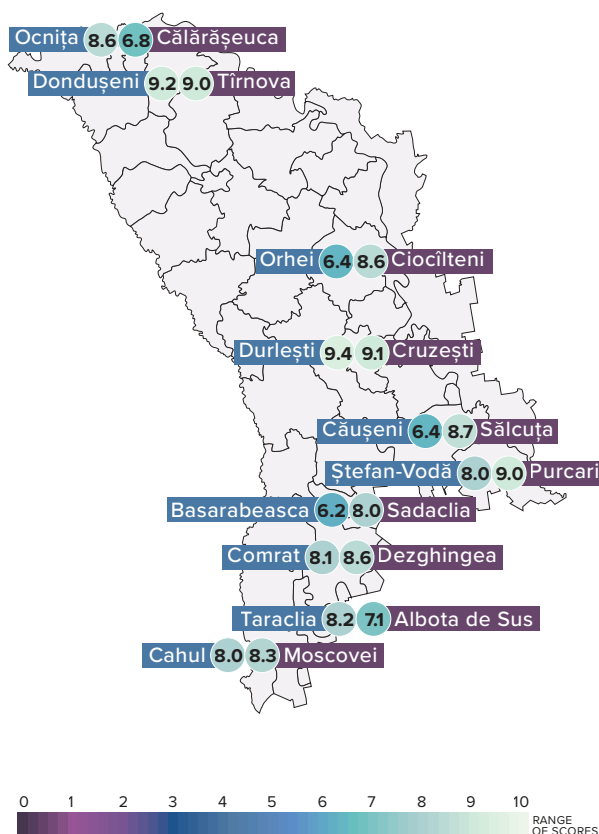
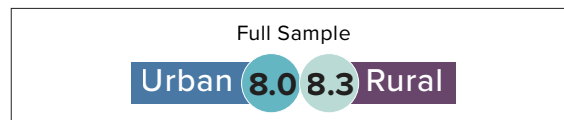
Local institutions appear to buffer communities from broader uncertainty. Their perceived effectiveness strengthens vertical social cohesion at the local level (e.g. high scores reported for “Mayor’s office services and essential communal infrastructure”, “Assessment of local authorities’ capacities”, “Access to community assets and resources”), enhancing trust in municipal governance even when confidence in national institutions is weaker. This pattern mirrors findings from the 2024 wave, where local authorities consistently outperformed national actors in citizens’ and experts’ assessments.



1.2. Positive intergroup relations.

Intergroup relations constitute another notable area of resilience. Despite heightened national-level political polarisation, economic pressures, and the continued social effects of the war in Ukraine, experts consistently describe relations among different social groups as stable, constructive, and largely harmonious. This is reflected in high scores for attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees, tolerance toward ethnolinguistic minorities, and acceptance of socioeconomically vulnerable

Mayor's office services and essential communal infrastructure



groups. Qualitative discussions further highlight strong expressions of solidarity, particularly in relation to hosting and integrating Ukrainian refugees, citing hospitality networks, active volunteer groups, and the ability of schools and social services to support displaced families. These findings suggest that, even amid broader national uncertainty, communities continue to demonstrate substantial capacities for inclusion and coexistence.



Hosting Conditions for Ukrainian Refugees – Summary of Qualitative Inputs

Across communities, participants reported that the number of Ukrainian refugees currently residing locally is far smaller than during the first months of the war, when many people were in transit. Those who remain have generally integrated well: children attend schools and kindergartens, and some adults have found employment. In localities with no refugees at present, respondents emphasised that the community would still be open and supportive to new arrivals.

Attitudes toward refugees are consistently described as tolerant and respectful. Participants across multiple communities recalled the initial influx as a moment of strong solidarity, with residents, volunteers, schools, and social services mobilising rapidly to provide shelter, food, transport, and guidance. This early collective effort left a lasting positive imprint and continues to shape local norms of hospitality. In places where a small number of refugee families remain such as **Cahul town**—ongoing support has helped maintain stable and cooperative relations.

A few concerns were raised, including isolated frustration over perceived levels of assistance or unappreciative attitudes—mentioned explicitly in **Donduşeni town**. Some participants also referred to underlying anxieties linked to the broader regional security situation. However, these issues remain limited and have not escalated into sustained tensions.

Overall, the discussions highlight that communities retain a strong capacity for empathy, coexistence, and adaptive support for displaced populations, even amid ongoing regional uncertainty.

When comparing the highest-scoring indicators (schools, mayor’s office services, refugee attitudes) with the lowest-scoring ones (economic opportunities, national authorities’ care, EU-readiness), a clear divergence emerges: **local, community-managed dynamics are functioning well, while structural, nationally driven dynamics remain challenging**. These findings suggest that Moldova’s local social fabric remains robust and that localities continue to demonstrate significant capacities for inclusion, cooperation, and social cohesion even in moments of national strain.

2. Negative National Trends.

At the lower end of the table, the weakest indicators highlight systemic challenges that extend beyond local control.

2.1. Limited economic opportunities

Economic opportunities remain among the most constrained dimensions across localities. Experts consistently express concerns about the scarcity of stable employment, limited options for young

people, and the absence of diversified local economies capable of generating sustained growth. In many areas, economic activity is dependent on a narrow set of sectors (often agriculture or small-scale trade) which leaves communities vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations and external shocks. These constraints reinforce patterns of outward migration and reduce confidence in the locality’s long-term prospects.

2.2. Perceived weak presence and responsiveness of national authorities

Dissatisfaction with national authorities also remains pronounced. Local actors report feeling insufficiently supported by central institutions, noting gaps between national-level strategies and the practical realities faced by municipalities. This perceived disconnect contributes to a sense of territorial neglect, with communities highlighting slow bureaucratic processes, limited direct engagement, and a lack of targeted interventions for local development. As a result, trust in na-

tional authorities remains significantly lower than trust in local governance structures.

2.3. Limited readiness for EU reforms

Readiness for EU reforms receives similarly cautious evaluations. Experts indicate that local administrations often lack the institutional capacity, administrative resources, and financial means necessary to meet the standards and procedural requirements associated with EU alignment. Many report uncertainty about the reforms' implications and insufficient guidance or technical support to implement them effectively. This contributes to a broader sense of being unprepared for the scale and complexity of the transformation required.

Taken together, these findings show that experts express much higher confidence in locally managed issues and in the capacity of their communities to address day-to-day needs at the municipal level. However, this confidence diminishes sharply when discussions move toward broader structural dynamics. Experts frequently report feeling overwhelmed, under-resourced, or insufficiently supported to absorb the pressures generated by nationwide economic challenges, demographic trends, or the demands of EU alignment. This contrast underscores a central message: **local actors trust their ability to manage local stakes, but structural and national-level processes remain a source of uncertainty and anxiety.**

3. Territorial disparities across the 20 Localities

This section offers a comparative overview of how the twenty assessed localities perform across the full set of ECoST indicators, highlighting both the strongest and the most challenged areas. While Section 5 provides a detailed, locality-by-locality analysis, the aim here is to present a broad picture of territorial patterns and disparities across Moldova. Figure 2 visualises these differences, with green shades denoting higher-performing localities and red shades marking those with weaker results. This serves as an entry point for understanding the main trends before proceeding to the in-depth examination that follows in later sections.

3.1. What are the common traits of the urban localities with the weakest performance?

Across the dataset, Basarabeasca, Ștefan-Vodă, and Orhei emerge as the three urban localities facing the most significant challenges. Although they differ in size, geography, and demographic composition, they share a common pattern of low performance across several critical indicators. Together, these deficits reveal structural vulnerabilities that constrain their development prospects and limit their ability to respond to emerging pressures.



These shared patterns across these three localities can be identified as follows:

Low confidence in the locality's future. All three localities report some of the lowest scores in future confidence, signalling deep concerns about long-term economic viability, demographic decline, and limited opportunities for younger generations. Experts highlight a pervasive sense of stagnation, driven by weak job creation, outward migration, and a lack of visible development initiatives. This pessimism creates a reinforcing cycle: low expectations discourage community mobilisation and reduce trust in local or national actors' ability to catalyse change.

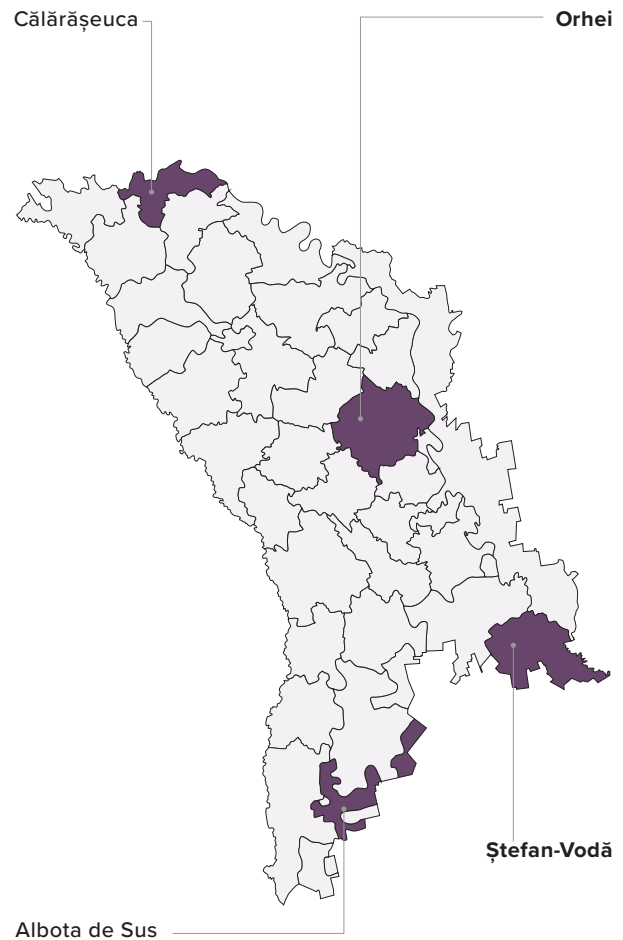


Weak perceived support from national authorities. Basarabescă, Ștefan-Vodă, and Orhei also register some of the lowest evaluations of national authorities' care. Experts perceive a persistent disconnect between national-level policymaking and local realities, particularly in smaller or politically marginalised areas. The lack of sustained engagement, inadequate communication, and slow responsiveness to local needs contribute to feelings of isolation and institutional neglect. This gap undermines confidence in reforms and hinders the implementation of development initiatives.



Challenges in managing environmental risks. Environmental risk management is another consistent weakness across these localities, reflecting limited infrastructure, insufficient investment, or gaps in local planning. Problems include inadequate waste management, vulnerability to extreme weather, and lack of preparedness for climate-related

Vulnerable Localities



hazards. These deficits have direct implications for public health and local quality of life, reinforcing the broader sense of fragility and unmet needs.

Limited readiness for EU reforms. All three localities report low readiness for EU reforms, pointing to insufficient institutional capacity, lack of technical knowledge, and limited financial resources to comply with reform requirements. Experts often describe a lack of guidance from central authorities, uncertainty about future expectations, and inadequate human resources within local administrations. This results in hesitation or resistance toward change, despite general public support for EU integration.





Strong urban performers: common drivers of high local outcomes.

Conversely, Durlleşti, Comrat, and Donduşeni stand out as the strongest urban performers. Experts in these localities provided consistently high scores across most indicators, pointing to well-functioning administrative structures, strong essential services, and vibrant community life. Their profiles suggest robust local governance, higher citizen engagement, and strong intergroup cohesion.

A closer comparison of their results shows that these localities share a set of common strengths. All three score particularly well on **mayor's office services and essential communal infrastructure**, demonstrating strong municipal capacity and service delivery. They also perform highly on the **quality and accessibility of schools**, reflecting well-functioning local education systems. Institutional performance is further reinforced by **strong local authorities' capacities** and **active citizen participation** in decision-making. In the social domain, these localities exhibit very positive attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees and **strong collaboration with neighbouring villages, indicating cohesive, outward-looking communities with solid inter-local ties**.

To summarize, these urban localities stand out for their effective public services, solid educational provision, and capable local administrations that engage residents in decision-making. They also demonstrate strong social cohesion, shown through welcoming attitudes toward refugees and constructive cooperation with nearby communities.

3.2. What are the common traits of the rural localities with the weakest performance?

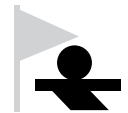
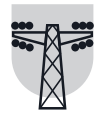
Călărăşeuca (Ocniţa area) and **Albota de Sus** (Taraclia area) emerge as the two rural localities with the most acute challenges, characterised by weak performance across several interconnected thematic areas.

Essential services and local infrastructure. Both localities score poorly on the quality and accessibility of healthcare, management of environmental risks, and access to community assets and resources. This points to structural limitations in service delivery and insufficient investment in basic infrastructure, which directly affects living conditions and community wellbeing.

Civic environment and local participation. Evaluations of the associative sector, community mobilisation potential, and youth friendliness are consistently low in both areas. These results suggest a fragile civic environment marked by limited organisational capacity, weak volunteer structures, and a lack of opportunities for youth engagement.

Social inclusion and intergroup relations. Both localities also underperform on tolerance toward socioeconomically vulnerable groups, indicating strained social relations and limited openness toward groups facing hardship. This points to social fragmentation and reduced capacity for inclusive community dynamics.

Relationship with national authorities and eu reform readiness. Călărăşeuca and Albota de Sus share some of the lowest scores on national authorities' care and readiness for EU reforms. This reflects a strong perception of being overlooked by central institutions, alongside limited confidence in their ability to meet the administrative and financial demands associated with EU alignment.





Future outlook and community confidence. Finally, both localities register very low confidence in the locality's future, signalling deep pessimism about

long-term prospects. This outlook is reinforced by the intersecting weaknesses in services, civic participation, inclusion, and national-level support.



Strong rural performers: common drivers of high local outcomes.

Sălcuța (Căușeni), Cruzești (Durlești), and Dezghingea (Comrat) stand out with consistently strong performances across the majority of indicators. Their profiles reveal a set of shared strengths that explain their favourable position in the rural landscape.

First, these localities demonstrate high-quality essential services, with strong results in both the quality and accessibility of schools and the healthcare system. This suggests well-functioning local infrastructure, effective resource management, and sustained investment in education and public health.

They also score very well on mayor's office services and essential communal infrastructure, indicating responsive and capable local ad-

ministrations that maintain public utilities, manage communal services effectively, and remain accessible to residents. This is reinforced by strong assessments of local authorities' capacities, reflecting competent governance, organisational stability, and the ability to coordinate community needs.

In addition, these localities excel in collaboration and proximity with neighbouring villages, signalling strong inter-local ties and regional cooperation. Such collaboration can translate into shared initiatives, resource pooling, and smoother coordination across communities, which collectively strengthen resilience.

Taken together, the performance of Sălcuța, Cruzești, and Dezghingea illustrates rural environments characterised by solid service provision, effective municipal governance, and strong regional connectivity. These conditions create a favourable ecosystem that supports community stability, trust, and long-term development.

Section 2. Comparison Between 2024 and 2025

The ECoST tool was first implemented in 2024 across the same ten urban localities, allowing for a meaningful comparison of results over time. Although the 2025 version introduced several new indicators, the majority of measures were retained, ensuring continuity and enabling a year-on-year analysis. Comparing the 2024 and 2025 waves offers valuable insight into how local dynamics are evolving across Moldo-

va. Despite the relatively short interval between the two assessments, the results reveal notable shifts that reflect broader socio-economic developments, changing community expectations, and the early impacts of ongoing reforms. Overall, the comparison highlights a pattern of both continuity in core strengths and gradual transformations in areas more sensitive to national or structural pressures.

The comparison between the 2024 and 2025 ECoST waves should be interpreted with caution. While the same localities and overall methodology were retained, the assessment is based on participatory expert group discussions rather than a longitudinal panel design. The composition of Local Expert Groups differed between waves, meaning that the same individuals did not necessarily participate in both years. In addition, the ECoST methodology relies on open and deliberative discussions, where perceptions and scoring are shaped through collective reflection and evolving local contexts. As such, year-on-year variations should be understood as indicative trends in community perceptions rather than precise causal measurements or statistically robust longitudinal comparisons.

Table 3. Variations between ECoST 2024 and ECoST 2025.

