



Understanding Social Tensions in Moldova

An expert assessment of community dynamics

Acknowledgements

Authors:	Valeriu Dragalin, Nadiia Novosolova, Dr. Tornike Zurabashvili
Contributors:	Dr. Ilke Dagli-Hustings
Design:	Olga Pugina

The present report was developed by the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) within the Social Tensions Monitoring Mechanism (STMM) for Moldova: Theoretical Framework and Measurement Tool Empirical Pilot Wave, with the support of the “Multidimensional response to emerging human security challenges in Moldova” project, funded by the Government of Japan and implemented by the UNDP Moldova.

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or official positions of the United Nations, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), its Member States, the Government of Japan, the Government of the Republic of Moldova, or any affiliated entities.

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	4
METHODOLOGY	5
KEY FINDINGS	9
DETAILED FINDINGS BY LOCALITIES	10
Basarabasca	10
Cahul	11
Căușeni	12
Chișinău	13
Comrat	14
Dondușeni	15
Ocnîța	15
Orhei	16
Ștefan Vodă	17
Taraclia	18
DETAILED FINDINGS BY INDICATORS	20
Intergroup Relations Dimension	20
Institutional and Civic Dimension	22
Welfare Dimension	23
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	27
GLOSSARY OF INDICATORS	29
ABOUT SEED	31
ABOUT UNDP	31
ABOUT STMM	31

Introduction

This report details the results of the expert community scoring tool (ECoST), deployed by the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) from February to August 2024 in ten localities across Moldova. ECoST was implemented using a deliberative mixed-method format, involving local officials, civil servants and civil society representatives. The primary aim was to gather expert assessments of social tensions at the local level, focusing on dimensions such as governance, socio-economic well-being and inter-group relations.

ECoST was part of the Social Tensions Monitoring Mechanism (STMM), an innovative research tool designed to understand and monitor societal dynamics in Moldova. Specifically, it draws on the household survey component of the STMM, conducted from December 2023 to January 2024 across Moldova. It complements the household survey in two ways: first, by enriching its findings with a more detailed evaluation of community dynamics; and second, by identifying and offering more targeted interventions to address specific local needs.

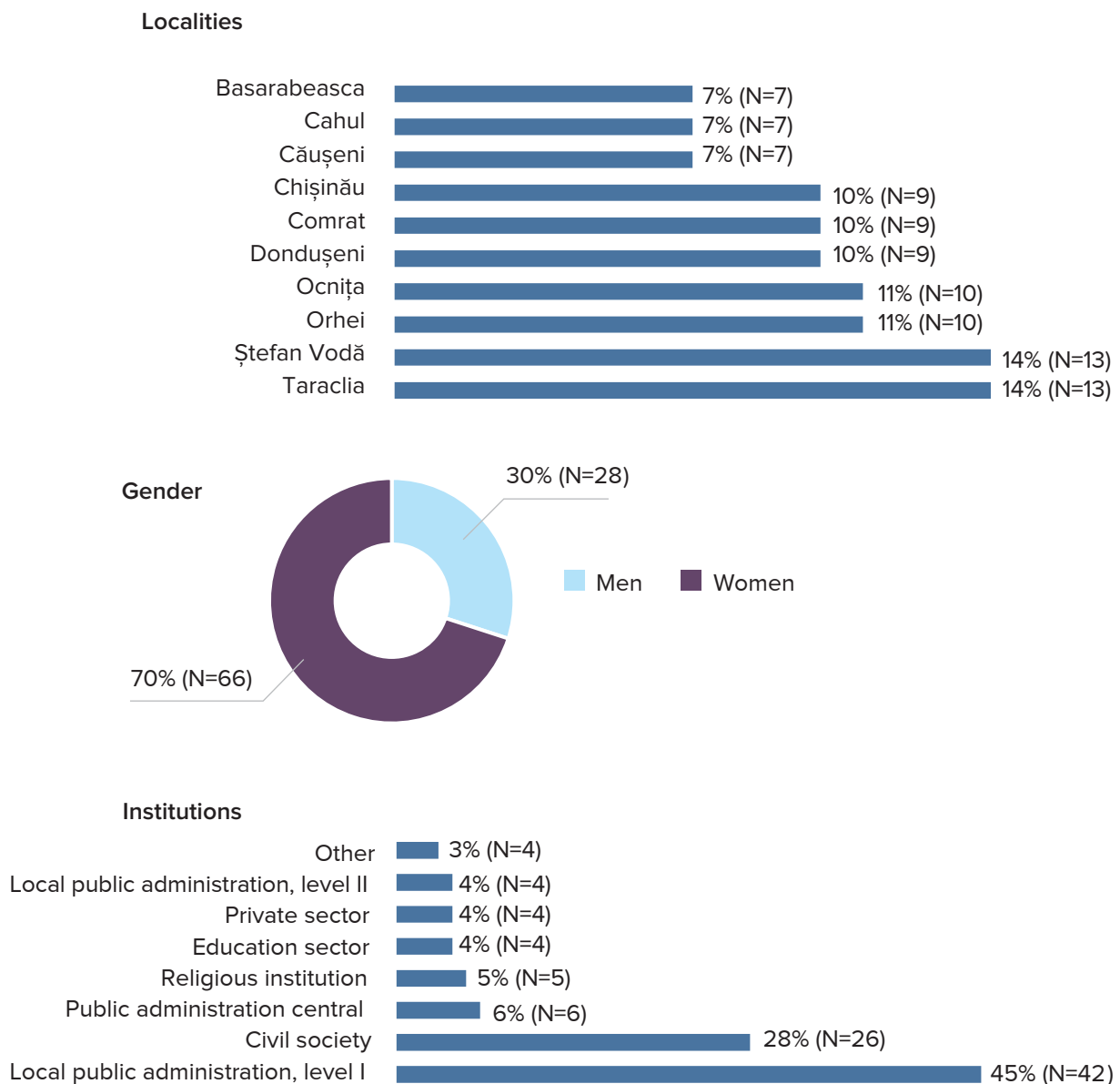
To allow for a more thorough examination of perceptual and objective conditions of social tensions, SeeD is publishing the results in two separate volumes; *Understanding Social Tensions in Moldova: A household survey*; and *Understanding Social Tensions in Moldova: An expert assessment of community dynamics*. For better comprehension, SeeD recommends that the two documents are read sequentially, starting with the household survey report.

Data of the expert community scoring can be accessed by clicking on the following links:
<https://shorturl.at/vEf3J> and <https://shorturl.at/PIL5q>.

Methodology

The data was collected between February 2024 and August 2024 through meetings of the Community Security Council (CSC), an advisory body formed to consult and oversee the implementation of STMM in target localities. Each CSC consisted from seven to 13 participants from localities, representing local authorities (both at city and raion/district levels), central public administration, local civil society organizations, education and private sectors, religious institutions and other actors that play an important role in the community.

FIGURES 1-3. ECoST sample distribution (localities, gender and institutional affiliations of involved experts).



A total of 94 experts participated in ECoST in 10 localities across Moldova: Căușeni, Comrat, Basarabeasca, Taraclia, Cahul, Ștefan Vodă, Ocnița, Dondușeni, Orhei and Chișinău.

Experts evaluated (both qualitatively and quantitatively) the current state of affairs in their communities across 17 indicators grouped into three dimensions (see Table 1 for detailed list of indicators).

1. Welfare Dimension, focusing on economic aspects, environmental risks and well-being;
2. Institutional and Civic Dimension, focusing on performance of national and local authorities, as well as the efficiency of the civil society sector and engagement in decision-making;
3. Intergroup Relations Dimension, focusing on people-to-people relations and potential ruptures.

The ECoST process involved careful qualitative deliberation about the indicators at hand, starting with a triggering question that set the stage for discussions and established convergence among participating experts. They then evaluated the state of affairs for each specific indicator using a scorecard and drawing on the prior discussions with other experts. Scores for each indicator ranged from 0 to 10, where 0 means that the phenomena being assessed is not observed, experienced or felt at all, 10 means that it is observed, experienced or felt strongly. The scorecard was divided into four scoring rubrics, with each of them providing a clear description of the conditions associated with specific score ranges.

In the case of the Quality and accessibility of schools indicator, scores falling between 7.5 and 10 indicate that there are enough easily accessible schools that provide high-quality education. Conversely, scores ranging from 5.0 to 7.5 suggest that while there are sufficient schools to meet the needs of all children, the quality of education may sometimes be questionable and access could be problematic. Scores between 2.5 and 5.0 reflect a small shortage of schools compared to the number of children, while scores from 0 to 2.5 signify a significant shortage of schools in relation to the number of children needing education.

FIGURE 4. A cross-section of the ECoST scorecard.

Indicator 1: Quality and accesibility of schools

Triggering Questions

Are the capacities of schools sufficient to cover the needs of all children in this locality? Do children have convenient access to these facilities, such as through accessible/affordable transport or because they are close to their catchment communities? (Interviewer takes notes to summarize response)

And given your response, on a scale from 0 to 10, how would you score availability and accessibility of schools in this locality? (Interviewer hands over a card with the scoring options, invites interviewees to reflect carefully and score to the closest half point.)

Scoring Rubric

There are enough easily accessible schools that provide qualitative education in thislocality.	7.5 to 10
There are sufficient schools to cover all children in this locality, the quality of education sometimes is questionable and in some cases access is problematic.	5.0 to 7.5
There is a small shortage of schools in this locality, compared to the number of children.	2.5 to 5.0
There is a great shortage of schools in this locality, compared to the number of children.	0 to 2.5

If your answer is between 0 – 5 please note down top 3 problems / obstacles / reasons for your evaluation and 1-3 suggested solutions

TABLE 1. Full list of indicators grouped under the ECoST dimensions.