	Basarabasca	Cahul	Căușeni	Chișinău/Durlești	Comrat	Dondușeni	Ocnita	Orhei	Ștefan Vodă	Taracalia
Access to community assets and resources	0.7	2.8	-0.9	1.1	1.0	1.8	1.3	0.1	0.5	1.5
Assessment of local authorities' capacities	0.7	0.6	-0.3	2.4	0.9	0.9	0.9	-1.4	-1.0	-0.5
Assessment of the associative sector	0.4	0.3	-0.1	-0.6	1.0	1.1	0.3	-0.2	1.1	1.1
Availability of economic opportunities	0.8	0.0	0.3	1.0	-1.1	-0.3	-0.5	-0.1	-1.2	-0.6
Availability of social welfare support	1.7	1.4	1.3	2.7	0.9	2.2	1.7	1.9	-0.5	1.2
Citizen participation in the decision-making	0.7	1.4	-0.7	2.9	0.5	1.5	0.8	-1.3	-0.3	1.4
Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees	1.3	0.3	0.4	0.9	2.3	1.6	-0.3	0.0	0.3	-0.6
Community mobilization potential	-0.8	-0.8	-0.6	0.9	1.1	-0.2	-1.7	-0.6	-1.6	-0.1
Confidence in the locality's future	-1.2	-0.5	-0.4	0.7	-0.7	-1.5	-1.5	-2.6	-3.0	-2.6
National authorities care	1.0	1.0	0.7	1.6	0.8	2.4	2.9	1.1	1.0	2.5
Quality and accessibility of schools	2.0	0.4	0.3	2.2	0.1	0.8	1.0	0.5	-0.1	-0.1
Quality and accessibility of the healthcare system	1.6	-0.1	0.8	3.3	0.3	0.5	1.3	1.0	0.4	0.6

Insight 1. Overall improvement in local conditions

Compared with 2024, the 2025 results show a general upward trend across most indicators and in most localities. Although year-on-year variations remain moderate (typically between -1.3 and +1.5 points), the overall pattern points to incremental improvement rather than stagnation. The majority of indicators show slight increases, and several localities report meaningful progress in key areas such as essential services, institutional capacities, and intergroup relations. While some places experienced sharp swings (such as a +3.3 rise in healthcare access in Durlești or a -3.0 decline in confidence in the locality's future in Ștefan-Vodă) the broader landscape is characterised by steady, broad-based improvement in local conditions.

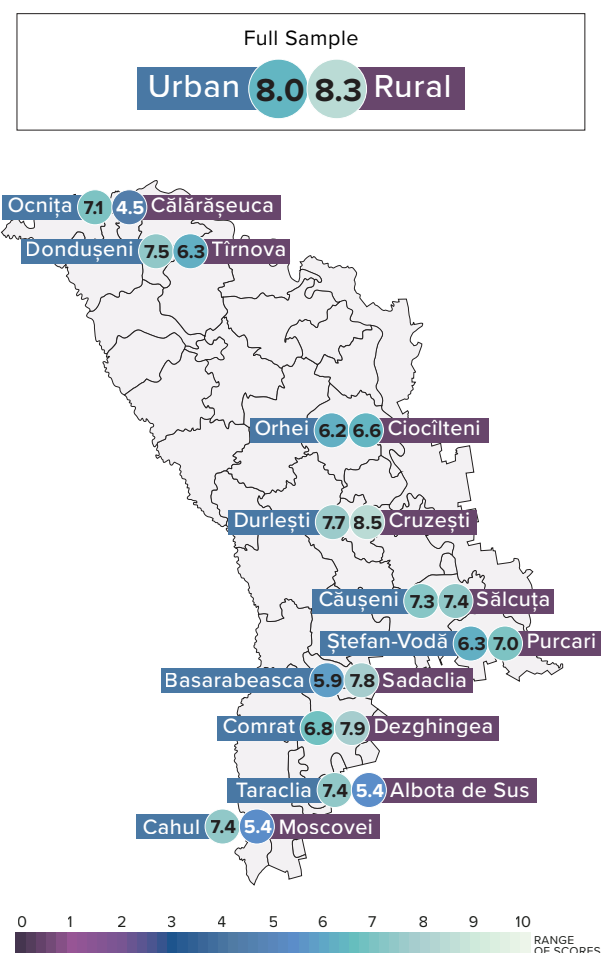
Insight 2. Marked improvement in perceptions of national authorities' care, a critical driver of local performance

A particularly significant finding in the longitudinal comparison is the improvement in perceptions of care from national authorities. Although this indicator started from a low baseline in 2024 and continues to rank among the weakest across localities, it is the only indicator that improved across all ten urban areas in 2025. Experts across multiple localities report slightly greater visibility of central government initiatives, more active engagement from national agencies, and clearer communication around national programmes. These developments appear to have strengthened perceptions, albeit modestly, of national-level support.

It should be noted that this increase may also be partly explained by the heightened visibility of national political actors during the campaign period, as data collection coincided with early and active campaigning in several localities.

This improvement is especially important given the patterns observed in previous assessments. In both 2024 and 2025, perceived support from national authorities emerged as a key differentia-

National authorities care



tor between high-performing and weak-performing localities, across rural and urban settings alike. Localities that scored higher tended to feel more connected to national institutions, more informed about reforms, and more supported in their development efforts. Conversely, communities that felt overlooked or disconnected from the central level consistently scored lower across multiple dimensions, including future confidence, institutional capacity, and social cohesion.

Against this backdrop, the upward shift in perceptions of national authorities' care is not a marginal detail: it represents a potentially important early signal. If sustained, it may help reduce some of the persistent territorial disparities identified in both waves of the ECoST. While the indicator remains low overall, the 2025 improvement suggests that initial efforts by national institutions to strengthen communication and outreach are beginning to be felt at the local level.



Early Campaign Presence – Summary of Qualitative Inputs

During the July–August focus groups (held before the official start of the electoral campaign on 29 August) participants in Cahul, Căușeni, Orhei, Ștefan Vodă, and Durlăști reported an already active and highly visible pre-campaign presence. Political representatives were frequently seen visiting villages, speaking with residents, and addressing local concerns. This early and informal campaigning was perceived as influential, as it increased the visibility and accessibility of political actors and helped mobilise voters ahead of the official campaign period.

Facilitators noted that these direct interactions created a temporary sense of proximity between citizens and national authorities. Practical initiatives promoted during these visits reinforced the impression that the state was attentive and engaged in local realities. In several communities, participants described feeling “listened to” and supported, attributing this sentiment largely to the sustained presence of politicians on the ground.

However, while early campaigning strengthened short-term trust and responsiveness, participants emphasised that it did not significantly change underlying worries about long-term vulnerabilities. The heightened visibility of officials thus improved perceptions of attentiveness but did not resolve the structural challenges repeatedly raised across the focus groups.

Insight 3. Improved perceptions of social welfare support

Perceptions of the local social welfare system show a noticeable improvement compared with 2024. Except for Ștefan-Vodă, all urban localities report higher scores on the availability and accessibility of social support, suggesting that local experts perceive the welfare system as better able to provide a minimal level of assistance to those in need. In several communities, partic-

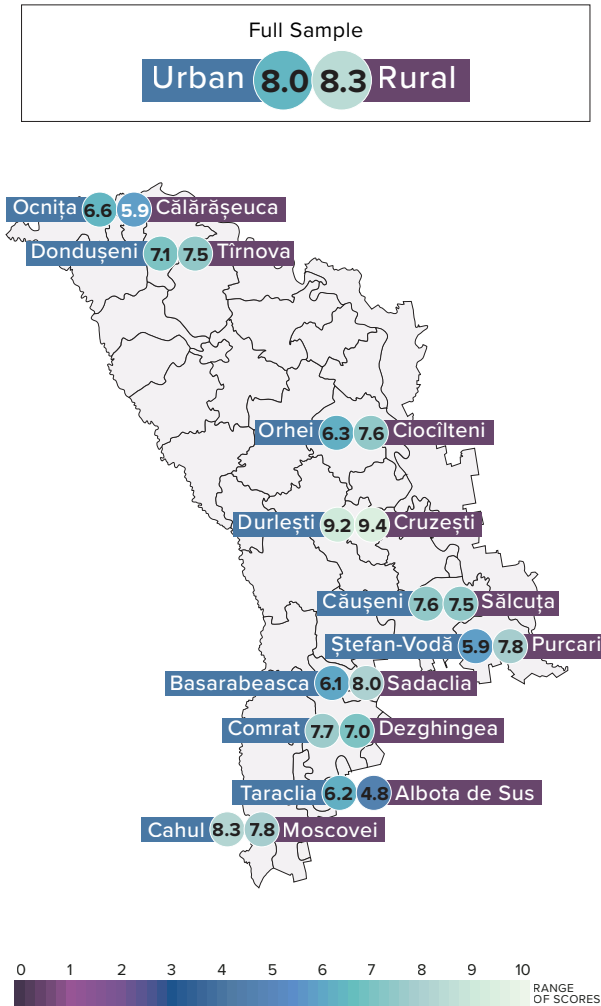
ipants highlighted that certain forms of targeted aid had become easier to access or were communicated more clearly, contributing to greater awareness of available benefits.

However, this progress is tempered by ongoing concerns regarding the adequacy and fairness of support for the most vulnerable groups, as well as continued disparities in service provision across territories. These mixed perceptions indicate that while access may be improving, deeper structural issues within the welfare system remain unresolved.

Insight 4. Declining confidence in the locality's future despite improved national engagement

Confidence in the locality's future shows the sharpest decline of all indicators, with only Durlești avoiding this downward trajectory. Almost every other locality reports a more pessimistic outlook compared with 2024. This creates a notable paradox: even though perceptions of national authorities' support have improved, expectations for the locality's long-term prospects have weakened. Discussions with experts help clarify this contrast. The perceived increase in national authorities' care is largely associated with visible, short-term interventions such as infrastructure projects, targeted services, or heightened political presence during the campaign period. In contrast, evaluations of the locality's future reflect concerns about deep, structural pressures that remain unaddressed: youth migration, inflation, demographic decline, and persistent economic stagnation. As a result, while national engagement may appear more active, it is not yet perceived as sufficient to influence the broader structural determinants of local development. This disconnect explains why improved national visibility does not translate into greater optimism about the locality's long-term trajectory.

Confidence in the locality's future



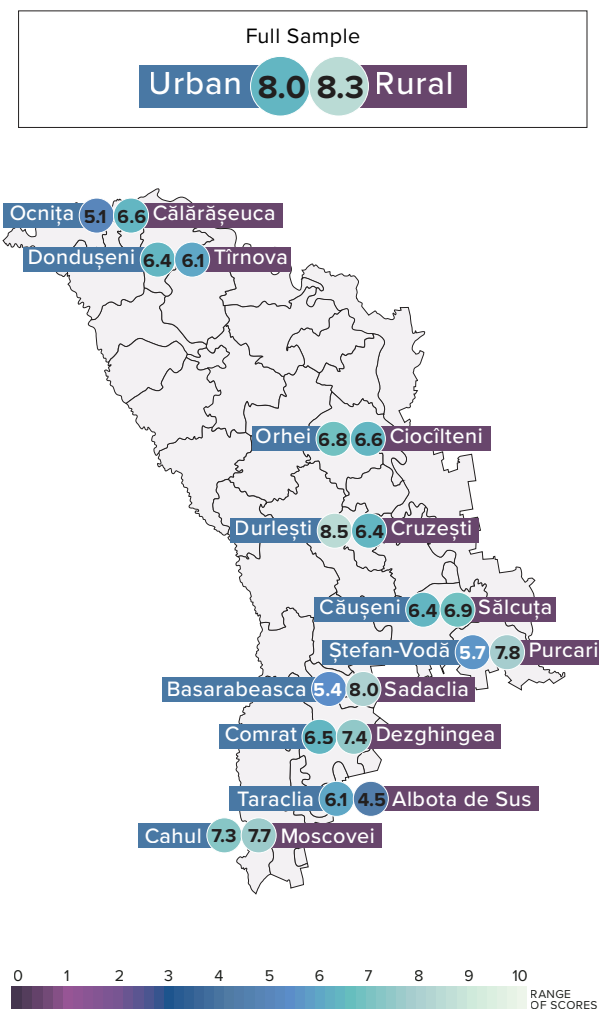
Insight 5. Persistent stagnation in economic opportunities

In contrast to the improvements observed in other areas, perceptions of economic opportunities remain largely unchanged, confirming a pattern of stagnation already evident in 2024. Scores for this indicator show little movement, reflecting a continuing sense that the local economic environment offers limited prospects for growth or employment. Experts frequently pointed to the absence of new economic drivers, the steady pressure of inflation, and the ongoing trend of outward migration, particularly among young people, as key factors constraining local development.

This persistent stagnation suggests that while some aspects of community life are improving, the structural economic foundations of many localities remain weak. Without new investments, diversification, or incentives for youth retention, economic opportunity is unlikely to evolve, continuing to act as one of the most significant barriers to long-term resilience and local wellbeing.

Overall, the 2024–2025 comparison paints a picture of cautious progress in selected domains, particularly in areas influenced by targeted development support and strong local governance. However, economic stagnation, political uncertainty, and persistent challenges in civic participation continue to weigh heavily on community perceptions. These patterns underscore the need for sustained, locally grounded interventions that can translate reforms into visible and tangible benefits in citizens’ everyday lives.

Availability of economic opportunities



Section 3. Urban–Rural Comparison

The 2025 ECoST wave presents the first systematic opportunity to compare expert perceptions across urban and rural localities, offering a more nuanced understanding of territorial dynamics in Moldova. The findings challenge common assumptions about universal rural disadvantage and instead reveal a more complex and balanced picture.

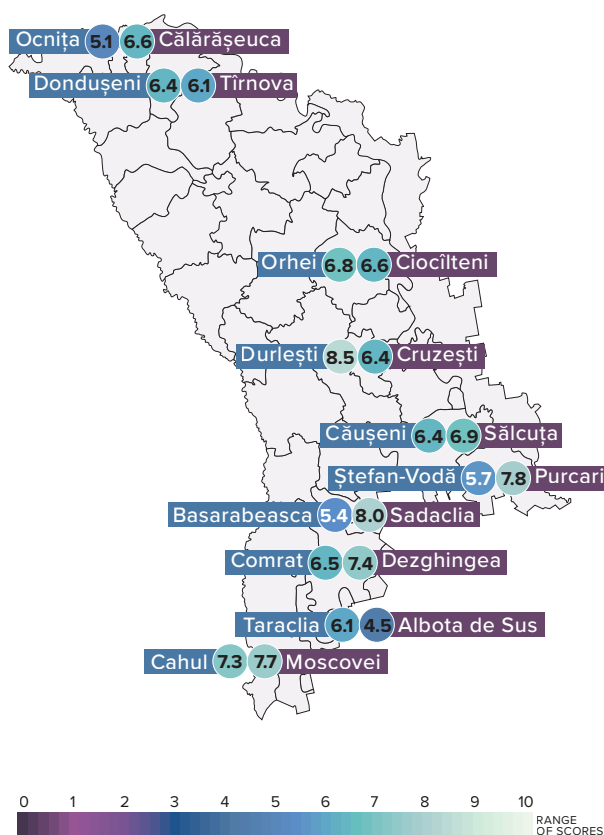
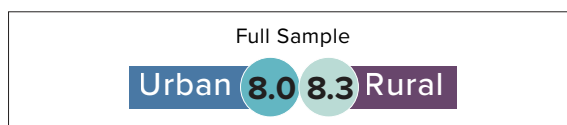
1. General patterns and territorial trends: a complex rural-urban landscape.

Overall, the average differences between urban and rural localities are modest. Across many indicators, the mean scores are remarkably similar, suggesting that both locality types face broadly comparable challenges. This convergence reflects the presence of national-level pressures (economic, political, and social) that affect communities regardless of their setting. It also highlights a shared reliance on municipal institutions that function with similar capacities across much of the country.

However, when moving beyond average comparisons, the data reveal strong variation within the urban group and within the rural group, indicating that the quality of wellbeing, institutional responsiveness, and civic engagement is highly dependent on the specific territorial conditions of each locality. In many cases, disparities within the same locality (i.e. between one town and its rural counterpart) are greater than the aggregate differences between “urban” and “rural” areas nationwide. This means that the decisive factor is often local context, not locality type.

Despite these broad similarities, several differences are still visible. Urban localities tend to perform better in dimensions linked to institutional capacity, particularly care from national authorities and avail-

Availability of economic opportunities



ability of welfare support. Urban experts reported a stronger sense of connection to national institutions and greater visibility of central-level initiatives. Conversely, rural experts often described national authorities as more distant or less responsive.

In contrast, rural localities show relative strengths in areas such as local authorities’ capacities. In several rural settings, experts emphasised the strength of interpersonal networks, the presence of proactive leadership, and recent development projects

that had visibly improved infrastructure or services. These factors contributed to more favourable evaluations of local governance compared with their urban counterparts.

However, a simple urban–rural distinction remains insufficient for explaining performance patterns. As shown in Figure 6, some rural localities outperform their neighbouring urban centres (shown in green), while some urban centres outperform their surrounding rural areas (shown in blue). Because results are not homogeneous (there is no clear pattern of “urban always better” or “rural always struggling”) qualitative insights from expert discussions are essential for understanding why certain localities perform better than others. The following analysis identifies the common characteristics of urban localities that outperform their rural counterparts and rural localities that outperform their urban centres.