Dimension	Indicators
Welfare dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Absence of environmental risks ● Access to a good healthcare system ● Availability of social welfare support ● Access to community assets and resources ● Availability of economic opportunities ● Quality and accessibility of schools
Institutional and Civic dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● National authorities' care ● Citizen participation in decision making ● Overall assessment of the capacity of local government ● Presence of an efficient associative sector ● Community mobilization potential
Intergroup Relations dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Absence of societal polarization ● Acceptance of other groups outside the community ● Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees ● Absence of social tensions ● Positive intergroup relations ● Confidence in locality's future

The mean scores are calculated for each indicator, including averages for all localities, as well as averages disaggregated by institutional affiliation. The scores range from 0 to 10, with 0 representing the lowest score and 10 representing the highest score.¹

¹ ECoST is based on expert assessments, with a limited number of indicators, while the household survey is based on an opinion poll conducted on a representative sample of the Moldovan population. Although some indicators overlap, they differ in their focus: ECoST measures social dynamics at the community level, whereas the household survey captures them at the individual level. Additionally, the two tools differ in their scoring methodologies. In the expert assessment, participating experts evaluate the state of affairs in a given area using a scoring rubric, while in the household survey, respondents are administered closed-ended questions, which are then converted into score points. While both tools report results on a scale from 0 to 10, the specific interpretations and applications of the scale are not identical between the two. For more information on the household survey methodology, please refer to the corresponding report.

Key findings

General

- Of the three dimensions featured in the expert scoring tool, Intergroup Relations dimension is the strongest, while Welfare, Institutional Civic indicators show average to relatively high scores.
- The highest-ranking indicator is Confidence in the locality's future, with a rating of 8.5 out of 10. It is followed by Positive intergroup relations (7.8), Community mobilization potential (7.7) and the Quality and accessibility of schools (7.6).
- The lowest-ranking indicators are Access to a good healthcare system (5.9), Absence of environmental risks (5.6) and National authorities' care (5.6).
- Results by institutional affiliation show a diverse picture; experts from public agencies report consistently more positive scores, while representatives from civil society organizations express more critical stances.
- Localities display some variation across indicators. The largest gap (between highest and lowest scores among different localities) is found in the Quality and accessibility of schools (3.3 points gap), Availability of economic opportunities (2.9 points gap) and National authorities' care (2.5 points gap).

Localities

- Ștefan Vodă consistently demonstrates strong scores across various indicators, while Basarabeasca steadily underperforms compared to the other localities
- Chișinău shows a mixed performance, with strengths in areas such as Availability of economic opportunities and Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees, while falling short in Positive intergroup dynamics and Absence of societal polarization.
- Căușeni demonstrates relatively weak performance, particularly in issues related to social tensions, economic opportunities and welfare support.
- Ocnița exhibits relatively weak performance as well, facing challenges with social tensions and acceptance of outside groups, as well as in terms of local governance.
- Comrat shows moderate strength across most indicators; however, acceptance of outside groups, particularly Ukrainian refugees, continues to be an issue.
- Cahul and Taraclia show relative strength as well; the former scores visibly higher on institutional and civic indicators, while the latter scores high in interpersonal relations.
- Many localities, particularly Basarabeasca and Căușeni, show significant deficits in welfare support, healthcare and economic opportunities.

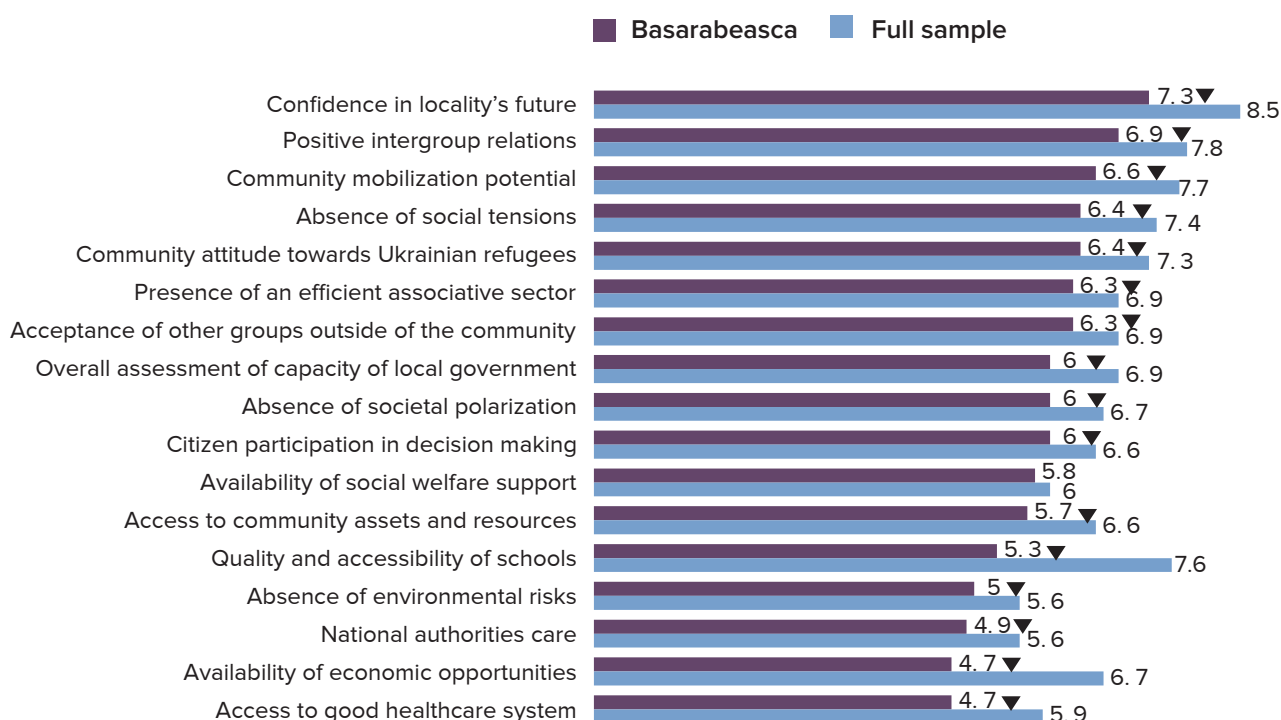
Detailed findings by localities

The following section offers a detailed overview of each locality, describing their standing in relation to the full sample figures,² as well as the values from other localities. It also examines top-and bottom-ranking indicators per locality and offers recommendations.

Basarabeasca

Basarabeasca reports visibly lower scores than the full sample (FS) on 16 out of 17 indicators, with the Availability of social welfare support being the only exception, where its value is only marginally below the full sample average (5.8 | FS 6.0). Furthermore, relative to the full sample, the town shows the largest gap in the Quality and accessibility of schools and Access to economic opportunities, with differences of 2.3 and 2.0 points compared to the full sample average, respectively. Similarly, Basarabeasca demonstrates lower Confidence in locality's future and Access to good healthcare system, each trailing by 1.2 points compared to the full sample average. Additionally, when compared to individual values of other localities, it ranks lowest on ten indicators. These findings underscore the urgent need for action in the locality. Interventions should be multifaceted and systemic, but – for maximum impact – could primarily focus on improving healthcare provision and addressing lack of economic opportunities – two areas where it performs the weakest, both relative to other localities and across various indicators.

FIGURE 5. Mean scores for the ECoST indicators in Basarabeasca, ranked from highest to lowest and compared to the full sample mean scores. ▼ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points lower in Basarabeasca compared to the full sample average.

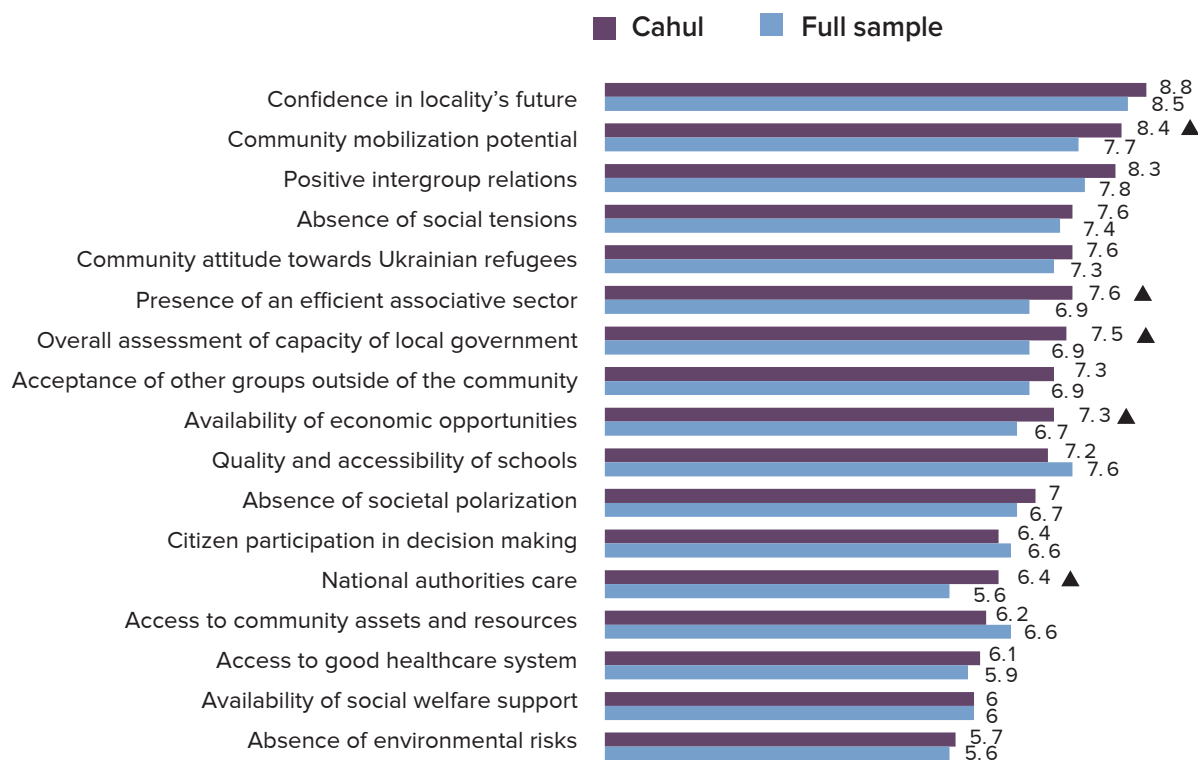


² For the purposes of this report, only differences in scores >0.5 points higher or lower than average are considered meaningful.