2. What characterises urban localities that outperform their rural counterparts?

2.1. Stronger infrastructure and service networks, backed by higher institutional capacity.

Urban localities generally benefit from more developed infrastructure systems (e.g. better roads, utilities, public transport, and public facilities) which enhance everyday mobility and access to services. Their administrations tend to have more professional staff, larger budgets, and greater administrative experience, allowing them to manage projects and deliver services more efficiently than smaller rural communes.



Durlești town

Illustrates how urban localities benefit from significantly stronger connectivity and service infrastructure compared with nearby rural settlements. As a suburban town with direct access to Chișinău, Durlești is served by a trolleybus line and frequent public transport, enabling residents to commute easily to workplaces, schools, and services in the capital. This stands in contrast to the rural locality of Cruzești which, despite its geographical proximity to Chișinău, lacks similar transport options and remains more isolated in practice. The difference between the two cases demonstrates how urban status and institutional capacity translate into more reliable mobility, better integration into regional service networks, and improved access to essential opportunities.

2.2. Greater openness and engagement.

Urban communities are typically more exposed to diverse information sources, civic initiatives, and external partners. This exposure fosters higher levels of civic engagement, innovation, and receptiveness to collaboration, enabling faster adaptation to new policies, technologies, and development opportunities.

2.3. Socio-cultural orientation.

Urban settings tend to have more socially diverse populations and more frequent interactions with state institutions and external actors. This creates a more outward-looking environment, where attitudes towards inclusion, reform, and civic participation are generally more positive compared to isolated or homogenous rural settings.



The contrast between Ocnița and Călărășeuca

Illustrates how exposure to information and external networks shapes civic engagement. Ocnița, as a more urbanized locality, benefits from greater access to diverse information sources, interested local media, and civic initiatives, which fosters an informed and actively engaged population. Residents are more likely to participate in community projects, collaborate with external partners, and respond to new policies and development opportunities. In comparison, Călărășeuca, a smaller rural settlement, experiences more limited access to information and fewer connections to external networks, which constrains both awareness and participation.



The comparison between Ocnița and Călărășeuca

Youth engagement emerges as a critical driver of community vitality, supported by active NGOs, youth centres, and dynamic local leadership. In Ciocîteni village, proactive local leadership stimulates youth involvement and collective problem-solving, creating a vibrant civic environment even in a small rural setting. In Dezghingea, the operation of a youth centre plays a central role in reinforcing civic participation, fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging young residents to take advantage of development opportunities.

2.4. Economic diversity.

Urban economies tend to rely on a broader mix of sectors (i.e. services, trade, administration, and sometimes industry) making them less vulnerable

to economic shocks. This diversification provides residents with more stable employment options and contributes to higher confidence in local development prospects.



The economic contrast between Ocnîța and Călărășeuca

Illustrates how diversification shapes resilience and development opportunities. Ocnîța benefits from a more varied urban economy, encompassing services, trade, administration, and small-scale industry, which provides residents with multiple employment options and contributes to greater confidence in local development prospects. In contrast, Călărășeuca exhibits a strong Eurasian economic orientation and a reliance on a single sector, which limits both employment opportunities and the community's integration into broader regional or national markets. Facilitators noted that this single-sector dependence not only constrains economic mobility but also heightens vulnerability to external shocks, reinforcing patterns of isolation and reducing residents' capacity to adapt to new development initiatives.

3. What characterises rural localities that outperform their urban counterparts?

3.1. Targeted external support effectively absorbed at local level

High-performing rural localities often demonstrate strong organisational capacity to manage Donor-funded projects, despite their smaller scale. Because the population is more compact and local leaders closely involved, development interventions tend to produce visible, tangible results that quickly strengthen community well-being.



The comparison of Dezghingea and Comrat

Illustrates how targeted external support can enhance local development outcomes in both rural and urban settings. In Dezghingea, Donor-funded initiatives have generated strong results due to the locality's ability to implement and monitor projects closely, ensuring that development inputs are effectively translated into local benefits. In Comrat, as an urban center, the combination of Donor-funded support with existing administrative capacity and service networks has facilitated the scaling of interventions and their integration into broader community development plans.

3.2. Lower political polarisation and greater collaboration with national authorities

Rural administrations often maintain pragmatic relations with central authorities, allowing them to access support mechanisms more effectively. Compared with urban centres, where political fragmentation or opposition-aligned leadership can limit cooperation, rural leaders may face fewer political barriers to engaging with national institutions.



The comparison between Sadaclia and Basarabeasca

Illustrates how local political dynamics influence cooperation with national authorities. In Basarabeasca, political isolation limits access to support and coordination: the local leadership is aligned with a party other than the one in government, and facilitators noted a lack of effective communication with national institutions, reducing the town's ability to benefit from state programs. In contrast, Sadaclia demonstrates proactive engagement with national and European funding opportunities. The local population is active in applying for diverse projects, and the administration is receptive to implementing externally funded initiatives.

3.3. Focused economic anchors

Many rural localities rely on a strong, clearly identifiable economic driver such as agriculture, wine production, or local manufacturing which provides stability and a shared sense of purpose. These anchors create predictable employment, community cohesion, and economic resilience even in otherwise disadvantaged contexts.



In Dezghingea village

Strong agricultural entrepreneurship functions as a village where local farmers are active economic, sustaining livelihoods and reinforcing community stability. In Comrat, an urban center, the commercial and administrative activities diversify economic opportunities while maintaining strong links to rural production. These examples underscore the importance of focused economic anchors in creating reliable employment, strengthening social cohesion, and enhancing resilience, whether in rural villages or small urban centers.

3.4. High youth engagement and active civil society

Some rural communes maintain dynamic civic ecosystems, supported by active youth centres, community groups, or local NGOs. This engagement fosters social cohesion, collective problem-solving, and higher community mobilisation, compensating for their smaller demographic base.



Across the examined rural localities

Youth engagement emerges as a critical driver of community vitality, supported by active NGOs, youth centres, and dynamic local leadership. In Ciocîteni village, proactive local leadership stimulates youth involvement and collective problem-solving, creating a vibrant civic environment even in a small rural setting. In Dezghingea, the operation of a youth centre plays a central role in reinforcing civic participation, fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging young residents to take advantage of development opportunities.

3.5. Manageable scale and visible impact of interventions

Because rural localities are smaller, investments or community projects tend to produce noticeable improvements quickly. This visibility strengthens public trust in local governance and increases optimism, creating a reinforcing cycle of engagement and support.

The urban–rural comparison reveals a complex reality: both types of communities face deep structural challenges, but each also demonstrates distinctive strengths. The example of economic wellbeing

shows that outcomes are not determined by urban or rural status. Rural communities might struggle with agricultural vulnerability and seasonal employment, while urban areas face high living costs and limited high-quality jobs. Some rural localities perform better economically due to strong local anchors (e.g., Purcari), while urban centres perform strongly when they offer a diversified economy. These differences underscore the need for tailored, locality-specific interventions, rather than broad assumptions about territorial disparities. Local conditions, not rural or urban labels, remain the decisive factor shaping performance and resilience.



Sălcuța

Highlights how the manageable scale of a rural locality can enhance the visibility and impact of development interventions. Sălcuța village is a vibrant village with an active high school and engaged youth, residents can directly observe the benefits of infrastructure improvements and social programs, which reinforces public trust in local governance. Facilitators noted that the community's active participation and cohesion enable projects to produce tangible results quickly, fostering optimism and a sense of shared achievement.

Section 4. Deep Dives into Priority Policy Indicators

This section explores three dimensions that are particularly relevant to Moldova’s current policy priorities and territorial development agenda. Each of these indicators (i.e. local potential for amalgamation, youth-friendliness, and readiness for reforms) touches directly ongoing national debates regarding decentralisation, demographic resilience, and EU integration. By examining these indicators in depth, the ECoST results offer actionable insights that can support policy design and territorial planning.

1. Local Potential for Amalgamation

The amalgamation process remains a central component of Moldova’s decentralisation strategy. To identify rural localities that show readiness or predisposition to engage in amalgamation, the logic of the analysis consists of cross-checking three complementary indicators that together signal fertile ground for shared governance:



Mayor’s Office Services and Essential Communal Infrastructure

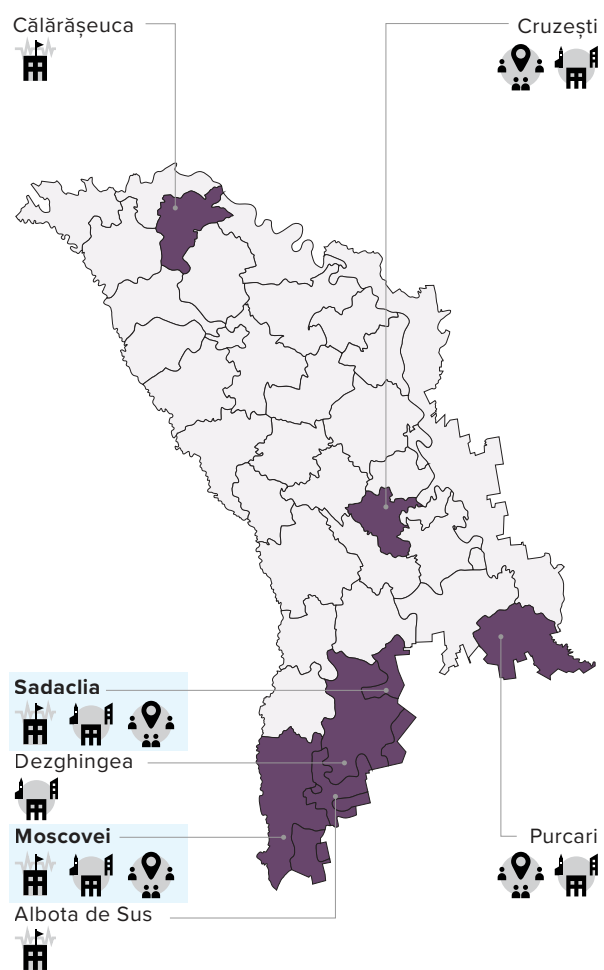
A lower performance in this area may indicate that a locality lacks the administrative or infrastructural base to function efficiently on its own, making shared systems and collective investment potentially advantageous.



Collaboration and Proximity with Neighbouring Villages

High scores on inter-village cooperation suggest the presence of trust, shared interests, and established communication channels - key prerequisites for any future amalgamation.

Rural Localities: Readiness for Amalgamation



Acceptance Toward Ethnolinguistic and Cultural Minorities

Social openness and low intergroup tension increase the likelihood that merged communities will be able to govern collectively and integrate social, administrative, and identity-related differences.



By combining these three indicators, it becomes possible to map rural localities where enabling conditions for amalgamation already exist. This exercise does not predict which localities will ultimately engage in the process as political, economic, and historical considerations remain decisive but it highlights where the “three enabling conditions” converge. Localities scoring positively on all three dimensions are more structurally predisposed to consider amalgamation than those meeting only one or two conditions.

As shown on the heatmap, Moscovoi and Sadacليا emerge as the two rural localities with the strongest potential, as they meet all three criteria simultaneously. These localities combine favourable collaboration patterns, social openness, and basic service gaps that could be effectively addressed through shared administration.

2. Youth-Friendly Communities

Youth-friendliness is an increasingly important dimension for Moldova, given demographic decline, outward migration, and the need to cultivate opportunities that retain young people in their communities. The ECoST results show that many localities struggle to offer environments that support youth aspirations, participation, and wellbeing.

Local experts frequently pointed to lack of meaningful leisure or cultural spaces, the limited career development pathways and highlighted a weak youth participation in community decision-making. These gaps contribute to a sense of disconnection among young people and increase the likelihood of migration.

Yet the data also reveal several high-performing localities, both urban and rural, that have made visible investments in youth-oriented services such as youth centres, sports facilities, digital learning hubs, cultural programmes, and NGO partnerships. These efforts resonate strongly with high youth-friendliness scores, demonstrating that even modest but well-targeted interventions can significantly improve perceptions.

The distribution of youth-friendliness scores reveals that there is no clear rural–urban divide: both high-performing and low-performing localities appear on each side of the territorial spectrum. This indicates that youth-friendliness is not determined by whether a locality is urban or rural, but rather by the quality of local leadership, institutional capacity, and targeted investments. Several rural communities, for example, score exceptionally well, demonstrating that smaller territories can create dynamic and attractive environments for young people when resources are channelled effectively.

Youth-friendliness emerges as a broader indicator of community vitality: localities that are confident in their future and display innovation, civic energy, and economic diversification tend to score highly on the youth-friendly environment indicator. These settings are not successful solely because of youth-specific services, but because strong and trusted local institutions create meaningful opportunities for participation, engagement, and employment. In such communities, effective governance and an active civic sphere reinforce one another, generating a virtuous cycle of inclusion and optimism for both young people and the wider population.

Finally, the variation across localities highlights the importance of prioritising support to those at

the bottom of the distribution. High-performing localities require consolidation, not priority intervention; the greatest returns will come from supporting those at the bottom of the list where lagging areas represent the greatest opportunity for impact. In this perspective, the map allows policymakers to identi-

fy where interventions are most needed. Strengthening youth participation, expanding opportunities, and investing in inclusive community spaces will be essential for tackling demographic decline and reinforcing long-term social and economic resilience across Moldova.

Table 4. Mean scores for “Youth Friendly Community”.

Durlești	9.1	Ștefan-Vodă	7.1
Sălcuța (Căușeni area)	8.5	Orhei	7.0
Sadaclia (Basarbeasca area)	8.0	Dondușeni	6.9
Ciocîlteni (Orhei area)	7.8	Ocnița	6.8
Dezghingea (Comrat area)	7.6	Basarabeasca	6.8
Cahul	7.5	Moscovei (Cahul area)	6.2
Cruzești (Durlești area)	7.4	Călărășeuca (Ocnița area)	6.0
Căușeni	7.3	Purcari (Ștefan Vodă area)	6.0
Tîrnova (Dondușeni area)	7.3	Albota de Sus (Taraclia area)	6.0
Comrat	7.2	Taraclia	5.8

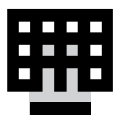
3. Readiness for EU Reforms

Readiness for EU reforms provides a crucial lens for assessing whether localities are prepared to absorb, adapt to, and implement new standards, procedures, and funding streams. To assess this readiness, two complementary indicators were combined:



EU Reform Readiness

Indicates how aware, willing, and prepared local communities are to engage with the reform agenda and manage EU-related processes.



Perceived Support from National Authorities

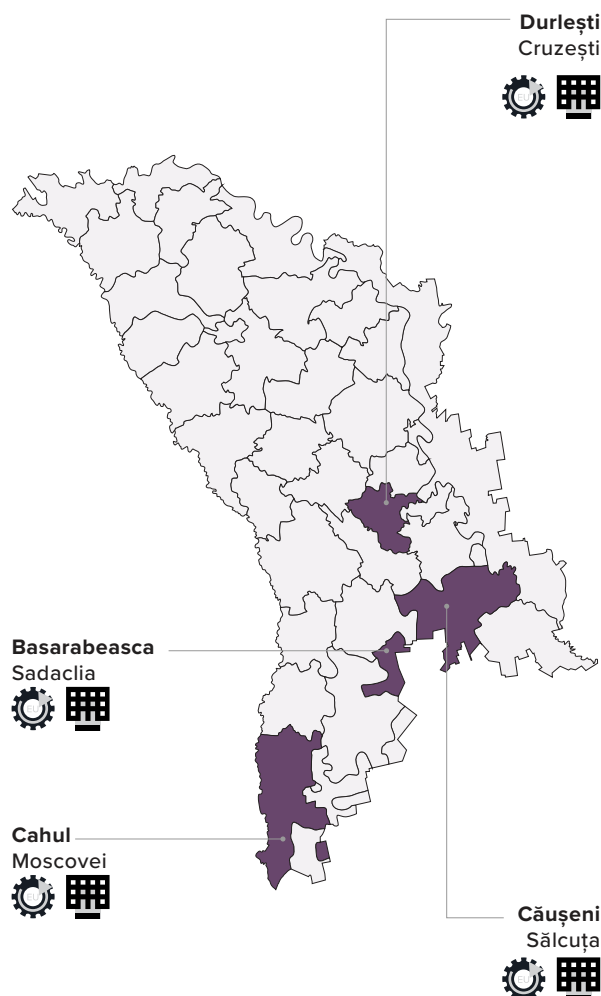
Measures whether local actors feel they receive sufficient guidance, communication, and institutional backing from central authorities - crucial for implementing complex reforms.

Localities that score high on both criteria have the strongest potential for successful, stable, and sustainable reform implementation, because they combine internal capacity (readiness) with external support (national engagement).