Cahul

Cahul generally performs better than the full sample average and is a high performer compared to the other localities. Notably, it scores relatively better than the full sample on five indicators, with differences ranging from 0.6 to 0.8 points. These indicators include National authorities' care (6.4 | FS 5.6), Presence of an efficient associative sector (7.6 | FS 6.9), Community mobilization potential (8.4 | FS 7.7), Overall assessment of the capacity of local government (7.5 | FS 6.9) and Availability of economic opportunities (7.3 | FS 6.7). Interestingly, four of these indicators fall within the Institutional and Civic dimension, suggesting a positive interaction between the community, state authorities and non-state actors in the area. Additionally, when compared to the values of the other nine localities, Cahul ranks highest on Community mobilization potential (alongside Ștefan Vodă), Positive intergroup relations (alongside Taraclia) and Presence of an efficient associative sector. It is also worth noting that the four indicators evaluated the lowest in the locality belong to the Welfare dimension, namely — Access to community assets and resources, Access to a good healthcare system, Availability of social welfare support and Absence of environmental risks. Therefore, out of the three dimensions measured, the Welfare dimension should be prioritised in Cahul.

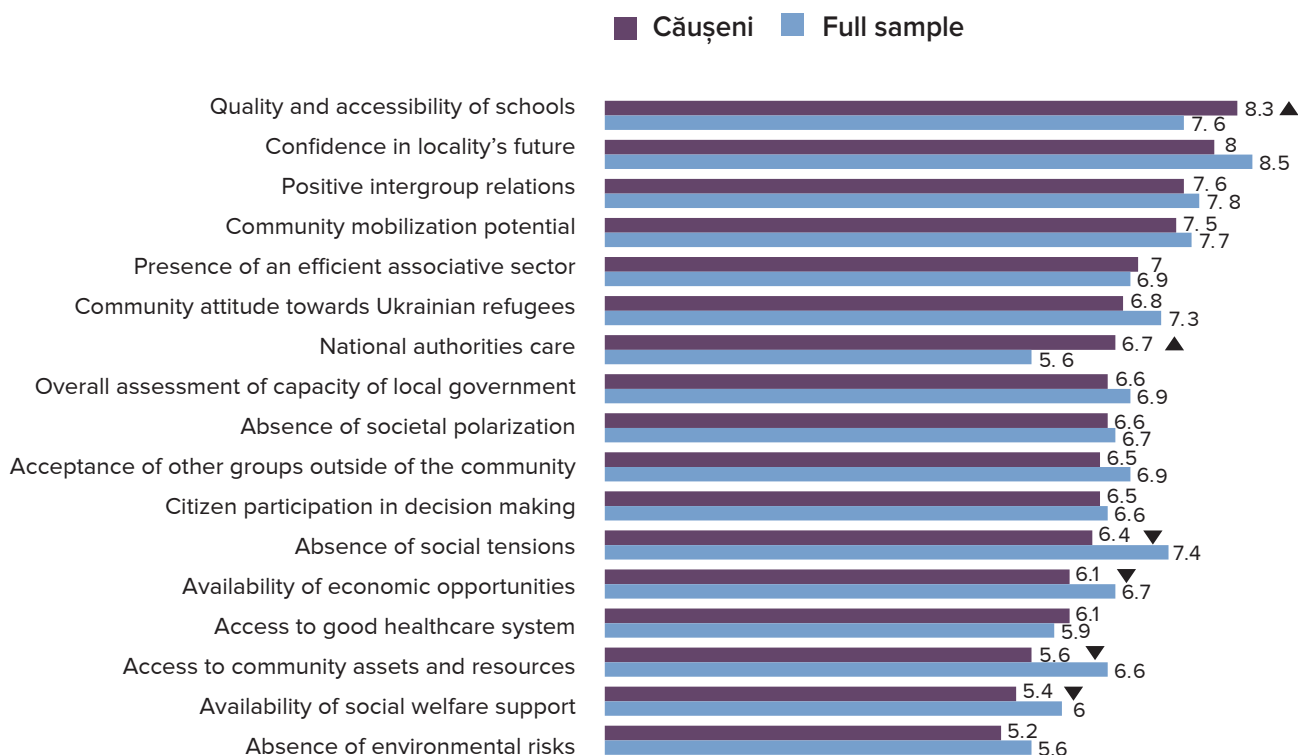
FIGURE 6. Mean scores for the ECoST indicators in Cahul, ranked from highest to lowest and compared to the full sample mean scores. ▲ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points higher in Cahul compared to the full sample average.



Căușeni

Căușeni is generally in line with the overall picture, but most indicators are still marginally below the full sample values. The locality scores visibly lower than the aggregate values in terms of the Absence of social tensions and Access to community assets, each by 1.0 point, as well as availability of economic opportunities and welfare support, each by 0.6 points. Interestingly, Căușeni scores higher than the full sample values in the National authorities' care (5.6 | FS 6.7) and Quality and accessibility of schools (7.6 | FS 8.3). When compared to the other nine localities, Căușeni ranks the lowest for Access to community assets, Absence of social tensions (alongside Basarabeasca) and Availability of social welfare support (alongside Orhei). Additionally, all five indicators that received the lowest evaluations also belong to the welfare dimension (Availability of economic opportunities, Access to a good healthcare system, Access to community assets and resources, Availability of social welfare support and Absence of environmental risks), underscoring the need for increased investments in this area.

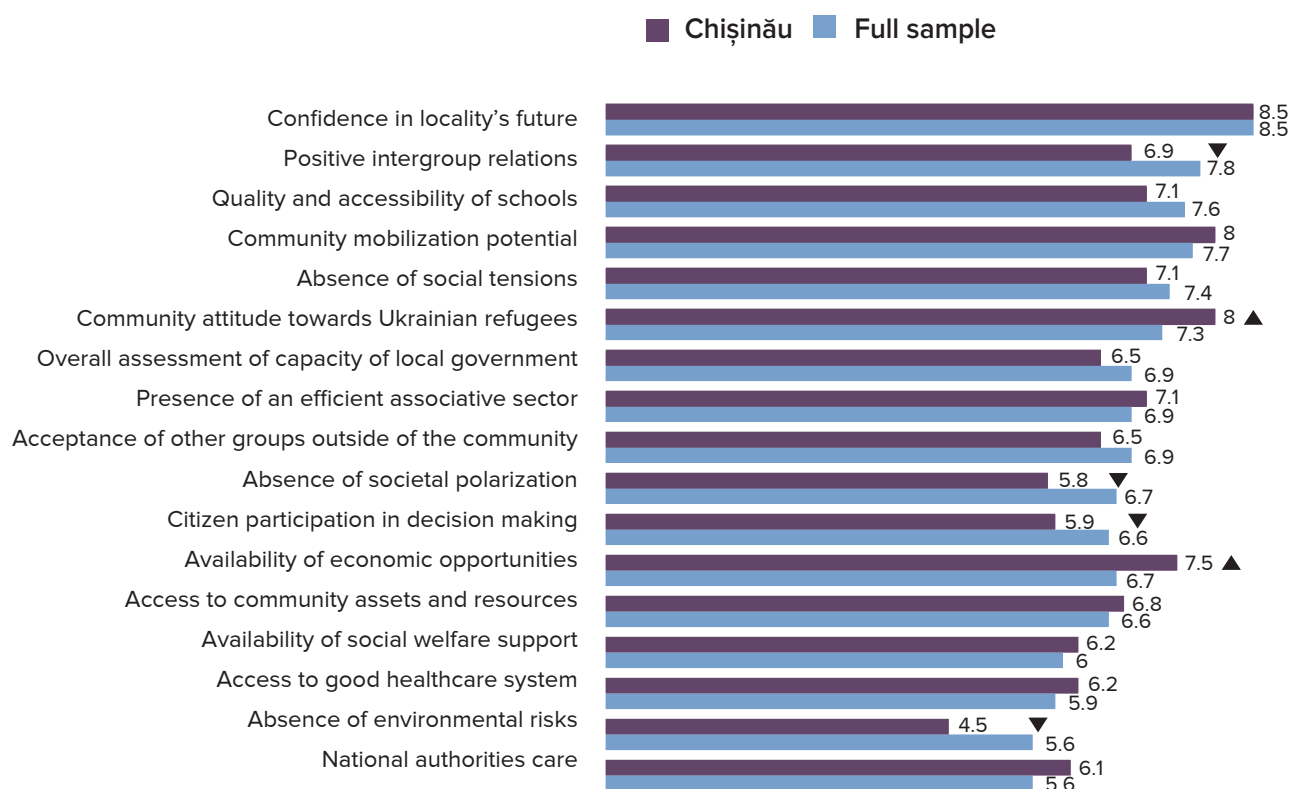
FIGURE 7. Mean scores for the ECoST indicators in Căușeni, ranked from highest to lowest and compared to the full sample mean scores. ▼ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points lower in Căușeni compared to the full sample average. ▲ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points higher in Căușeni compared to the full sample average.



Chişinău

Expert assessments in Chişinău present a rather diverse picture; on one hand, the city scores above the full sample average in Availability of economic opportunities (7.5 | FS 6.7) and Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees (8 | FS 7.3). On the other hand, it falls below the aggregate values in Absence of environmental risks (4.5 | FS 5.6), Absence of societal polarization (5.8 | FS 6.7), Positive intergroup relations (6.9 | FS 7.8) and Citizen participation in decision making (5.9 | FS 6.6). This aligns with a broader trend observed in urban centers, where economic growth often coexists with challenges related to environmental sustainability, social cohesion and active civic engagement. Still, findings highlight the need for multifaceted interventions, focusing primarily on fostering meaningful civic participation in decision-making and building a culture of dialogue. Strategies such as structured dialogues can enhance understanding and can merge seemingly polarized positions, while initiatives like civic assemblies and participatory budgeting will further engage the community in the decision-making process. Additionally, prioritizing public-private-civic collaborations will be crucial to effectively address environmental concerns.

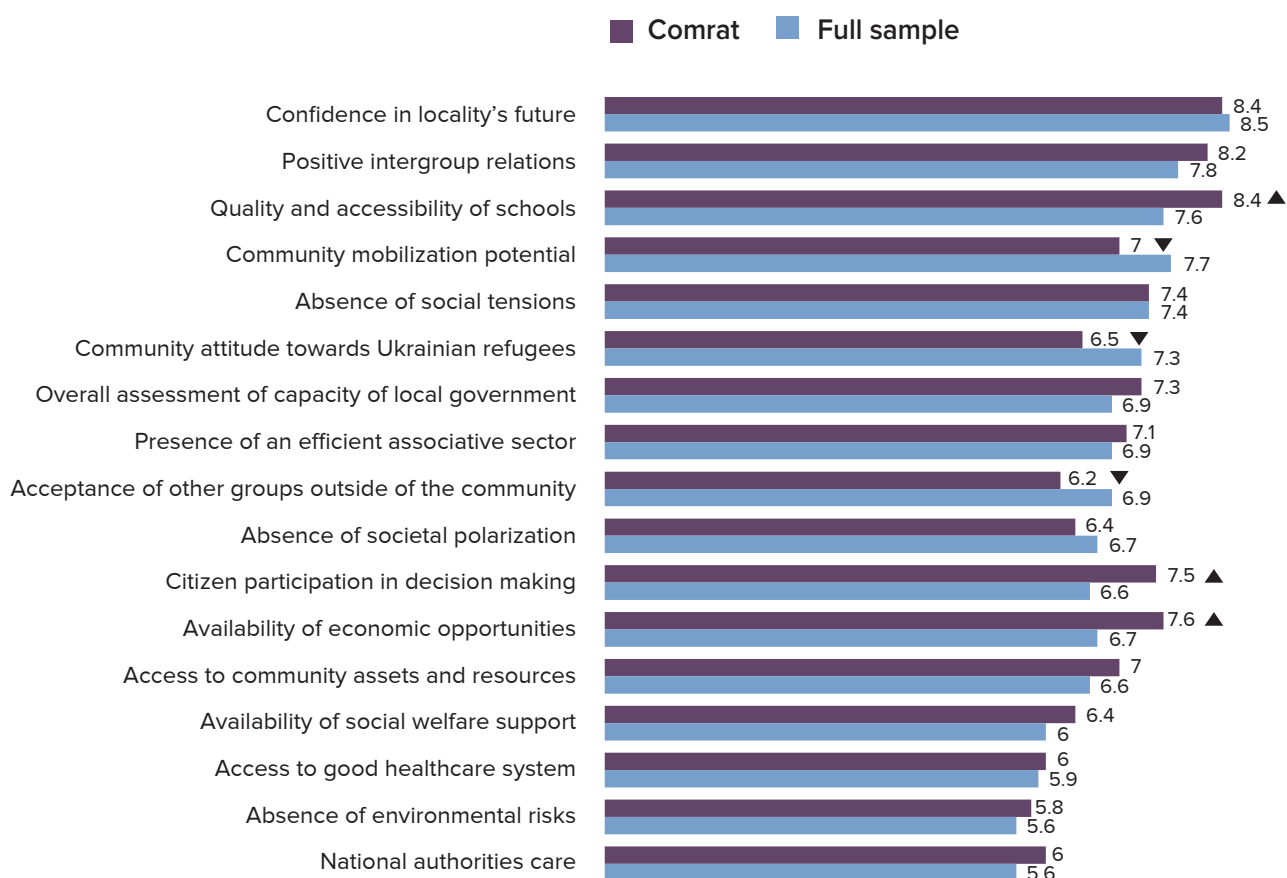
FIGURE 8. Mean scores for the ECoST indicators in Chişinău, ranked from highest to lowest and compared to the full sample mean scores. ▼ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points lower in Chişinău compared to the full sample average. ▲ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points higher in Chişinău compared to the full sample average.



Comrat

Comrat generally aligns with the overall picture, showing only minimal variation from the full sample average. However, it scores relatively higher in Citizen participation in decision making (7.5 | FS 6.6), Availability of economic opportunities (7.6 | FS 6.7) and the Quality and accessibility of schools (8.4 | FS 7.6). Conversely, it under-performs compared to the full sample in terms of Acceptance of other groups outside the community (6.2 | FS 6.9), Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees (6.5 | FS 7.3) and Community mobilization potential (7.0 | FS 7.7). When compared to the other nine localities, Comrat stands out with top rankings in Citizen participation in decision making and Availability of economic opportunities, while it ranks lowest in Acceptance of other groups outside the community (alongside Ocnița). This finding – combined with Comrat’s low standing regarding Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees – highlights the need to enhance sense of inclusion and understanding.

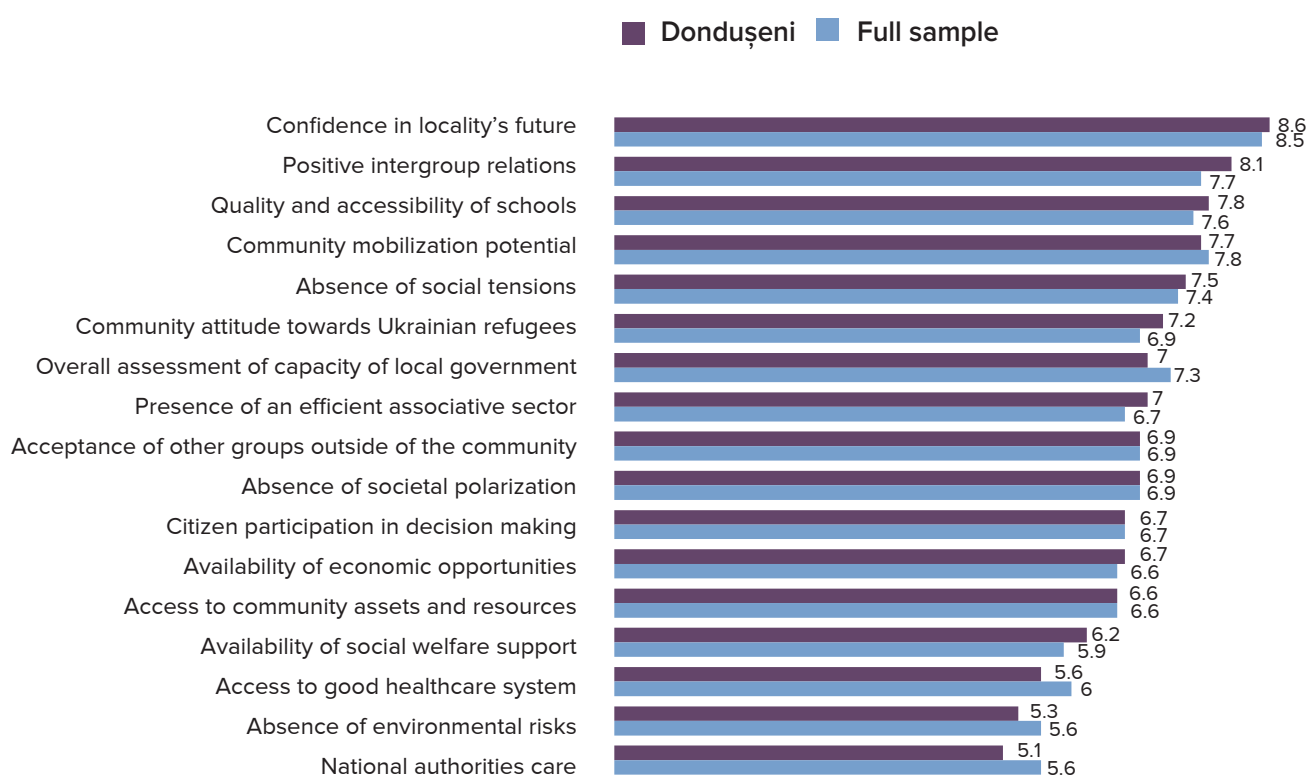
FIGURE 9. Mean scores for the ECoST indicators in Comrat, ranked from highest to lowest and compared to the full sample mean scores. ▼ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points lower in Comrat compared to the full sample average. ▲ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points higher in Comrat compared to the full sample average.