What the results show

- High-scoring localities typically report frequent exposure to reform communication, active civil society involvement, or ongoing capacity-building efforts. These communities see reforms as concrete, meaningful, and achievable.
- Low-scoring localities often describe reforms as distant, abstract, or politically driven.
- Limited institutional resources, weak information flows, or low civic engagement contribute to scepticism and confusion.
- Rural–urban disparities persist, with rural communities in particular reporting

Readiness for EU Reforms



weaker outreach and less understanding of reform processes.

- The results underline the importance of consistent, localised engagement with communities about reform processes beyond national-level messaging. EU readiness depends not only on administrative capacity but also on social trust, civic understanding, and local ownership. Sustainable reform outcomes require accessible explanations, targeted training, and a clear pathway for implementation at the community level.

Section 5. Locality Snapshots

This section presents a concise profile of each of the twenty assessed localities. Each snapshot summarises overall performance, highlights key strengths and areas of concern, and notes significant changes compared with the 2024 results. The profiles also outline specific implications for policy and programming. Together, they serve as both a practical reference for decision-makers and a foundation for more in-depth local engagement and tailored interventions.

1. Basarabeasca

Welfare & Essential Services. Basarabeasca faces chronic weaknesses in several essential services. Healthcare accessibility remains low, and the mayor's office services and communal infrastructure also underperform, limiting residents' sense of reliability in the locality. Persistent environmental risks and very weak economic opportunities further constrain local wellbeing, making the locality structurally fragile.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Institutional assessments point to significant vulnerability. Readiness for EU reforms ranks notably low, and perceptions of national authorities' care remain weak. These issues reduce trust in higher-level institutions and hinder integration into wider reform processes.

Intergroup Relations. Weak links with neighbouring villages indicate reduced interaction and some isolation.

Comparison with 2024. While Basarabeasca remains one of the lowest-scoring urban localities, it shows small signs of stabilisation rather than further decline; a contrast with the deterioration seen in other struggling urban centres.

Overall Message. Basarabeasca is a locality marked by structural fragility, with weaknesses spanning essential services, economic

prospects, and institutional support. No major strengths offset these vulnerabilities, highlighting the need for foundational investments across multiple domains.

2. Cahul

Welfare & Essential Services. Cahul's strongest asset is its excellent access to community resources, which significantly enhances residents' daily life and opportunities. However, healthcare remains a clear weakness, limiting perceived wellbeing despite otherwise solid service provision.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Cahul's institutional capacity stands out as a major strength. Local authorities are perceived as highly competent, enabling effective management of local challenges and strengthening public confidence. This strong administrative foundation compensates for weaker healthcare performance.

Intergroup Relations. None of the intergroup indicators meet the inclusion threshold, suggesting a generally stable social environment without particularly strong or weak dynamics.

Comparison with 2024. The locality continues to consolidate its strong institutional performance while healthcare persists as a recurring challenge.

Overall Message. Cahul is a well-functioning administrative centre with strong institutional capacity and excellent access to community assets. The main service gap remains healthcare, which limits overall performance but does not undermine the locality's otherwise solid foundation.

3. Căușeni

Welfare & Essential Services. Căușeni is defined by a contrast between strong educational perfor-

mance and very weak access to community assets and resources, which is among the lowest across urban localities. This imbalance creates unequal opportunities despite good school quality.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Citizen participation in decision-making remains low, indicating limited community involvement and a weaker civic culture. This reinforces the challenges linked to poor access to local assets.

Intergroup Relations. No intergroup indicators qualify as significant strengths or weaknesses.

Comparison with 2024. Căuşeni continues to show the same structural imbalance: strong schools but limited access to assets, with no major shifts in its civic environment.

Overall Message. A locality with very limited access to community assets, coupled with low civic participation. Development efforts must address the resource gaps that undermine the potential created by strong education services.

4. Durleşti

Welfare & Essential Services. Durleşti is one of Moldova's highest-performing localities. It excels across nearly all essential services: schools and healthcare score exceptionally high, and social welfare support, economic opportunities, and communal infrastructure are also outstanding. Environmental risks are perceived as very low, reinforcing a strong sense of local wellbeing.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Institutional performance is equally impressive. Citizen participation, community mobilisation, and local authority capacity all reach the highest scores nationally, demonstrating an empowered and engaged community. The locality is also well-prepared for EU reforms, reflecting administrative readiness and openness.

Intergroup Relations. Durleşti performs well: tolerance towards minorities, attitudes towards refugees, collaboration with neighbouring villages, youth-friendliness, and confidence in the future all stand out as top scores. This indicates a cohesive, optimistic, and highly inclusive environment.

Comparison with 2024. Durleşti shows one of

the strongest positive trajectories across the entire monitoring cycle, with multiple indicators entering the top performance tier.

Overall Message. Durleşti is a model locality with outstanding performance across welfare, institutional, and cohesion indicators. It combines excellent services, strong governance, and inclusive social relations, making it a benchmark for urban Moldova.

5. Donduşeni

Welfare & Essential Services. Donduşeni performs strongly in several areas, with high scores for school quality, communal infrastructure, and access to community assets and resources. However, economic opportunities remain weak, limiting longer-term prospects and livelihood security.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Citizen participation stands out as a notable strength, suggesting an active civic environment and strong engagement between residents and local authorities. Other institutional indicators remain stable without showing significant weaknesses.

Intergroup Relations. The locality demonstrates a positive attitude towards Ukrainian refugees, a key strength that reflects social openness and a cohesive community climate.

Comparison with 2024. Progress is incremental but visible. Strong essential services are being consolidated, while economic opportunities remain an unresolved challenge.

Overall Message. A locality with strong services and high civic participation, complemented by positive intergroup relations. Economic vulnerability is the key barrier to further progress.

6. Ocnîţa

Welfare & Essential Services. Ocnîţa shows strong performance indicators in schools and Mayor's essential services. Several areas fall into the weak range: residents report elevated environmental risks, which undermines local wellbeing; economic opportunities are also weak, limiting livelihood op-

tions. Healthcare, while not among the very lowest, remains below the strong-performance threshold and contributes to a sense of uneven service quality.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Institutional indicators are modest and in general slightly above the average for most of the indicators. Only community mobilisation potential seems to be weak, adding to the sense of institutional stagnation.

Intergroup Relations. Moderate social cohesion is present, though none of the indicators stands out as particularly strong or worryingly weak.

Comparison with 2024. Compared with 2024, Ocnîța remains largely stable, though not improving in its weakest domains. The lack of positive movement in institutional support and economic opportunities remains notable.

Overall Message. Ocnîța is a locality marked by ongoing average institutional stability. While no severe crisis indicators appear, the combination of weak economic opportunities and poor level of mobilization potential keep the locality in a structurally fragile position.

7. Orhei

Welfare & Essential Services. Orhei shows poor levels of essential service indicators. Weak performance is evident in management of environmental risks, which limit both wellbeing and longer-term local stability. Communal infrastructure also falls below expectations, shaping a mixed perception of local service capacity.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Orhei registers one of the clearest weaknesses in institutional capacity: the assessment of local authorities scores very low, reflecting concerns about governance performance. National authorities' care is also weak, compounding issues of trust and support. EU reform readiness remains limited, and the associative sector underperforms, suggesting a relatively constrained civic space.

Intergroup Relations. While social cohesion is not critically low, no intergroup indicators reach the strong category. Vulnerability to manipulative narratives is moderately high, indicating susceptibility to misinformation.

Comparison with 2024. Orhei continues a pattern of

institutional erosion noted in 2024. Declines in perception of local capacity persist, reinforcing concerns about governance and local engagement.

Overall Message. Orhei is characterised by significant institutional weaknesses and underperforming essential services, with limited economic prospects. This combination positions it as one of the more fragile urban centres in the 2025 assessment.

8. Ștefan-Vodă

Welfare & Essential Services. Ștefan-Vodă performs well on schools and mayor's office services, which remain among its strongest features. However, healthcare is weak, and economic opportunities underperform, contributing to ongoing concerns about future prospects.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Citizen participation remains low, and the assessment of local authorities' capacities is also weak. EU reform readiness is below the average, indicating limited administrative preparedness. Compared with other urban centres, institutional fragility is particularly pronounced.

Intergroup Relations. The locality shows moderate attitudes towards refugees and minorities, with no strong or weak extremes appearing in the highlighted indicators.

Comparison with 2024. Ștefan-Vodă shows one of the sharpest deteriorations across multiple indicators, especially in institutional trust and service quality. Declining confidence in the future reinforces this downward trend.

Overall Message. A locality displaying major structural weaknesses in governance, civic participation, and future outlook. Its deteriorating trend marks it as a priority for targeted institutional support.

9. Taraclia

Welfare & Essential Services. Taraclia benefits from solid communal infrastructure but faces serious weaknesses in healthcare and economic opportunities. Environmental risks are also

perceived as elevated, adding pressure to local wellbeing.

Institutional & Civic Environment. The associative sector performs moderately, but citizen participation does reach strong levels.

Intergroup Relations. Taraclia displays very high levels of tolerance towards ethnolinguistic minorities, which stands out as a key strength. Collaboration with neighbouring villages is also above threshold, indicating strong local connectivity and external engagement.

Comparison with 2024. Improvements in social openness continue, while weaknesses in services and institutional care show little movement.

Overall Message. A locality combining strong intergroup tolerance and community collaboration with structural weaknesses in essential services and limited institutional support.

10. Comrat

Welfare & Essential Services. Comrat performs strongly across several indicators: schools score high, as do communal infrastructure and access to community assets. Healthcare remains weak, creating disparity within the service environment. Economic opportunities are moderate.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Local authorities' capacities are perceived as highly competent, while mobilisation potential is also strong. The associative sector performs well, supporting a dynamic civic environment. EU readiness is moderate but not flagged as weak.

Intergroup Relations. Attitudes towards refugees and collaboration with neighbouring villages are strong, and tolerance towards minorities is high. These strengths create a cohesive and inclusive social environment.

Comparison with 2024. Comrat continues to consolidate its strengths in social cohesion and institutional capacity, while persistent weaknesses, particularly healthcare, remain unchanged.

Overall Message. A locality with robust institution-

al capacity and strong social cohesion, supported by excellent schools and infrastructure. Healthcare remains the primary structural weakness.

11. Sădăclia (Basarbeasca area)

Welfare & Essential Services. Sădăclia displays a very strong essential service environment: communal infrastructure is highly rated, and environmental risks are perceived as low. Economic opportunities are also strong, setting Sădăclia apart as a rural locality with a solid economic base. Access to community assets is another clear strength. No welfare indicators fall below the weak threshold.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Local authority capacity is strong, and the locality shows good mobilisation potential. National authorities' care and community participation remain also stable, without significant weaknesses.

Intergroup Relations. Sădăclia shows high levels of acceptance towards refugees and strong collaboration with neighbouring villages. Tolerance towards minorities is also a strength, contributing to a cohesive and open social environment.

Overall Message. A high-performing rural locality with strong services, good economic prospects, and inclusive social relations. It stands out as a stable, well-connected community with strong reform readiness.

12. Moscovei (Cahul area)

Welfare & Essential Services. Moscovei's strongest asset is its school quality, which is rated highly. However, healthcare is a notable weakness, and economic opportunities are only moderate. No other welfare indicators cross the strong threshold.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Institutional local capacity is a strong point, though community mobilisation is moderate. National authorities' care is weak, highlighting a perceived lack of higher-level support.

Intergroup Relations. Moscovei scores highly on collaboration with neighbouring villages and tolerance towards minorities. Attitudes towards refugees are also strong, indicating cohesive and inclusive social dynamics. It is also notable that this locality reports one of the lowest score for youth friendly environment.

Overall Message. A cohesive and open rural locality with strong education and community connectivity. Weak healthcare and low perceived national support remain structural constraints.

13. Sălcuța (Căușeni area)

Welfare & Essential Services. Sălcuța performs strongly in several welfare areas: schools, healthcare, and social welfare support all score highly. Access to community assets is another clear strength, confirming Sălcuța as a locality with a well-developed service environment. No major weaknesses are visible in essential services.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Local authority capacity is strong, mobilisation potential and the associative sector are high illustrating a dynamic local civic ecosystem. EU reform readiness is moderate but stable.

Intergroup Relations. Sălcuța shows strong tolerance towards minorities and vulnerable groups. Collaboration with neighbouring villages is also high. Attitudes towards refugees are positive, reinforcing its profile as an inclusive community. It also reports a strong level of youth friendly community confirming the dynamism of the local life.

Overall Message. A well-performing rural locality with excellent services and strong social openness. The main challenge is the very weak associative sector, which limits civil society engagement.

14. Cruzești (Durlești area)

Welfare & Essential Services. Cruzești excels in communal infrastructure and performs strongly in healthcare, though social welfare support is weak. Schools and access to community assets are strong, making the locality well positioned in terms of essential services.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Institutional capacity is very strong, with high assessments of local authorities and excellent citizen participation. Community mobilisation is also strong despite a weak associative sector.

Intergroup Relations. Attitudes towards refugees, collaboration with neighbouring villages, and tolerance towards minorities are all strong. Confidence in the future is also notably high, contributing to an optimistic and cohesive local social climate.

Overall Message. A high-performing rural locality with excellent infrastructure, strong institutions, and inclusive social relations. The only notable weakness is in social welfare support.

15. Tîrnova (Dondușeni area)

Welfare & Essential Services. Tîrnova has strong school performance and solid communal infrastructure. However, economic opportunities and environmental risks fall into the weak category. Access to community assets is strong, helping offset some structural weaknesses.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Institutional capacity is average, though national authorities' care and EU reform readiness are weak, marking a significant structural challenge.

Intergroup Relations. Attitudes towards refugees and tolerance towards minorities are moderate. Collaboration with neighbouring villages remains stable.

Overall Message. A locality with strong schools and infrastructure but persistent weaknesses in healthcare, environmental risks, and EU readiness. Strengths in social cohesion help counterbalance institutional vulnerabilities.

16. Călărășeuca (Ocnița area)

Welfare & Essential Services. Călărășeuca shows poor essential service indicators. Healthcare is weak, and environmental risks remain elevated. Access to community assets is low, and these combined weaknesses point to restricted

service availability and constrained quality of life.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Institutional performance is marked by several weaknesses: assessments of local authority capacity are modest, while the associative sector scores very low, one of the weakest nationally. National authorities' care is also perceived as very low, and EU reform readiness is weak. These institutional shortcomings collectively suggest limited preparedness, low engagement, and weak vertical cohesion.

Intergroup Relations. Low tolerance toward socio-economically vulnerable groups and an unfavourable environment for young people stand out as key weaknesses.

Overall Message. A structurally vulnerable locality with weak essential services and significant institutional fragility. Low community assets and an underperforming associative sector present major barriers to resilience.

17. Ciocîlteni (Orhei area)

Welfare & Essential Services. Access to community assets and Mayor's office services and essential communal infrastructure are clear strengths, adding to the overall service environment. No critical weaknesses appear among essential services, though healthcare remains moderate rather than strong.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Local authority capacity is strong, and citizen participation is highly rated, reflecting an engaged civic environment. The associative sector also performs well. No institutional indicators fall into the weak category. EU reform readiness is moderate but supported by strong governance performance.

Intergroup Relations. Ciocîlteni shows positive attitudes towards refugees and tolerance towards minorities.

Overall Message. A high-performing rural locality with strong services, good civic engagement, and inclusive social dynamics. Its strengths lie in both social cohesion and institutional capacity.

18. Purcari (Ștefan Vodă area)

Welfare & Essential Services. Purcari stands out with strong school performance, excellent communal infrastructure, and very strong access to community assets and resources. Economic opportunities also score highly, reflecting a diversified and dynamic local economy. Healthcare is weak, and environmental risks remain moderate.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Local authorities' capacities are strong, and mobilisation potential is high. Citizen participation and community mobilization potential are high, reinforcing the locality's interactive institutional culture and signaling an attractive local civic ecosystem.

Intergroup Relations. Purcari shows strong attitudes towards refugees, high collaboration with neighbouring villages, and excellent tolerance towards minorities. The locality combines social openness with economic and institutional strength. An unfavorable environment for young people stands out as key weaknesses.

Overall Message. A highly capable locality with strong services, dynamic economic prospects, and inclusive social relations. Purcari is one of the strongest rural performers and a candidate for piloting development-focused reforms.

19. Albota de Sus (Taraclia area)

Welfare & Essential Services. Albota de Sus shows no strong welfare indicators and several clear weaknesses. Healthcare accessibility is very weak, and economic opportunities score extremely low (one of the lowest across all rural areas). Access to community assets is also one of poorest reported. These weaknesses create significant structural disadvantage.

Institutional & Civic Environment. Local authorities' capacity is modest, and national authorities' care is very weak. The associative sector also performs poorly. EU reform readiness is low, indicating limited administrative capability. Citizen participation is also weak.

Intergroup Relations. Attitudes towards refugees are moderate, while tolerance towards minorities remains average, with no notable cohesion strengths. The very weak youth-friendly environment and low confidence in the future indicate that the locality is facing a critical situation.

Overall Message. A locality characterised by multiple structural weaknesses in services, institutional capacity, and economic opportunities. It requires comprehensive, multi-sector support.

20. Dezghingea (Comrat area)

Welfare & Essential Services. Dezghingea performs strongly on school quality and communal infrastructure. Social welfare support is also a notable strength. Healthcare is strong, making it one of the few rural localities with robust service delivery across multiple

domains. Economic opportunities are good, and access to community assets is average.

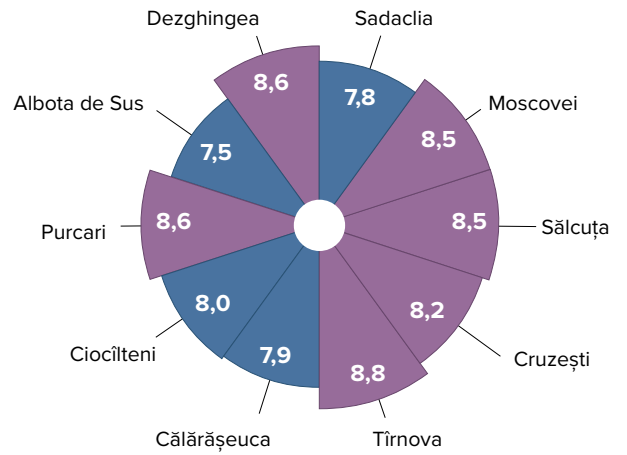
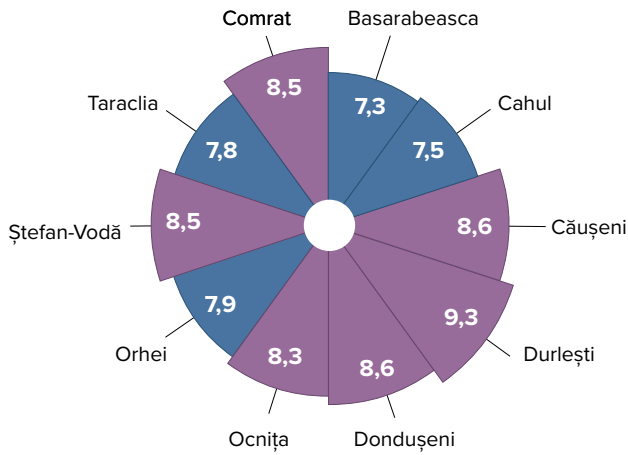
Institutional & Civic Environment. Local authorities' capacity is strong, and the associative sector is highly rated. Community mobilisation potential is strong as well. EU readiness does not reach the strong threshold but is stable. National authorities' care is also positive.

Intergroup Relations. Attitudes towards refugees are strong, and collaboration with neighbouring villages is very high. Tolerance towards minorities and vulnerable groups is also high, creating a cohesive and inclusive environment. Confidence in the future is moderately strong.

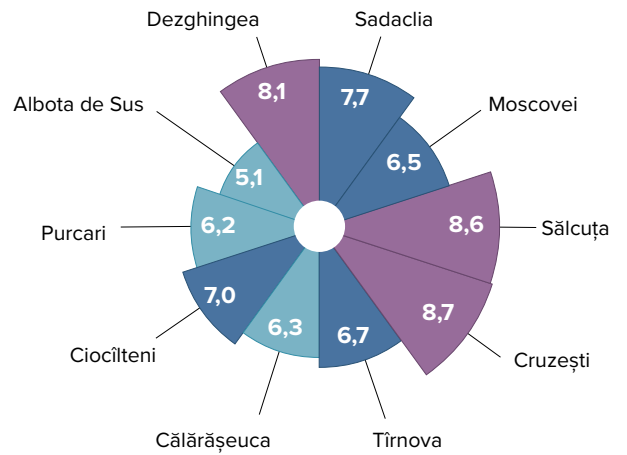
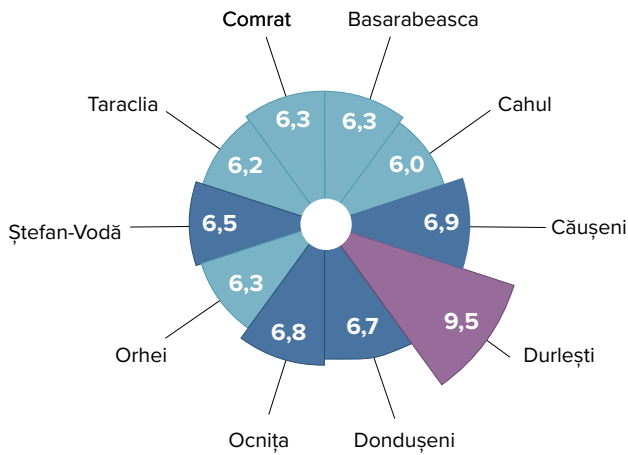
Overall Message. A highly capable and cohesive locality with strong services, strong institutions, and an inclusive social environment. Dezghingea stands as one of the top rural performers.

■ High score ■ Low score ■ Medium score

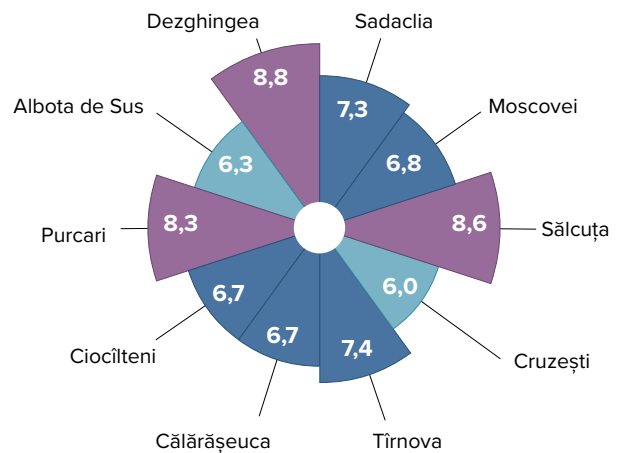
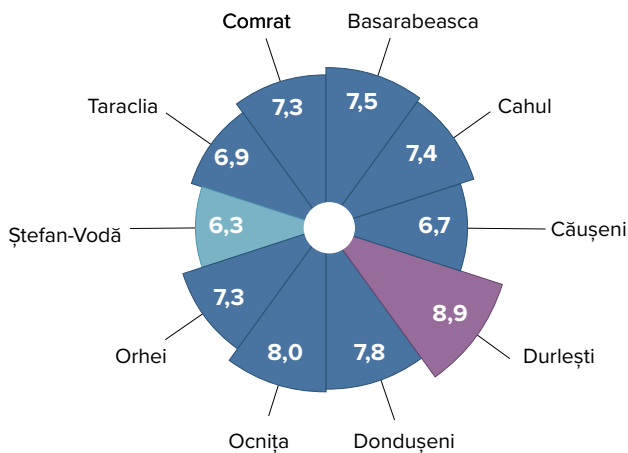
Quality and accessibility of schools



Quality and accessibility of the healthcare system

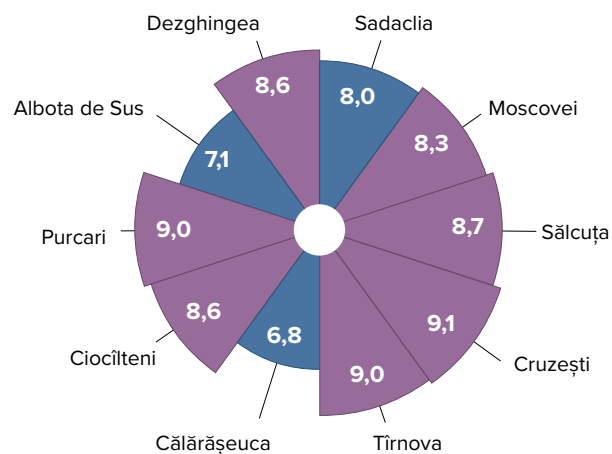
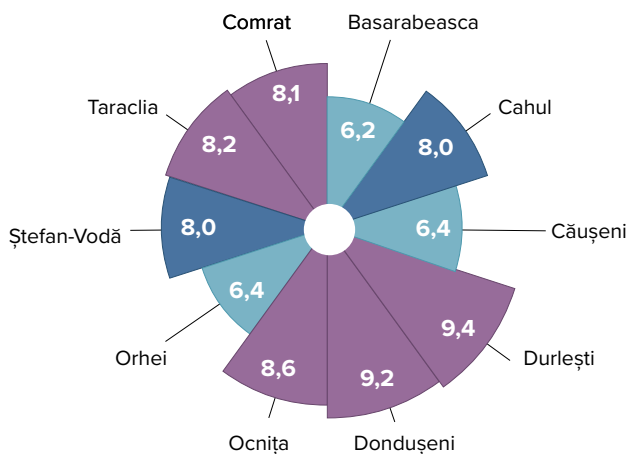


Availability of social welfare support

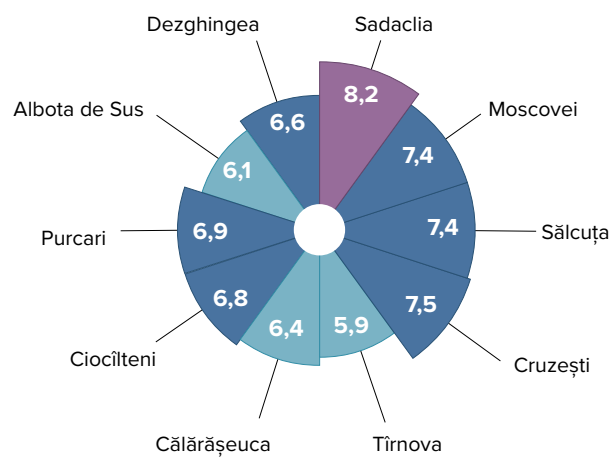
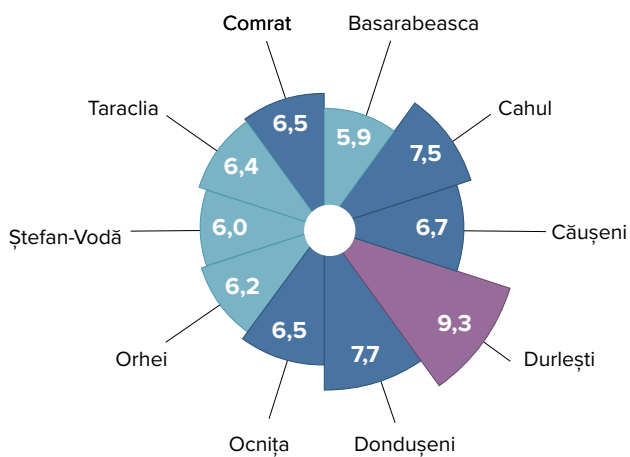


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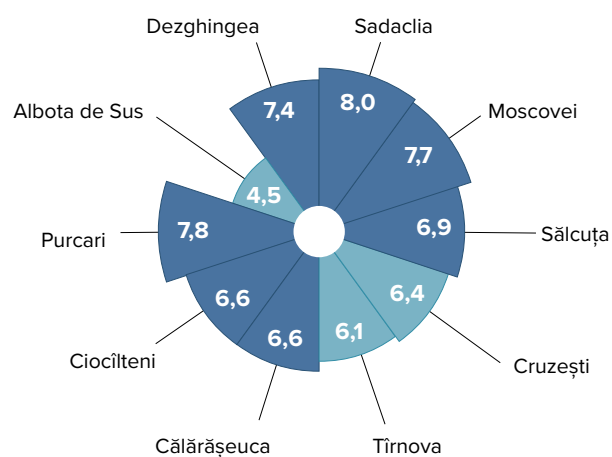
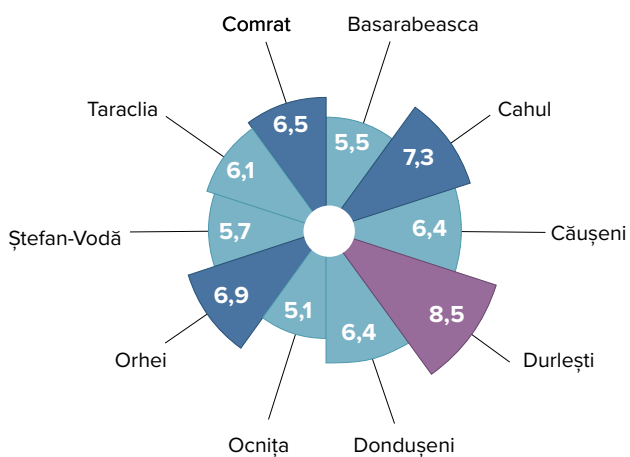
Mayor's office services and essential communal infrastructure



Environmental risks

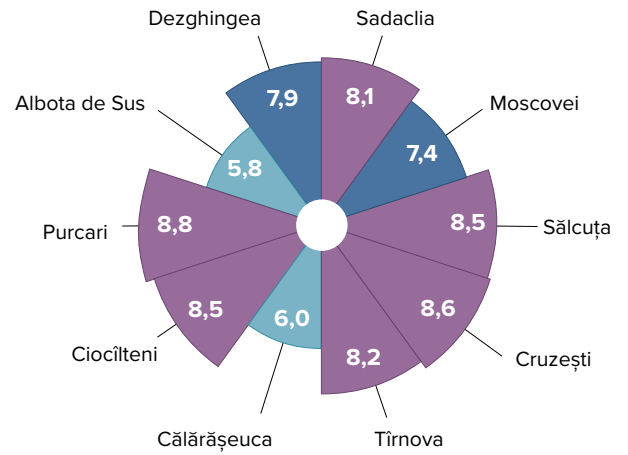
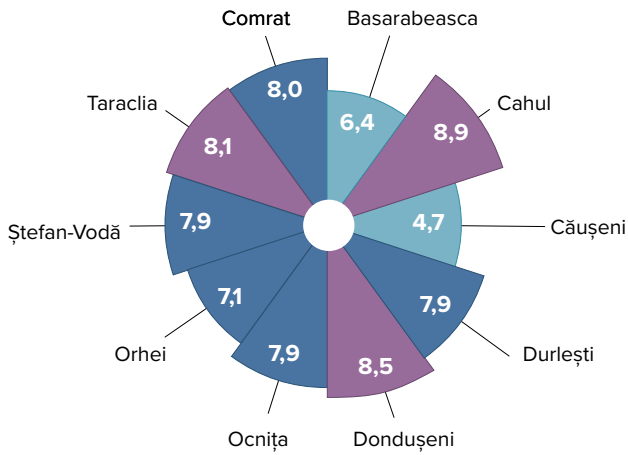


Availability of economic opportunities

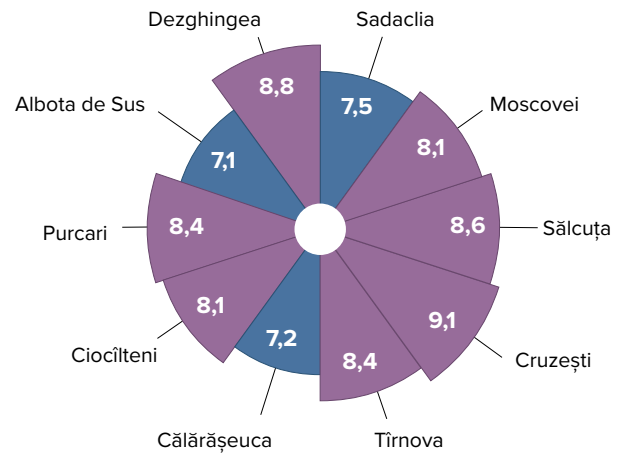
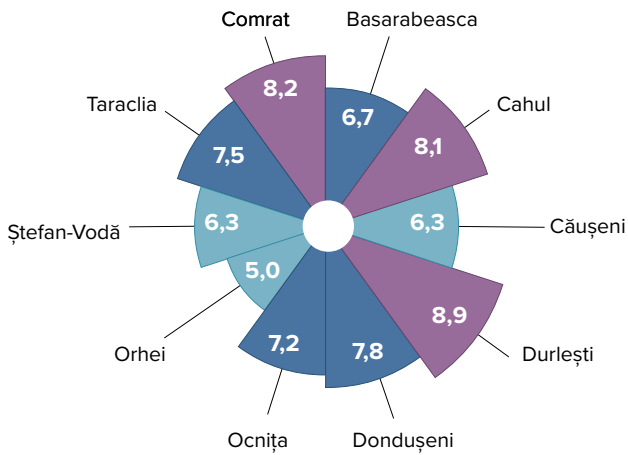