Dondușeni

Expert assessments in Dondușeni are in line with the full sample values, with neither positive nor negative highlights. However, when compared to the values of the other nine localities, Dondușeni reports one of the highest scores for Community mobilization potential (8.1) and Access to a good healthcare system (6.2). At the same time, it shows one of the weakest scores for Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees (7) and Availability of social welfare support (5.6). Like other localities, concerns about welfare and national authorities feature prominently here too, underscoring the need for increased attention to these areas.

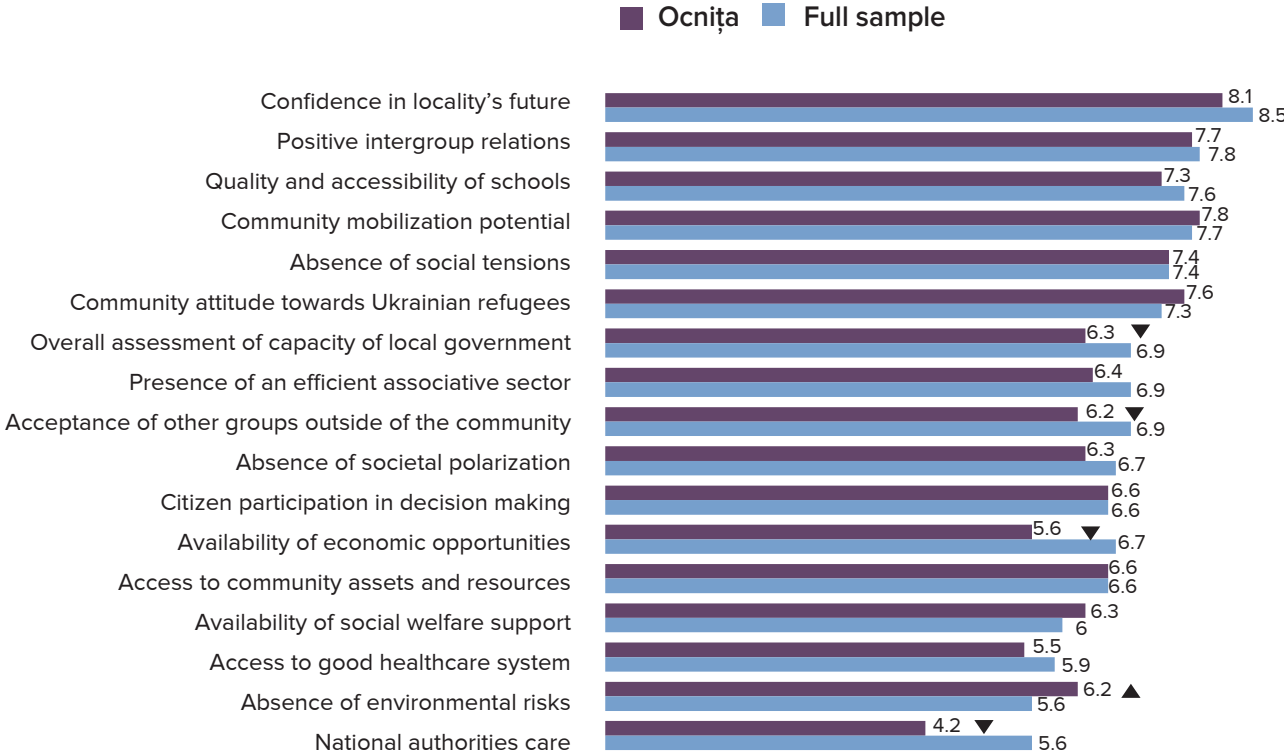
FIGURE 10. Mean scores for the ECoST indicators in Dondușeni, ranked from highest to lowest and compared to the full sample mean scores.



Ocnița

Ocnița is generally in line with the overall picture, but most indicators are still marginally below the full sample values. The locality, however, scores visibly lower than the aggregate values in several areas: National authorities' care (4.2 | FS 5.6), Availability of economic opportunities (5.6 | FS 6.7), Acceptance of other groups outside the community (6.2 | FS 6.9) and Overall assessment of the capacity of local government (6.3 | FS 6.9). Interestingly, Ocnița received a more positive evaluation on the Absence of environmental risks (6.2) than most other localities, but it scored the lowest in terms of National authorities' care (4.2). Additionally, Ocnița performs relatively weakly in Overall assessment of the capacity of local government, Acceptance of other groups outside the community and Availability of economic opportunities, when compared to other localities. Taken together, these findings suggest the need for fundamental improvements in governance, including in the economic domain.

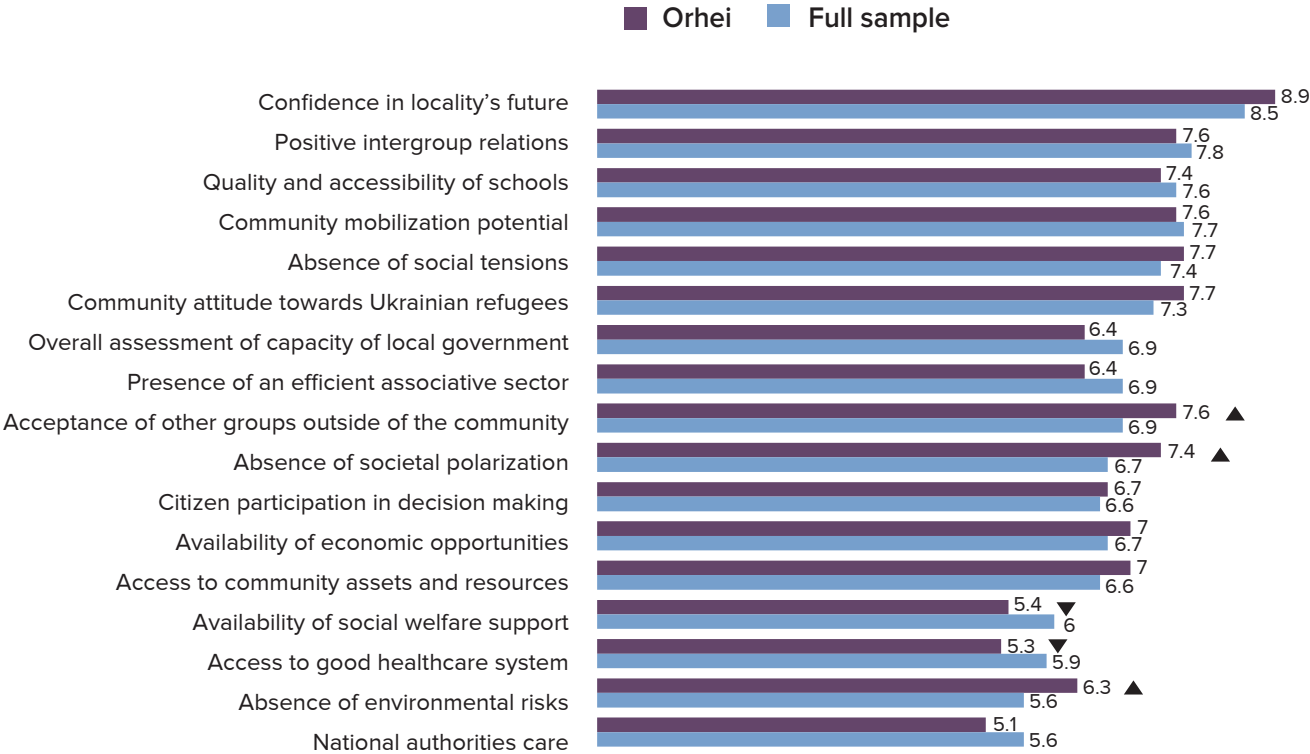
FIGURE 12. Mean scores for the ECoST indicators in Ocnița, ranked from highest to lowest and compared to the full sample mean scores. ▼ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points lower in Ocnița compared to the full sample average. ▲ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points higher in Ocnița compared to the full sample average.



Orhei

Orhei performs relatively better than the other localities, with most indicators either marginally or visibly above the aggregate numbers. It scores higher than the full sample in Acceptance of other groups outside the community (7.6 | FS 6.9), Absence of societal polarization (7.4 | FS 6.7) and Absence of environmental risks (6.3 | FS 5.6). Orhei also fares well compared to other localities in terms of Absence of environmental risks, where it shows the best standing and Acceptance of other groups outside the community and Absence of societal polarization, where it trails only Taraclia. Nevertheless, Orhei performs relatively weaker on two indicators: Availability of social welfare support and Access to a good healthcare system, both in relation to the full sample values and across other localities. Notably, six out of seven top-ranking indicators in Orhei fall in the Intergroup Relations dimension, indicating positive intra- and inter-group dynamics in the area. This positive foundation can be leveraged to address the more pressing needs, such as improving welfare support and healthcare system, as well as to foster formal and non-formal participation dynamics, where the locality currently shows a moderate standing.