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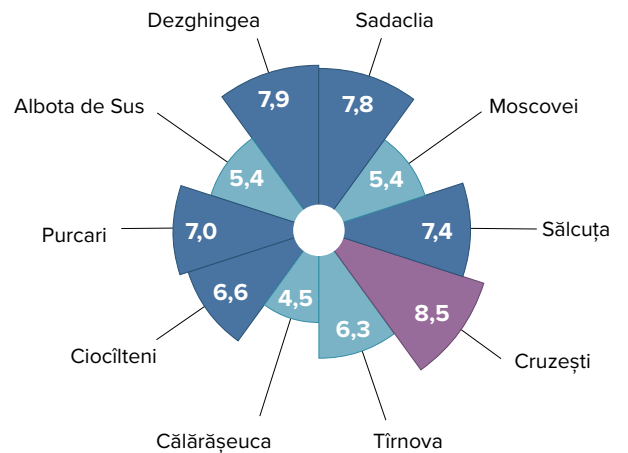
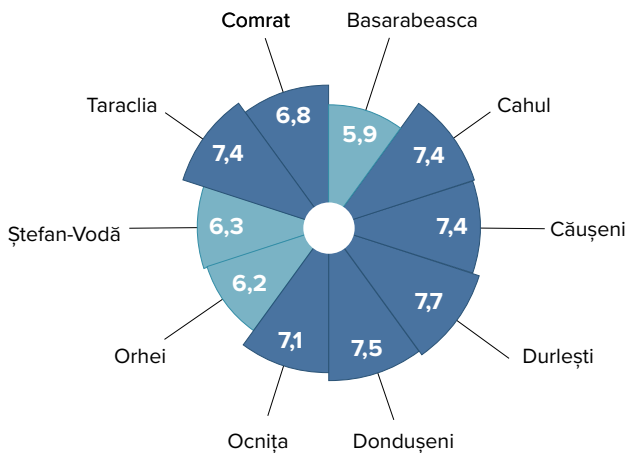
Access to community assets and resources



Assessment of local authorities' capacities

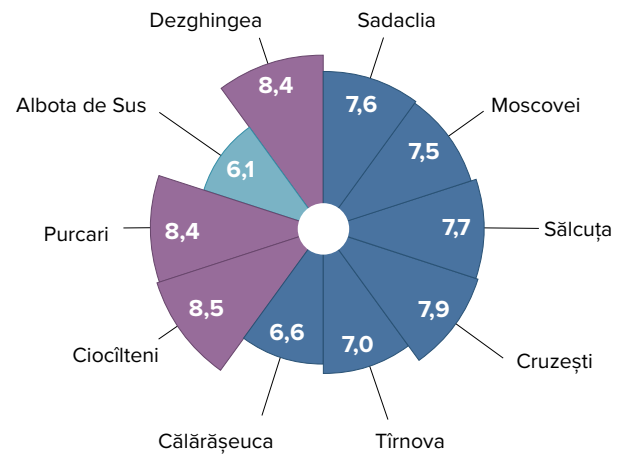
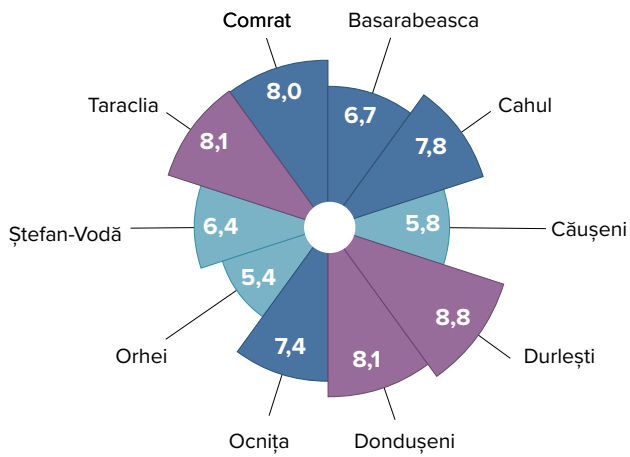


National authorities care

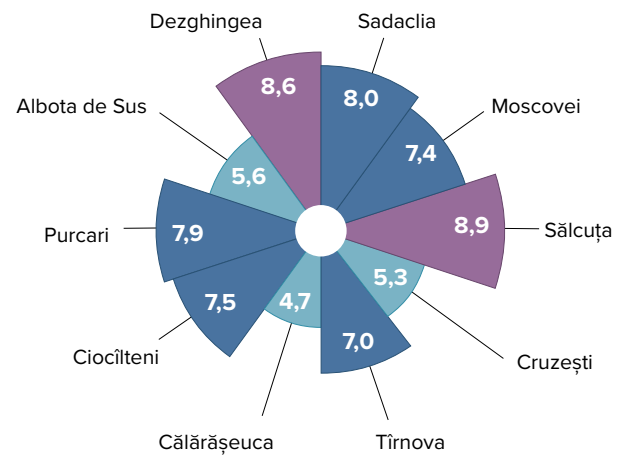
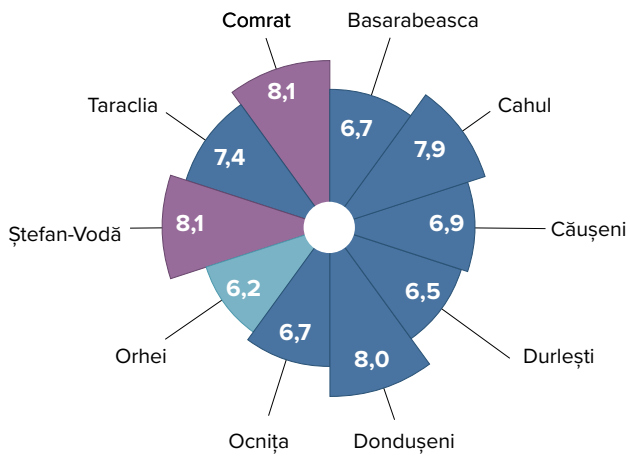


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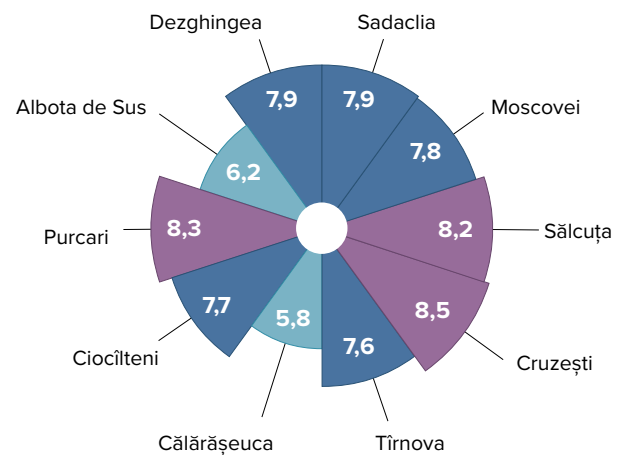
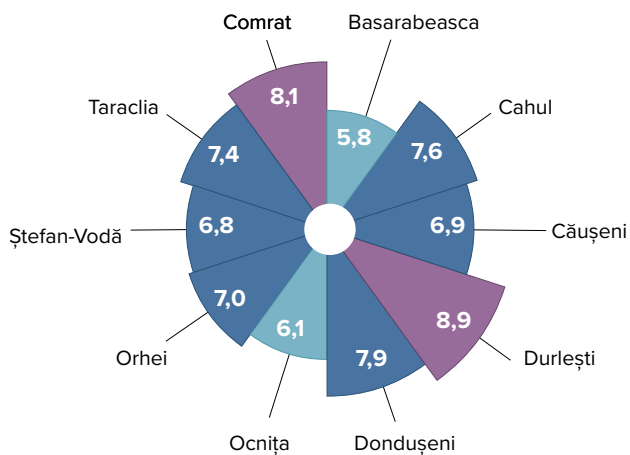
Citizen participation in the decision-making



Assessment of the associative sector

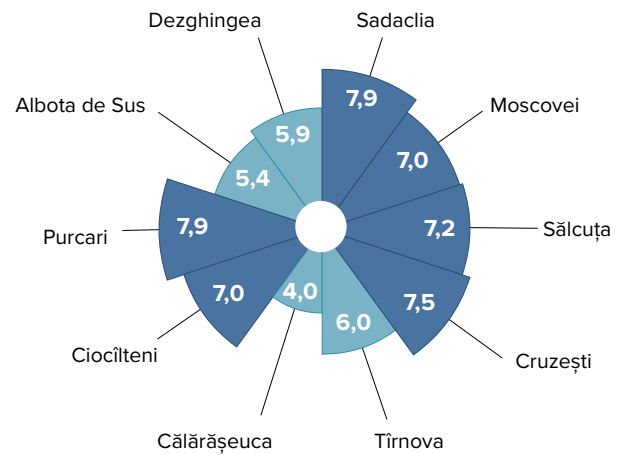
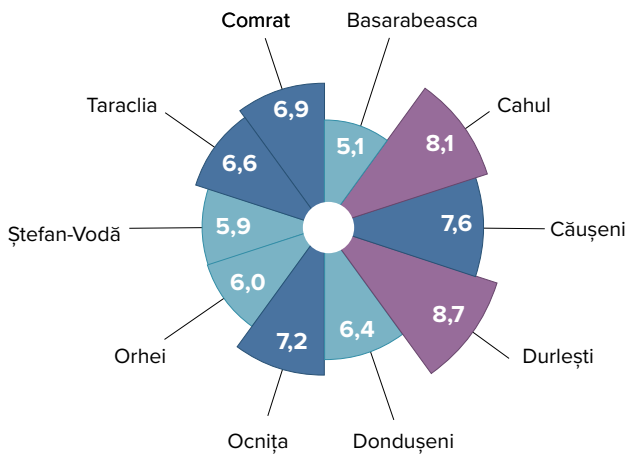


Community mobilization potential

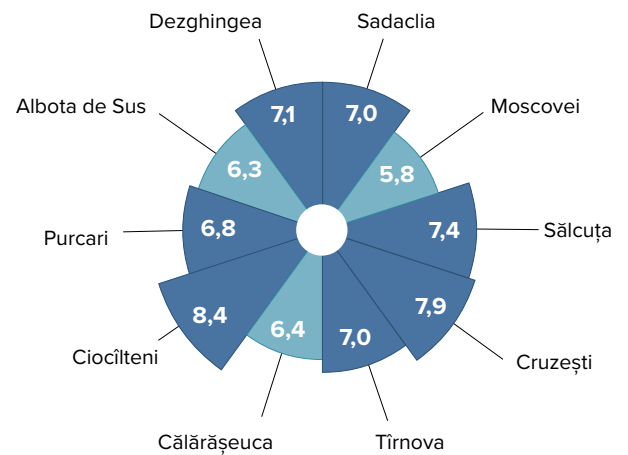
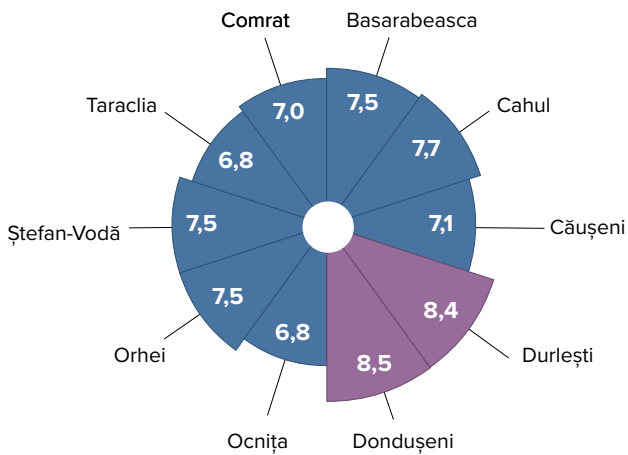


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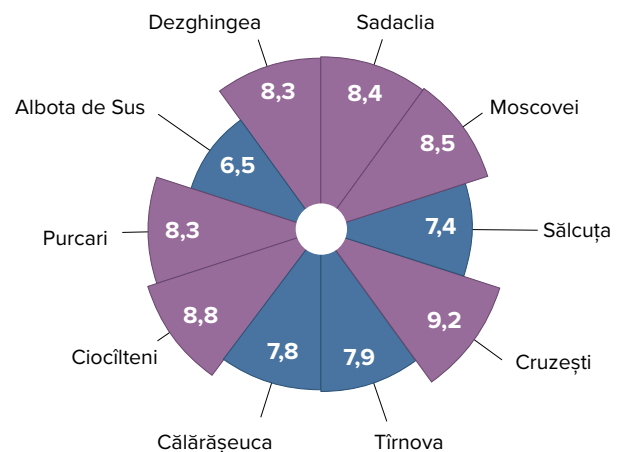
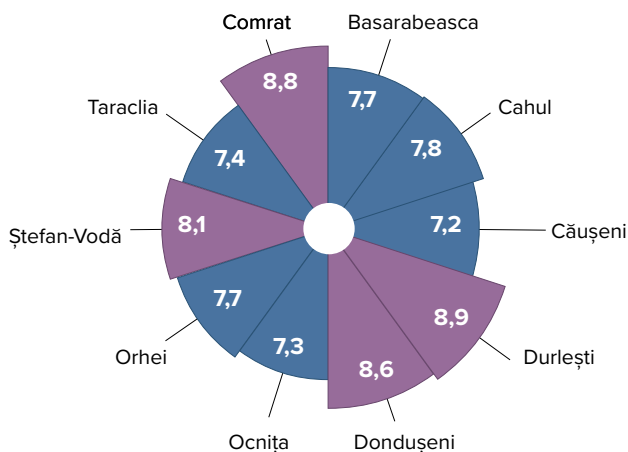
Readiness for EU reforms



Vulnerability to manipulative narratives and mis/disinformation

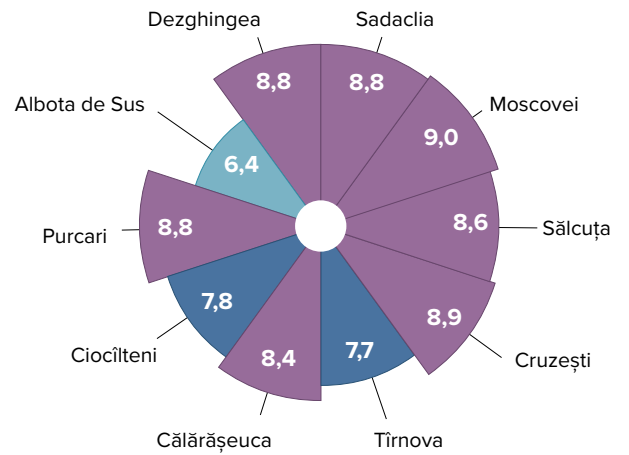
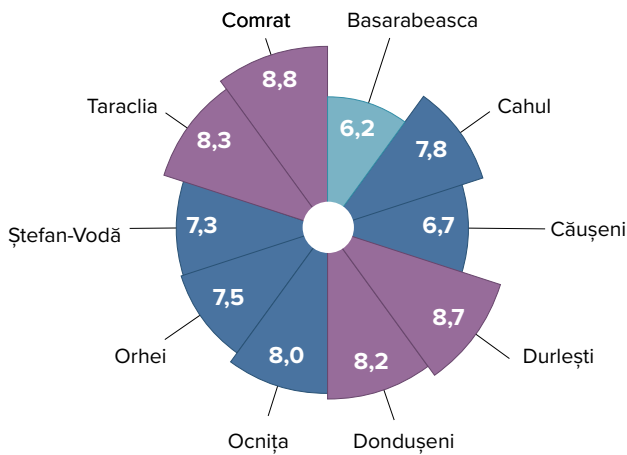


Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees

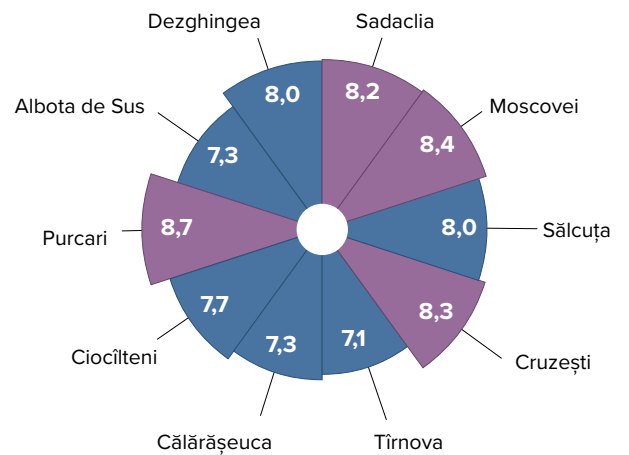
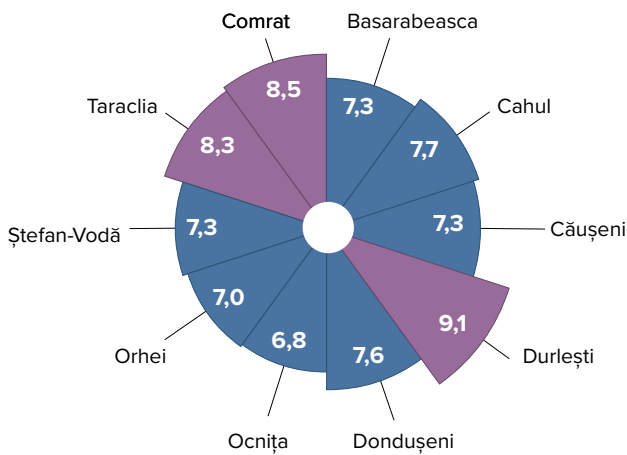