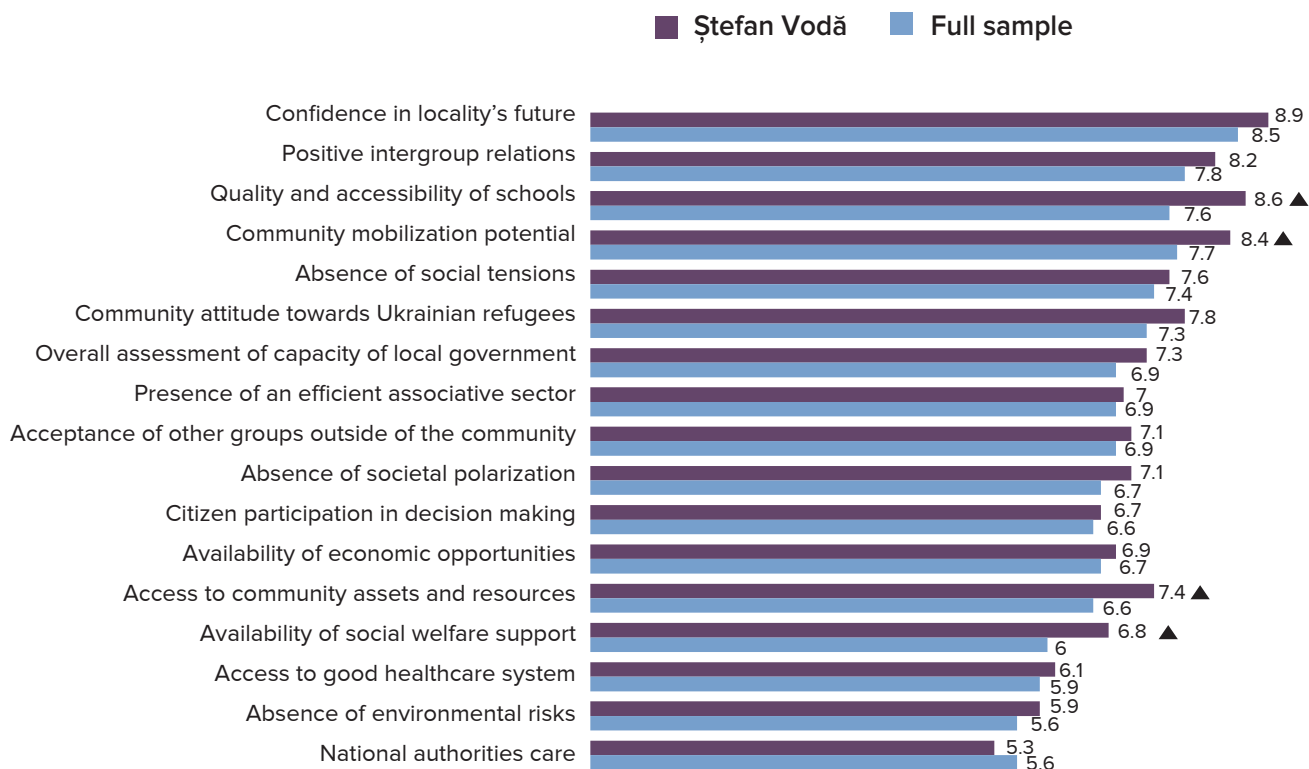
FIGURE 12. Mean scores for the ECoST indicators in Orhei, ranked from highest to lowest and compared to the full sample mean scores. ▼ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points lower in Orhei compared to the full sample average. ▲ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points higher in Orhei compared to the full sample average.



Ștefan Vodă

Ștefan Vodă performs relatively better than the other localities, with most indicators above or visibly above the aggregate numbers. It fares relatively better than the full sample on four indicators: Quality and accessibility of schools (8.6 | FS 7.6), Access to community assets and resources (7.4 | FS 6.6), Availability of social welfare support (6.8 | FS 6) and Community mobilization potential (8.4 | FS 7.7). When compared to other localities, Ștefan Vodă also ranks highest in these four indicators, alongside confidence in locality's future (which it shares with Orhei and Taraclia). Notably, three of the four top-ranking indicators fall within the Welfare dimension, suggesting a relatively healthy situation in the area, while the fourth – Community mobilization potential – belongs to the Institutional and Civic dimension.

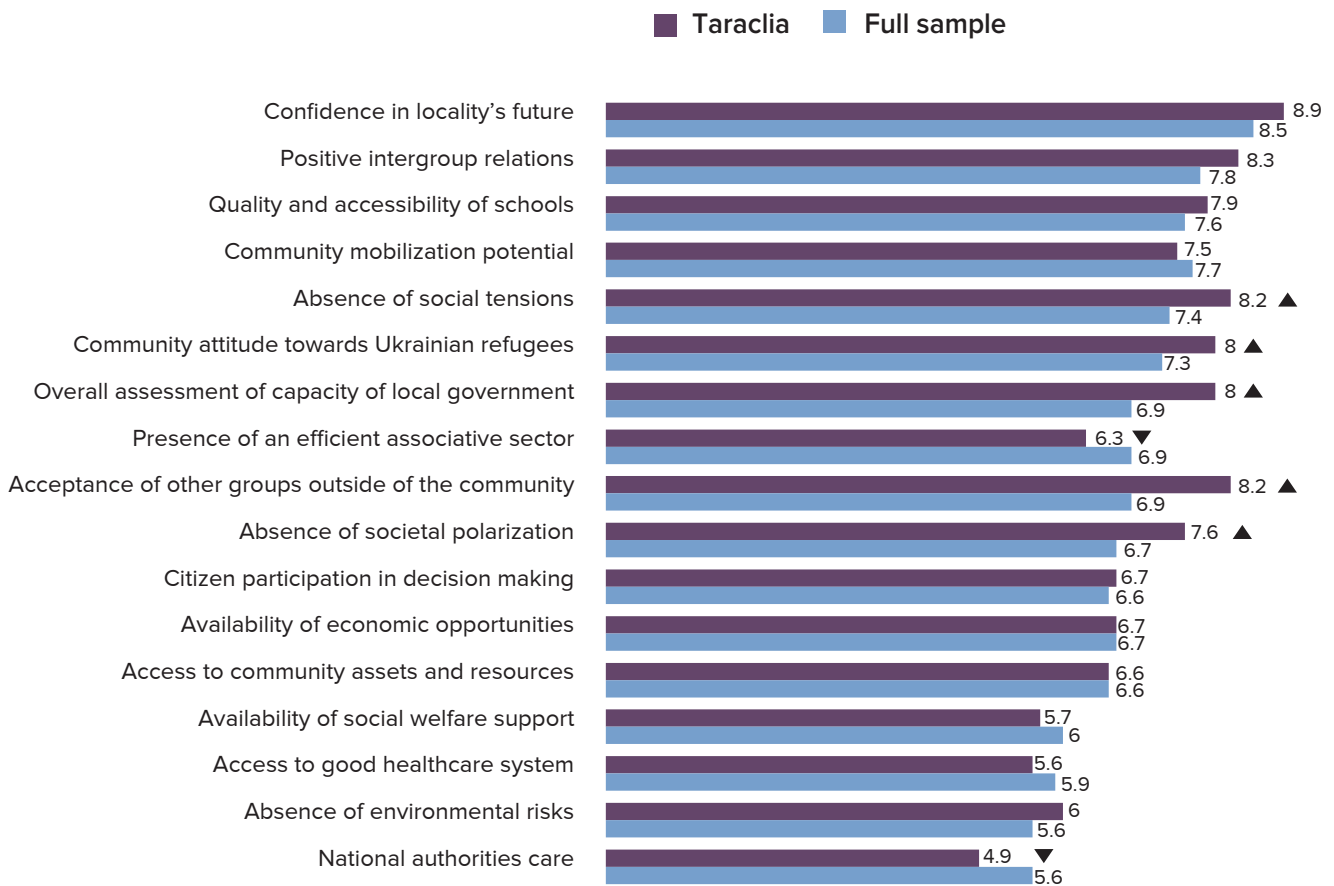
FIGURE 13. Mean scores for the ECoST indicators in Ștefan Vodă, ranked from highest to lowest and compared to the full sample mean scores. ▼ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points lower in Ștefan Vodă compared to the full sample average. ▲ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points higher in Ștefan Vodă compared to the full sample average.



Taraclia

Taraclia performs relatively better than the other localities, topping the list on seven indicators: Confidence in locality's future (alongside Ștefan Vodă and Orhei), Positive intergroup relations (alongside Cahul), Absence of social tensions, Acceptance of other groups outside the community, Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees (alongside Chișinău), Overall assessment of the capacity of local government and Absence of societal polarization. Six of these indicators fall within the Interpersonal Relations dimension, suggesting more harmonious relationships among social groups in this locality. However, it is important to note that Taraclia ranks the lowest in terms of the Presence of an efficient associative sector (alongside Basarabasca), which indicates a potential gap in opportunities for civil society participation. Additionally, it ranks noticeably lower in National authorities' care, trailing behind Ocnița. Similar to other localities, concerns about welfare and national authorities are prominent here too.

FIGURE 14. Mean scores for the ECoST indicators in Taraclia, ranked from highest to lowest and compared to the full sample mean scores. ▼ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points lower in Taraclia compared to the full sample average. ▲ marks indicators scoring >0.5 points higher in Taraclia compared to the full sample average.



Detailed findings by indicators

The next section offers a detailed overview of each indicator, describing their standing vis-à-vis other indicators. It also looks at top and bottom performing localities, as well as results by institutional affiliation. Where applicable, references are made to similar indicators from the household survey, which – although employing a radically different methodology – still allows more general comparisons. The indicators are grouped by corresponding dimensions.

Intergroup relation dimension

Confidence in locality's future, measuring the degree of optimism within the expert community, is the highest-ranking indicator across the indicators, averaging 8.5 out of 10. It ranks lowest in Basarabeasca (7.3) and highest in Orhei, Ștefan Vodă and Taraclia (all three at 8.9). The difference between the best and worst performers in this indicator is minimal at 1.6 points, indicating a relatively homogenous picture across the target localities. Of different institutions, the CSOs are most pessimistic about their localities' future (7.2), while experts from religious and educational institutions are most optimistic (both at 9).

Positive intergroup relations, which assesses the degree of harmonious interactions among community members, is the second-highest indicator, with an average of 7.8 out of 10. It is the weakest in Basarabeasca and Chișinău (both at 6.9) and the strongest in Cahul and Taraclia (8.3). The difference between the best and worst performers in this indicator is only 1.4 points, suggesting a relatively uniform situation across the target localities. Of different institutions, the CSOs express most critical stances about intergroup dynamics (6.3), while experts from educational facilities provide most positive assessments (8.3). Interestingly, a comparison with similar indicators from the household survey – **Positive feelings towards all groups**³ and **Perceived level of social tensions**⁴ – reveals that intergroup dynamics are generally perceived more positively at the local level.⁵ Taraclia which is populated primarily by ethnic Bulgarians,⁶ is a case in point here; although it ranks highest in **Positive intergroup relations** (alongside Cahul) and **Absence of social tensions** in the expert assessment, in the household survey, Bulgarians as one of the demographic groups report highest **Perceived level of social tensions**.⁷

Absence of social tensions, which measures the degree to which experts feel that there are no social tensions in their locality, ranks fifth, scoring 7.4 out of 10. Basarabeasca and Căușeni report the lowest scores at 6.4, while Taraclia has the highest at 8.2, indicating a moderate difference of 1.8 between the two. Among various institutions, representatives from CSOs report more significant concerns about social tensions, with a score of 6.4,⁸ whereas experts from educational institutions perceive the issue as less pronounced, scoring 8.3. Discussions among experts revealed that while significant horizontal tensions are absent in their localities, minor chasms do exist and impact intergroup dynamics. Interestingly, when speaking about social tensions, most experts emphasize local, community-specific problems rather than political or geopolitical issues, two major sources of individual grievances in the household survey. It is also worth noting that expert discussions do not corroborate the household survey finding that corruption and the economic situation (poverty and unemployment) are regarded as the most frequent sources of tensions. While the absence of

³ The level of warmth and affection, as opposed to coldness and hostility, that one feels towards different ethnic, linguistic, geographic and religious groups in the society.

⁴ The degree to which one feels that there are social tensions in society today.

⁵ The indicators are not fully comparable.

⁶ Raionul Taraclia. Pasportul raionului Taraclia. Raionul Taraclia, 2023, <https://raiontaraclia.md/pasport-rajona/>. Accessed 19 Nov. 2024.

⁷ The indicators are not fully comparable.

⁸ After 'other', which scores 5.7

corruption in expert discussions may be attributed to the fact that no such question was posed to respondents, the relatively better performance of the **Availability of economic opportunities** indicator compared to other welfare indicators, such as healthcare and social support, suggests that the economic situation is less likely to create tensions at the local level compared to the other Welfare indicators.

Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees, which evaluates the extent to which experts believe that their community treats the refugees positively, ranks sixth, with an average score of 7.3 out of 10. It is weakest in Basarabeasca (6.4) and strongest in Taraclia and Chişinău (both at 8). The difference between the best and worst performers in this indicator is 1.6 points, suggesting a relatively uniform situation across the target areas.⁹ Of different institutions, the least satisfactory assessments come from CSOs at 6.3,¹⁰ while experts from religious institutions report the most positive evaluations, scoring 8. Expert evaluations show that the target localities are mostly welcoming towards refugees. However, in some localities, such as Basarabeasca, Comrat, Ocnîţa and Căuşeni, concerns have been raised that the support provided to Ukrainians may lead to tensions with locals who also seek welfare benefits, adding pressure on social workers and local authorities. These findings largely correspond to the household survey results, which measure the attitudes to the war in Ukraine using three separate indicators – Individual dissatisfaction with arrival of Ukrainian refugees,¹¹ Positive feelings towards Ukrainian refugees in Moldova¹² and Support for policies about Ukrainian refugees.¹³ More specifically, it corroborates the finding that residents of Moldova give above-average support to policies supporting Ukrainian refugees but are only moderately favourable of them as a group.

Acceptance of other groups outside the community, which looks at how inclusive and welcoming the communities are towards individuals of diverse backgrounds, scores an average of 6.9 points out of 10. It is lowest in Comrat and Ocnîţa (both at 6.2) and highest in Taraclia (8.2), with a difference of two points. When looking at assessments across different institutions, representatives from CSOs show least confidence in how inclusive and welcoming their communities are, scoring just 5.2. In contrast, experts from educational and religious institutions express more optimism, with scores of 7.8. Although many experts view their communities as generally welcoming to outsiders, discussions reveal a more complex picture. Participants see their localities as predominantly homogenous and express concerns and misconceptions about certain outside groups, which they believe could impact the social fabric of their communities. This suggests that while there is an overall sense of acceptance, underlying apprehensions may hinder true inclusivity.

Absence of societal polarization, which evaluates the degree to which experts feel that there are no significant divisions on certain topics in their locality, has an average of 6.7 points out of 10. It is weakest in Chişinău (5.8) and strongest in Taraclia (7.6). The difference between the two stands at 1.6 points, indicating that there is a relatively similar situation across the localities. Among various institutions, the issue is most prominent for CSOs (5.4)¹⁴ and least pronounced for experts from educational institutions (7.5). Overall, expert discussions and evaluations suggest that the target areas are not highly polarized; diverse opinions coexist but some tensions remain on particularly polarizing topics.

⁹ The ten localities, where the ECoST was deployed, are also the localities that received the biggest number of refugees.

¹⁰ After 'other', which scores 6.

¹¹ The extent to which one feels dissatisfaction with the arrival of Ukrainian refugees to Moldova.

¹² The level of warmth and affection, as opposed to coldness and hostility, that one feels towards Ukrainian refugees in Moldova.

¹³ The level of support for the policies targeting Ukrainian refugees.

¹⁴ After 'other', which scores 5.

Institutional and civic dimension

Community mobilization potential, which evaluates the degree of preparedness in the face of emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the influx of Ukrainian refugees, ranks third among the indicators, reporting an average score of 7.7 out of 10. It is the weakest in Basarabeasca (6.6) and the strongest in Cahul and Ștefan Vodă (both at 8.4). The difference between the best and worst performers is moderate, at 1.8. Of different institutions, the CSOs provide the lowest assessments for the community mobilization capacity (6.8), while representatives from the private sector are most generous, scoring it at 8.5. Expert discussions demonstrated that the community response to the COVID-19 pandemic or the influx of Ukrainian refugees is largely viewed positively, with respondents highlighting the swift and efficient manner in helping those in need. Experts also mentioned that many people are willing to take part in activities serving common causes, but also added that most lack the time and opportunities to do so. Interestingly, a comparison with a similar indicator from the household survey – **Perceived ability of own group to mobilize resources**¹⁵ – reveals that the potential for collective action is generally stronger at the local level than among ethno-cultural groups, who assess this capacity as average.¹⁶

Overall assessment of the capacity of local government, which measures the degree to which experts feel that the capacity of public authorities in their locality is excellent across most sectors, has an average of 6.9 points out of 10. It is lowest in Basarabeasca (6) and highest in Taraclia (8), with a moderate difference of 2 points. Among different institutions, local government capacity is evaluated least positively by CSOs (5.4) and most positively by experts from public institutions (7.3). Expert assessments show that the capacity of local authorities is generally viewed as adequate. However, some important gaps still exist. In most cases, these challenges relate to human resources and budgetary limitations, especially in smaller localities like Ocnîța or Basarabeasca, where local administrations struggle to find the right professionals and cannot match desired pay of skilled professionals. These findings are largely in line with the results of the household survey, namely, that of the **Performance of local authorities**' indicator. More specifically, it corroborates the finding that Moldovans evaluate the work of the local authorities as above average.

Presence of an efficient associative sector, which assesses the extent to which experts believe that the civil society sector in their locality is dynamic and active, has an average of 6.9 points out of 10. It is weakest in Basarabeasca and Taraclia (both at 6.3) and strongest in Cahul (7.6). The gap between the best and worst performers is only 1.3 points. Of various institutions, experts from public institutions are least critical about the civil society sector (7.5), with religious institutions being most critical (5.2). Expert assessments indicate that the civil society sector is well established across the target localities. However, experts note that CSO activities do not always align with community needs. Some participants believe that the sector is monopolized by larger national or regional organizations, with many local organizations prioritizing donor requirements over the needs of their beneficiaries. Another challenge mentioned during discussions was the inadequate cooperation between CSOs and public authorities, including legal obstacles that hinder local administrations from effectively supporting CSOs.

Citizen participation in decision making, which measures the degree to which experts believe that citizens are represented in the decision-making in their locality, reports an average score of 6.6 points out of 10. It is weakest in Chișinău (5.9) and strongest in Comrat (7.5), with a difference of 1.6 points. When looking at assessments across various institutions, CSO representatives are least satisfied with the current state of affairs, scoring an average of 5.8, while the private sector is most satisfied, with a score of 6.8. The findings suggest that most groups do participate in policy deliberations within the target localities, but the views of some groups are not always fully considered when decisions are made. Expert discussions also revealed a divergent understanding of citizen participation. Experts from CSOs and public administration expressed

¹⁵ The degree to which one believes that their ethno-cultural group, as a collective, is able to mobilize tangible resources (e.g. money, political influence, arms, people) when needed.