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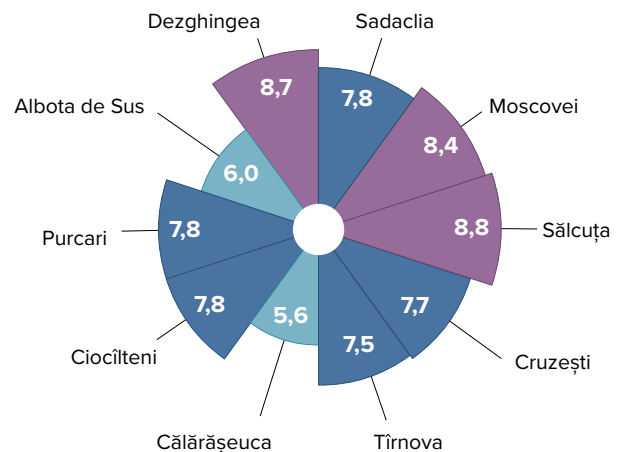
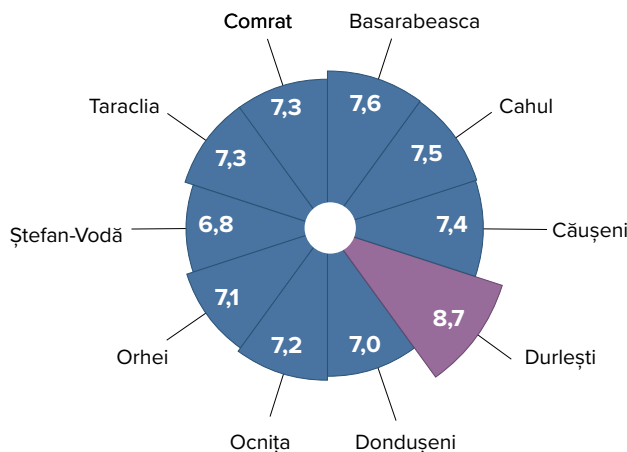
Collaboration and proximity with neighbouring villages



Tolerance towards ethnolinguistic and cultural minorities

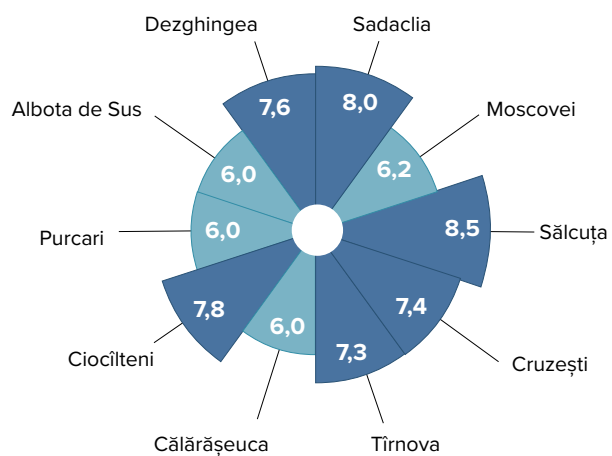
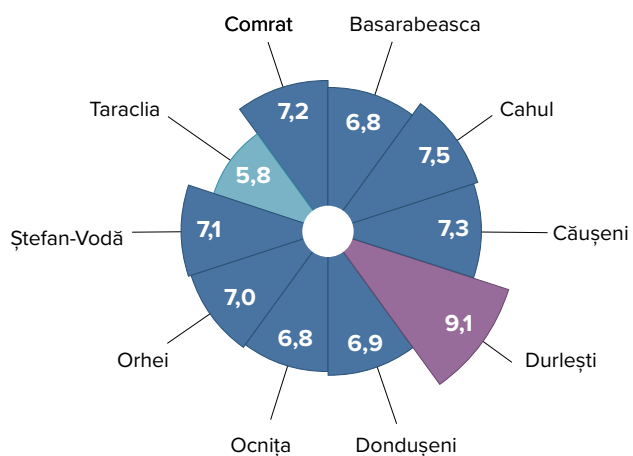


Tolerance towards socioeconomically vulnerable groups

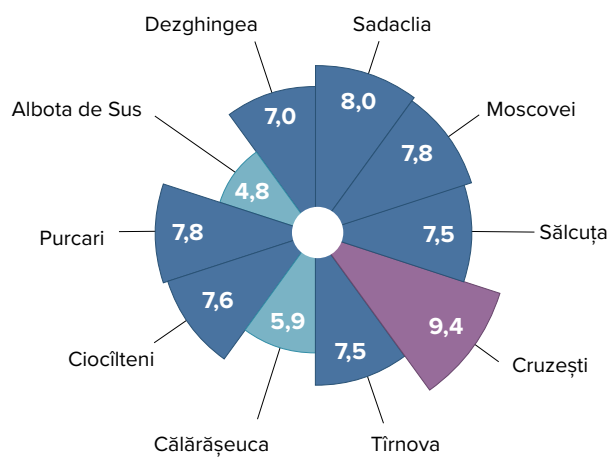
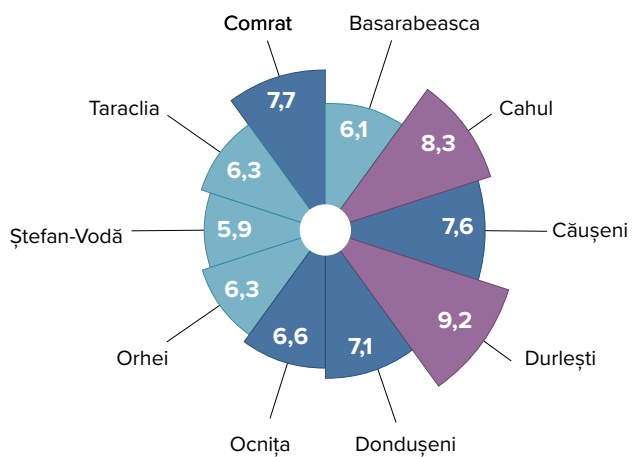


■ High score ■ Low score ■ Medium score

Youth friendly community



Confidence in the locality's future



Section 6. Policy recommendations based on the evidence from ECoST



Low scores



High scores



This section presents a set of policy recommendations directly informed by the 2025 ECoST results and tailored to the specific needs of Moldova's twenty assessed localities. The accompanying table identifies which localities require each type of intervention most urgently, based on their performance across key indicators such as essential services, institutional capacity, community cohesion, reform readiness, and youth-friendliness. By linking each recommendation to the localities where need is most acute, the analysis enables targeted, evidence-based planning and helps decision-makers prioritise resources where they will have the greatest impact.

Pillar 1. Strengthening Local Governance and Trust

WHERE?

Basarabeasca, Căușeni, Călărășeuca, Orhei and Albota de Sus

WHY in these areas?

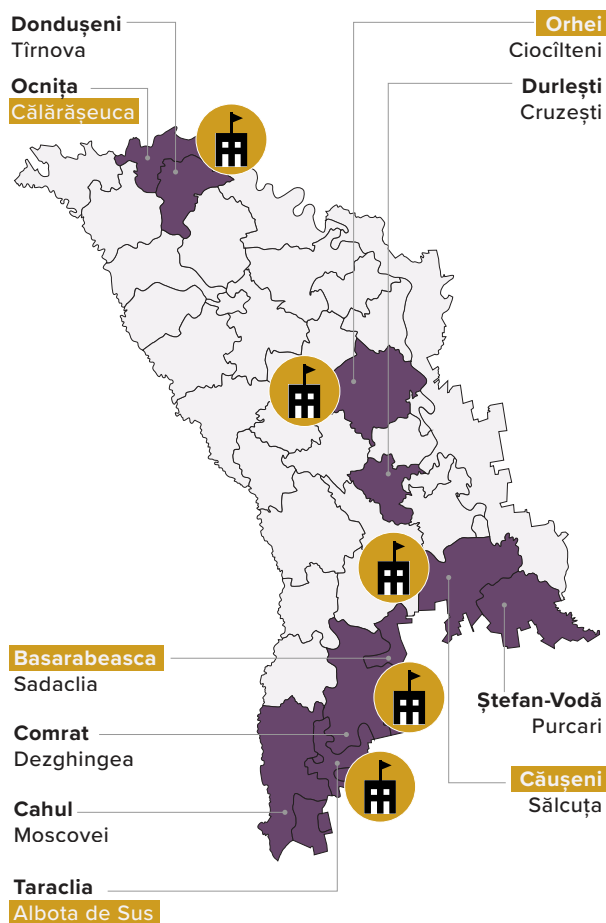
Critical scores for the following indicators: Assessment of local authorities' capacities / Mayor's office services and essential communal infrastructure / Quality and accessibility of the health-care system / Quality and accessibility of schools / Availability of social welfare support.

WHAT do the local experts say?

The case of Orhei.

Across mentioned localities, persistent challenges in local governance un-

Priority Areas for Strengthening Local Governance



dermine public trust and limit effective community participation. In Orhei town, local experts highlight low citizen engagement, limited transparency in financial decision-making, and concerns related to corruption and misinformation. Similarly, in Căușeni town, local experts report weak cooperation between local public authorities and elected council members, which restricts inclusive decision-making and reduces institutional accountability.

What types of initiatives to improve local governance and trust?

Local Civic Dialogue Platforms

Establish regular community–authority forums in localities with declining trust to co-design local development priorities.

Citizen Dashboards

Establish regular community–authority forums in localities with declining trust to co-design local development priorities.

Leadership Training for Mayors and Councillors

Focus on participatory governance, inclusive communication, and conflict-sensitive planning.

Peer Learning between Localities

Link high-trust localities with weaker ones through mentoring exchanges under UNDP’s local governance programmes.



Pillar 2. Revitalising Rural Areas

WHERE?

Albota de Sus and Călărășeuca

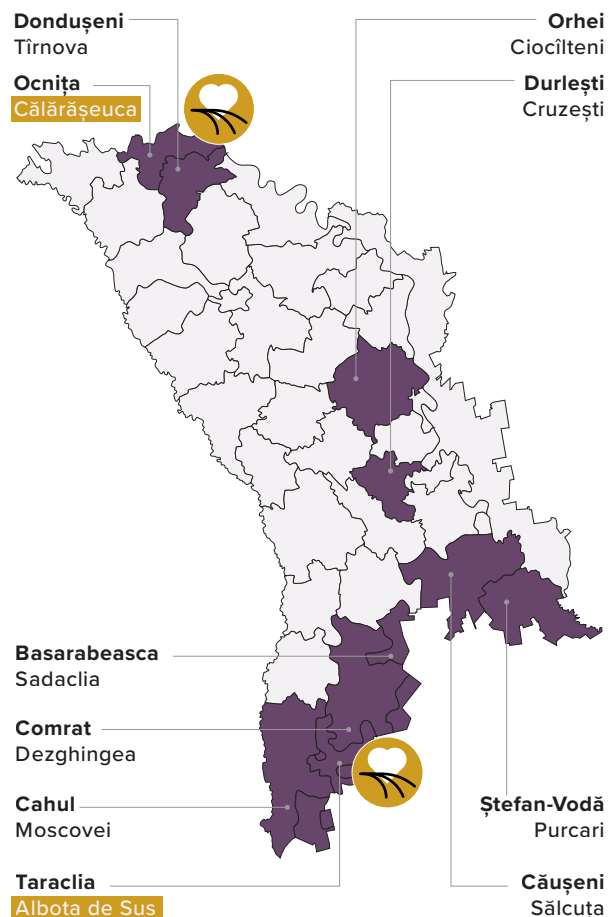
WHY in these areas?

Critical scores for the following indicators: Quality and accessibility of the healthcare system / Availability of social welfare support / Management of Environmental risks / Availability of economic opportunities / Access to community assets and resources / National authorities care / Assessment of the associative sector / Community mobilization potential / Readiness for EU reforms / Tolerance towards socioeconomically vulnerable groups / Youth friendly community / Confidence in the locality’s future

WHAT do the local experts say? The case of Albota de Sus and of Purcari

When comparing Taraclia town with the nearby village of Albota de Sus, as a district-level urban centre, Taraclia benefits from stronger infrastructure networks (such as better road conditions, more reliable utilities, and a wider range of public facilities) which collectively enhance residents’ daily quality of life comparing with Albota de

Priority Rural Areas for Revitalization



Sus village. Albota de Sus, despite its proximity to the town, faces more limited infrastructure and fewer service opportunities, conditions that tend to constrain both everyday well-being

and the ability of residents to participate actively in civic processes.

On the contrary, in Purcari village, the winery and associated tourism sector serve as the primary economic drivers, generating employment, fostering

community cohesion, and supporting local entrepreneurship. Facilitators noted that these activities not only provide predictable income for residents but also enhance the locality's attractiveness to visitors and external partners, reinforcing social and economic resilience in an otherwise rural context.

What types of initiatives to revitalize those areas?

Rural Micro-Clusters for Economic Diversification

Support value-chain projects in agriculture, crafts, or tourism (building on local examples such as Purcari's winery and tourism sector).

Mobile Service Hubs

Introduce mobile administrative and social services to reach isolated villages, improving perceived state presence.

Village Connectivity Projects

Invest in road and digital infrastructure to link rural communes with urban centres.

Civic Empowerment in Villages

Create mini-grant schemes for local NGOs or youth groups implementing community-benefit projects.



Pillar 3. Youth Retention and Empowerment

WHERE?

Basarabeasca, Ocnița, Călărășeuca, Albota de Sus, Purcari and Taraclia

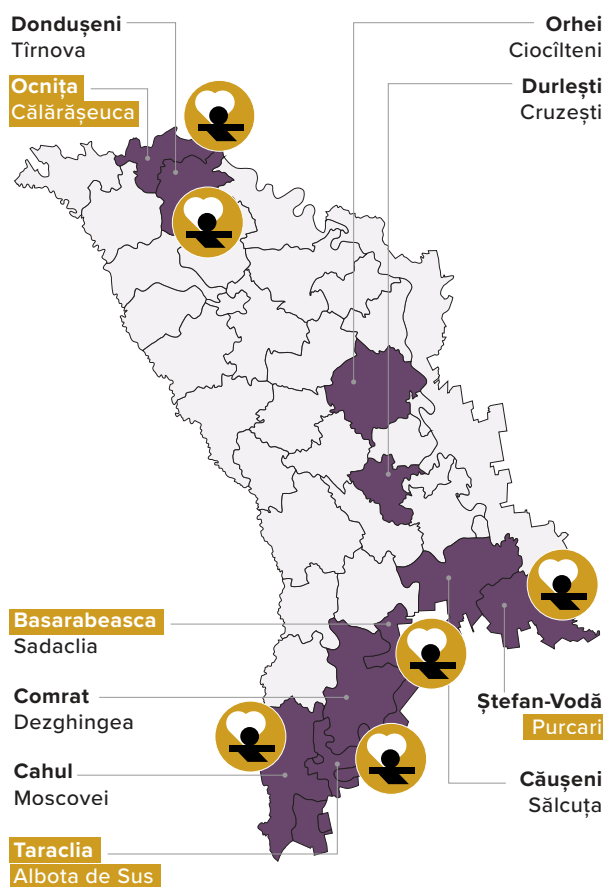
WHY in these areas?

Critical scores for the following indicators: Youth Friendly Environment / Economic Opportunities / Associative Sector.

WHAT do the local experts say? the case of salcuta

Across the examined rural localities, youth engagement emerges as a critical driver of community vitality, supported by active NGOs, youth centres, and dynamic local leadership. In Sălcuta village for example, the presence of multiple NGOs significantly enhances participation and inclusion, providing young people with structured opportunities to engage in civic ini-

Priority Areas for Youth-Focused Programmes



tiatives and access programmes linked to the European integration process. See also the case of Ciocîlteni, where proactive local leadership drives strong youth engagement and collective problem-solving, creating a dynamic civic environment.

In Dezghingea, the youth centre plays a key role in strengthening participation, fostering belonging, and encouraging young people to pursue development opportunities.

What types of initiatives to improve youth environment?

Local Youth Councils or Innovation Labs	Foster youth involvement in local decision-making and entrepreneurship.
Youth Social Enterprises	Provide seed funding and mentorship for start-ups with community impact.
Civic Education and Volunteering	Introduce structured volunteering programmes (e.g., environmental clean-ups, digital literacy tutoring) tied to employability skills.
Partnerships with Schools and Businesses	Promote apprenticeships and local internship schemes to connect education with economic opportunities.



Pillar 4. Preparing for EU Reforms

WHERE?

Durlești, Cruzesti, Causeni. Cahul, Sadaclia

WHY in these areas?

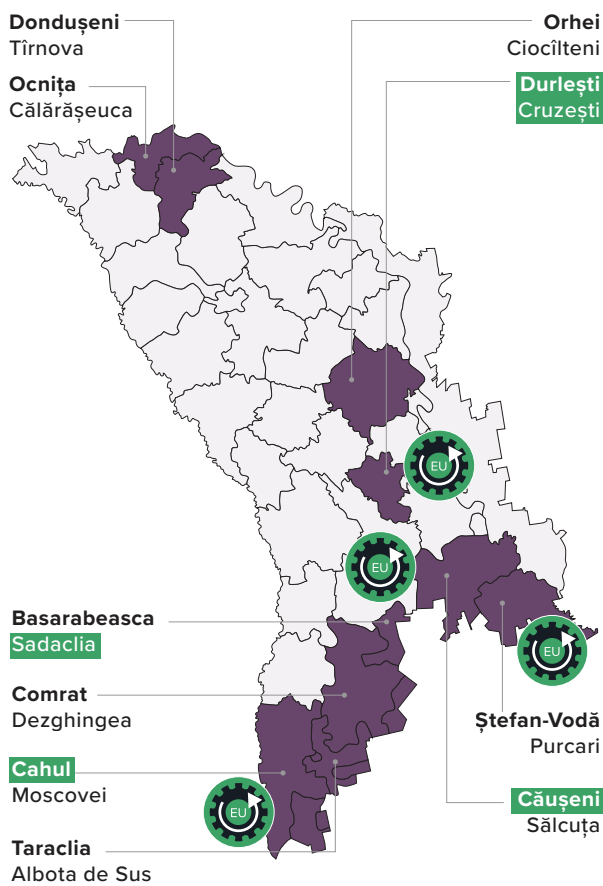
High scores for the following indicators: EU Reform Readiness / Support from National Authorities

WHAT do the local experts say?

The cases of Durlești and Cruzesti.

Several localities demonstrate readiness and openness toward advancing EU-related reforms, despite varying levels of capacity. In Durlești town, local experts note a clearly pro-European vision within the community, reflecting strong motivation to align with EU standards. In Cruzesti village, although there is a shortage of specialists experienced in EU-funded projects and limited training opportunities, the locality remains receptive and willing

Local Readiness for EU Reforms



to engage in the reform process. Similarly, in Cahul town, experts emphasize that the community values

and appreciates the European Union’s involvement and support.

What types of initiatives to facilitate integration of EU reforms?

Local EU Readiness Accelerators	Capacity-building workshops on EU standards (administrative transparency, environmental management, participatory budgeting).
Civic Awareness Campaigns	Promote understanding of EU reforms as local opportunities rather than top-down obligations.
Pilot Locality-Level “Reform Champions”	Identify one urban and one rural locality per region to pilot inclusive reform implementation processes.



Pillar 5. Promoting Inter-community Collaboration & Amalgamation Readiness

WHERE?

Sadaclia, Moscovei, Ocnita and Taraclia

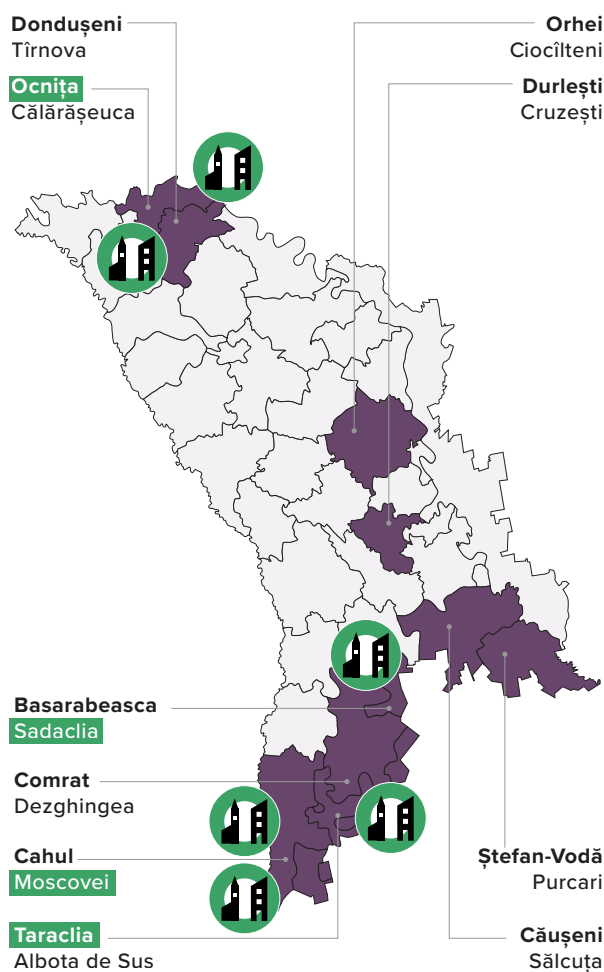
WHY in these areas?

High scores for the following indicators: Mayor’s office services and essential communal infrastructures / Collaboration and Collaboration and proximity with neighbouring villages / Tolerance towards ethnolinguistic and cultural minorities.

WHAT do the experts says?

Local experts in the potential localities say that these communities demonstrate a positive orientation toward constructive discussions with neighboring villages and engage actively in cooperation with nearby settlements. They highlight frequent

Potential Amalgamation-Prone Areas



mutual assistance between villages, as well as a shared understanding that amalgamation could open access to large-scale grant opportunities

and enable significant infrastructure development that would not be feasible individually.

What types of programmes to implement to convey amalgamation support?

Neighbourhood Partnership Grants

Fund joint projects between neighbouring communes (shared waste management, youth events, or cultural festivals).

Civic Exchange and Cohesion Programmes

Facilitate cultural exchange visits between diverse linguistic and ethnic communities (e.g., Comrat–Căușeni, Ocnita–Taraclia).

Annexes

1. Glossary indicators

Basic Education	Assesses the quality, accessibility, affordability and capacity of schools for all children in the locality.
Essential Health Care	Evaluates access to affordable, quality health services for all residents. Considers both availability and consistency of healthcare in the locality
Social Welfare Support	Measures whether vulnerable individuals receive adequate assistance to meet their basic needs. Focuses on the strength, accessibility, and coverage of welfare services.
Mayor's Office Services & Communal Infrastructure	Assesses the quality, accessibility, and responsiveness of municipal administrative and communal services such as waste management, water, sanitation, and documentation.
Management of Environmental Risks	Examines exposure to pollution and environmental hazards and their impact on health. Evaluates the presence and effectiveness of local policies to reduce environmental risks.
Economic Opportunities	Assesses the availability of employment, income opportunities, and access to economic assets for all demographic groups. Measures both overall economic vitality and equity within the locality.
Community Assets & Sense of Belonging	Evaluates access to community spaces such as parks, cultural centres, and public commons, and the extent to which they foster pride and belonging.
Satisfaction with Local Authorities	Measures the performance, integrity, and capacity of public authorities in meeting their responsibilities.
National Authorities' Care	Assesses how responsive, attentive, and supportive national authorities are to the locality's needs.
Civic Participation in Local Decision-Making	Evaluates the extent to which residents are engaged and represented in decisions through mechanisms like consultations and participatory processes.
Efficient Associative Sector	Assesses the presence, capacity, and effectiveness of NGOs, youth groups, unions, and civil society actors.
Community Mobilization Potential	Evaluates how well the community collaborates to respond to emergencies or solve shared problems. Reflects social cohesion and collective problem-solving capacity.
Readiness for EU Reforms	Assesses the community's awareness, willingness, and capacity to absorb and implement EU-related reforms and funding. Measures preparedness for administrative and policy change.

Vulnerability to Manipulative Narratives & Mis/Disinformation	Examines how frequently misinformation circulates, how strongly it influences residents, and whether it fuels tensions.
Attitudes Towards Ukrainian Refugees	Measures how welcoming or tense the relationship is between residents and Ukrainian refugees.
Proximity with Neighbouring Villages	Evaluates the quality of relationships, joint initiatives, shared services, and openness to future cooperation with nearby communities.
Tolerance Towards Ethnolinguistic & Cultural Minorities	Assesses social harmony, acceptance, and respect between majority and minority groups. Evaluates presence of discrimination, tension, or efforts to promote intercultural dialogue.
Tolerance Towards Socioeconomically Vulnerable Groups	Measures inclusion and treatment of groups such as people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, the homeless, and those facing poverty.
Youth-Friendly Community	Evaluates whether the locality offers opportunities, safety, leisure, and socio-economic prospects that encourage young people to stay and thrive.
Confidence in the Locality's Future	Assesses how optimistic residents feel about the future of their community. Reflects perceived opportunities, risks, and overall trust in the locality's trajectory.

2. Example of a Scorecard

Indicator 4: MAYOR'S OFFICE SERVICES AND ESSENTIAL COMMUNAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Triggering Questions

How would you assess the quality, accessibility and responsiveness of the services provided by the Mayor's Office in this locality? This includes administrative services such as issuing certificates, permits, and documentation, as well as communal services such as waste management, water/sanitation, streetlights, and local transportation. Are these services timely, inclusive, and adequate? Are there any challenges with access, responsiveness, or quality?

After hearing different opinions in the room, on a scale from 0 to 10, how would you score the provision of municipal services by the Mayor's Office in this locality?

Scoring Rubric [Please circle the appropriate score]	
Administrative and communal services are efficiently provided by the Mayor's Office. They are timely, accessible to all groups, and of good quality. Residents experience minimal issues in accessing these services.	7.5 to 10
Administrative and communal services are generally functional, but there are some inefficiencies or accessibility issues that occasionally affect certain groups or areas.	5.0 to 7.5
There are consistent problems in the provision of administrative or communal services. Services may be delayed, poorly managed, or inaccessible for some groups, leading to dissatisfaction among residents.	2.5 to 5.0
The Mayor's Office fails to deliver essential administrative and communal services effectively. There is widespread dissatisfaction due to inaccessibility, poor quality, or unresponsiveness.	0 to 2.5

If your score is less than 5, please note down up to 3 problems / reasons for your evaluation, and 1-3 suggested solutions

3. List of scores per urban locality

	Basarabasca	Cahul	Căușeni	Durlești	Dondușeni	Ocnita	Orhei	Ștefan Vodă	Taraclia	Comrat
Quality and accessibility of schools	7.3	7.5	8.6	9.3	8.6	8.3	7.9	8.5	7.8	8.5
Quality and accessibility of the healthcare system	6.3	6.0	6.9	9.5	6.7	6.8	6.3	6.5	6.2	6.3
Availability of social welfare support	7.5	7.4	6.7	8.9	7.8	8.0	7.3	6.3	6.9	7.3
Mayor's office services and essential communal infrastructure	6.2	8.0	6.4	9.4	9.2	8.6	6.4	8.0	8.2	8.1
Environmental risks	5.9	7.5	6.7	9.3	7.7	6.5	6.2	6.0	6.4	6.5
Availability of economic opportunities	5.5	7.3	6.4	8.5	6.4	5.1	6.9	5.7	6.1	6.5
Access to community assets and resources	6.4	8.9	4.7	7.9	8.5	7.9	7.1	7.9	8.1	8.0
Assessment of local authorities' capacities	6.7	8.1	6.3	8.9	7.8	7.2	5.0	6.3	7.5	8.2
National authorities care	5.9	7.4	7.4	7.7	7.5	7.1	6.2	6.3	7.4	6.8
Citizen participation in the decision-making	6.7	7.8	5.8	8.8	8.1	7.4	5.4	6.4	8.1	8.0
Assessment of the associative sector	6.7	7.9		6.5	8.0	6.7	6.2	8.1	7.4	8.1

	Basarabasca	Cahul	Căușeni	Durlești	Dondușeni	Ocnîța	Orhei	Ștefan Vodă	Taraclia	Comrat
Community mobilization potential	5.8	7.6	6.9	8.9	7.9	6.1	7.0	6.8	7.4	8.1
Readiness for EU reforms	5.1	8.1	7.6	8.7	6.4	7.2	6.0	5.9	6.6	6.9
Vulnerability to manipulative narratives and mis/disinformation	7.5	7.7	7.1	8.4	8.5	6.8	7.5	7.5	6.8	7.0
Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees	7.7	7.8	7.2	8.9	8.6	7.3	7.7	8.1	7.4	8.8
Collaboration and proximity with neighbouring villages	6.2	7.8	6.7	8.7	8.2	8.0	7.5	7.3	8.3	8.8
Tolerance towards ethnolinguistic and cultural minorities	7.3	7.7	7.3	9.1	7.6	6.8	7.0	7.3	8.3	8.5
Tolerance towards socioeconomically vulnerable groups	7.6	7.5	7.4	8.7	7.0	7.2	7.1	6.8	7.3	7.3
Youth friendly community	6.8	7.5	7.3	9.1	6.9	6.8	7.0	7.1	5.8	7.2
Confidence in the locality's future	6.1	8.3	7.6	9.2	7.1	6.6	6.3	5.9	6.3	7.7

4. List of scores per rural locality

	Basarabasca Sadacia	Cahul Moscovei	Căușeni Sălcuța	Durlești Cruzești	Dondușeni Tîrnova	Ocnîța Călărășeuca	Orhei Ciocîteni	ȘtefanVodă Purcari	Taraclia Albota de Sus	Comrat Dezghinea
Quality and accessibility of schools	7.8	8.5	8.5	8.2	8.8	7.9	8.0	8.6	7.5	8.6
Quality and accessibility of the healthcare system	7.7	6.5	8.6	8.7	6.7	6.3	7.0	6.2	5.1	8.1
Availability of social welfare support	7.3	6.8	8.6	6.0	7.4	6.7	6.7	8.3	6.3	8.8
Mayor's office services and essential communal infrastructure	8.0	8.3	8.7	9.1	9.0	6.8	8.6	9.0	7.1	8.6
Environmental risks	8.2	7.4	7.4	7.5	5.9	6.4	6.8	6.9	6.1	6.6
Availability of economic opportunities	8.0	7.7	6.9	6.4	6.1	6.6	6.6	7.8	4.5	7.4
Access to community assets and resources	8.1	7.4	8.5	8.6	8.2	6.0	8.5	8.8	5.8	7.9
Assessment of local authorities' capacities	7.5	8.1	8.6	9.1	8.4	7.2	8.1	8.4	7.1	8.8
National authorities care	7.8	5.4	7.4	8.5	6.3	4.5	6.6	7.0	5.4	7.9
Citizen participation in the decision-making	7.6	7.5	7.7	7.9	7.0	6.6	8.5	8.4	6.1	8.4
Assessment of the associative sector	8.0	7.4	8.9	5.3	7.0	4.7	7.5	7.9	5.6	8.6

	Basarabeasca Sadacia	Cahul Moscovei	Căușeni Sălcuța	Durlești Cruzești	Dondușeni Tîrnova	Ocnîța Călărășeuca	Orhei Ciocîteni	ȘtefanVodă Purcari	Taracia Albota de Sus	Comrat Dezghingea
Community mobilization potential	7.9	7.8	8.2	8.5	7.6	5.8	7.7	8.3	6.2	7.9
Readiness for EU reforms	7.9	7.0	7.2	7.5	6.0	4.0	7.0	7.9	5.4	5.9
Vulnerability to manipulative narratives and mis/disinformation	7.0	5.8	7.4	7.9	7.0	6.4	8.4	6.8	6.3	7.1
Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees	8.4	8.5	7.4	9.2	7.9	7.8	8.8	8.3	6.5	8.3
Collaboration and proximity with neighbouring villages	8.8	9.0	8.6	8.9	7.7	8.4	7.8	8.8	6.4	8.8
Tolerance towards ethnolinguistic and cultural minorities	8.2	8.4	8.0	8.3	7.1	7.3	7.7	8.7	7.3	8.0
Tolerance towards socioeconomically vulnerable groups	7.8	8.4	8.8	7.7	7.5	5.6	7.8	7.8	6.0	8.7
Youth friendly community	8.0	6.2	8.5	7.4	7.3	6.0	7.8	6.0	6.0	7.6
Confidence in the locality's future	8.0	7.8	7.5	9.4	7.5	5.9	7.6	7.8	4.8	7.0