¹⁶ The indicators are not fully comparable.

slightly different perspectives; the latter focused more on informing and consulting citizens, while the former emphasized the importance of meaningful and systemic participation in decision-making. Notably, however, both segments agreed on the importance of citizen participation.

National authorities' care, which assesses the degree to which experts consider national authorities responsive and effective in addressing the needs and concerns of their community, is the lowest-ranking indicator

(alongside environmental risks), averaging 5.6 out of 10. The indicator ranks lowest in Ocnița (4.2) and highest in Căușeni (6.7), showing a notable difference of 2.5 points. Among different institutions, religious institutions express greater concern about the work of national authorities (4.3), with experts from public administration being least critical (6.5). Overall, expert evaluations reveal limited satisfaction with the work of national authorities. While some respondents view national policies as effective in addressing community-specific challenges, others believe that the authorities are neglecting their needs. Findings of the household survey and expert assessment converge on this issue; with the former showing a below average score on the corresponding indicator.¹⁷

Welfare dimension

Quality and accessibility of schools, which measures the extent to which experts believe that schools in their locality are easily accessible and offer high-quality education, ranks fourth among the indicators, averaging 7.6 out of 10. It is weakest in Basarabeasca (5.3) and strongest Ștefan Vodă (8.6), with a notable gap of 3.3 points between the two localities. Of different institutions, the private sector is most critical about the quality and accessibility of schools (6.5), while experts from the public administration assess it most positively (8.3). Expert discussions highlighted two key issues: the availability of schools offering instruction in Romanian in predominantly Russian-speaking areas and the quality of Russian-language schools in localities where the Russian-speaking population forms a minority. Findings of the expert scoring align with the results of the household survey, which show that respondents are generally satisfied with the level of education their children receive at school.

Availability of economic opportunities, which examines the extent of perceived economic prospects in the target localities, scores an average of 6.7 points out of 10. It is lowest in Basarabeasca (4.7) and highest in Comrat (7.6), with a visible gap of 2.9 points. Among the institutions, economic opportunities are considered least available by religious institutions (5.5) and most available by the public sector (7.6). The private sector closely follows, with an average of 7.3. Expert assessments suggest that some economic disparities do indeed exist, but efforts are being made to address them through inclusive economic initiatives.

Access to community assets and resources, which evaluates the degree to which experts consider local assets and resources to be distributed fairly and equitably in their locality, has an average score of 6.6 out of 10. The issue is most problematic in Căușeni (5.6) and least problematic in Ștefan Vodă (7.4), showing a moderate difference of 1.8 points. Among different institutions, experts from educational institutions provide the highest evaluations for this indicator (7.5), while representatives from religious institutions are more critical (5.4).¹⁸ Expert discussions and their assessments show that local resources – such as infrastructure, parks, public spaces, land, water and natural resources – are generally distributed fairly, but some disparities exist and need to be addressed to ensure equal access for all community members.

Availability of social welfare support falls in the group of bottom-four indicators, averaging 6 out of 10. The weakest results are reported in Căușeni and Orhei (both at 5.4), while strongest results are demonstrated by Ștefan Vodă. The gap between the best and worst performers is only minimal – 1.4 points.

¹⁷ Indicators are not fully comparable.

¹⁸ After 'other', which scores 3.3.

When looking at assessments across different institutions, representatives from religious institutions appear most content (6.8), with CSOs providing the lowest scores (5.4).¹⁹ Expert assessments reveal that target localities enjoy basic level of social support, but challenges arise in various areas. Many participants have identified the Restart reform as particularly challenging to implement. Additionally, frequent legislative and policy changes – especially during the winter season – are believed to create impediments to providing the necessary social services. These fluctuations cause undue disruptions in service delivery, according to the experts.

Access to a good healthcare system, which evaluates the degree to which experts feel that there is equal availability of medical services in their locality, ranks one of the lowest, reporting an average of 5.9 out of 10. This indicates that localities experience limited access to healthcare, with the quality of medical services assessed as low or inconsistent. The indicator is weakest in Basarabeasca (4.7) and strongest in Chişinău and Donuşeni (each at 6.2), with a minimal difference of 1.3 points. Of different institutions, experts from public institutions provide the most positive assessments (6.1), while CSOs are most critical again (4.9). Findings of the expert scoring align with the results of the household survey, which show that respondents are generally not satisfied with the level of healthcare provision in the country.

Absence of environmental risks, which measures the extent to which experts believe that there is no real exposure to pollution and other risks in their locality, ranks lowest across the indicators, with an average of 5.6 out of 10. The problem is most pronounced in Chişinău (4.5) and least pronounced in Orhei (6.3). The difference between the best and worst performers is moderate, standing at 1.8 points. Among various institutions, CSOs perceive the problem most saliently, averaging at 3.7 out of 10. Conversely, representatives from educational institutions effectively downplay the problem, giving it an average of 7 out of 10. Expert evaluations reveal that the localities are exposed to various environmental risks. And while there is some policy response from the authorities, these interventions tend to be seen as moderately impactful. The challenges are consistent across the localities and include waste management, quality of sewage systems, water treatment and purification and management of industrial residues. These issues are seen as one of the biggest contributing factors to tensions among citizens, local authorities and the private sector.

¹⁹ After 'other', which scores 5.3.

FIGURE 15. Average scores for the ECoST indicators, ranked from highest to lowest (based on average for all localities) and disaggregated by locality. Grey is used for indicators under the Welfare dimension. Dark purple is used for indicators under the Institutional and Civic dimension. Light blue is used for indicators under the Intergroup Relations dimension. Color gradient is applied horizontally, by indicator values.

Indicator	Full sample (N=94)	Basarbeasca (N=7)	Cahul (N=10)	Causeni (N=9)	Chişinău (N=13)	Comrat (N=13)	Dondușeni (N=7)	Ocnita (N=9)	Orhei (N=7)	Ștefan Vodă (N=9)	Taraclia (N=10)
Confidence in locality's future	8.5	7.3	8.8	8	8.5	8.4	8.6	8.1	8.9	8.9	8.9
Positive intragroup relations	7.8	6.9	8.3	7.6	6.9	8.2	7.7	7.7	7.6	8.2	8.3
Quality and accessibility of schools	7.6	5.3	7.2	8.3	7.1	8.4	7.8	7.3	7.4	8.6	7.9
Community mobilization potential	7.7	6.6	8.4	7.5	8	7	8.1	7.8	7.6	8.4	7.5
Absence of social tensions	7.4	6.4	7.6	6.4	7.1	7.4	7.5	7.4	7.7	7.6	8.2
Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees	7.3	6.4	7.6	6.8	8	6.5	7	7.6	7.7	7.8	8
Overall assessment of capacity of local government	6.9	6	7.5	6.6	6.5	7.3	6.9	6.3	6.4	7.3	8
Presence of an efficient associative sector	6.9	6.3	7.6	7	7.1	7.1	6.9	6.4	6.4	7	6.3
Acceptance of other groups outside of the community	6.9	6.3	7.3	6.5	6.5	6.2	7.2	6.2	7.6	7.1	8.2
Absence of societal polarization	6.7	6	7	6.6	5.8	6.4	7	6.3	7.4	7.1	7.6
Citizen participation in decision making	6.6	6	6.4	6.5	5.9	7.5	6.6	6.6	6.7	6.7	6.7
Availability of economic opportunities	6.7	4.7	7.3	6.1	7.5	7.6	6.7	5.6	7	6.9	6.7
Access to community assets and resources	6.6	5.7	6.2	5.6	6.8	7	6.7	6.6	7	7.4	6.6
Availability of social welfare support	6	5.8	6	5.4	6.2	6.4	5.6	6.3	5.4	6.8	5.7
Access to good healthcare system	5.9	4.7	6.1	6.1	6.2	6	6.2	5.5	5.3	6.1	5.6
Absence of environmental risks	5.6	5	5.7	5.2	4.5	5.8	5.3	6.2	6.3	5.9	6
National authorities care	5.6	4.9	6.4	6.7	6.1	6	5.1	4.2	5.1	5.3	4.9

FIGURE 16. Average scores for the ECoST indicators, ranked from highest to lowest (based on average for all localities) and disaggregated by gender. Grey is used for indicators under the Welfare dimension. Dark purple is used for indicators under the Institutional and Civic dimension. Light blue is used for indicators under the Intergroup Relations dimension. Color gradient is applied horizontally, by indicator values.

Indicator	Full sample (N=94)	CSOs (N=26)	Education Institutions (N=4)	Public administration (all levels) (N=52)	Private sector (N=4)	Religious Institutions (N=5)	Other (N=3)
Confidence in locality's future	8.5	7.2	9	8.7	8.8	9	7.3
Positive intergroup relations	7.8	6.3	8.3	8.2	8	8.2	7.3
Community mobilization potential	7.7	6.8	7.8	8	8.5	8.2	7.7
Quality and accessibility of schools	7.6	6.6	7.8	8.3	6.5	7.1	6.7
Absence of social tensions	7.4	6.4	8.3	7.3	7	7.6	5.7
Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees	7.3	6.3	7.8	7.4	7.8	8.2	6
Overall assessment of capacity of local government	6.9	5.4	6.5	7.3	6.5	6.2	5.7
Presence of an efficient associative sector	6.9	6.8	6.3	7.5	5.3	5.2	5.7
Acceptance of other groups outside of the community	6.9	5.2	7.8	7.1	6.5	7.8	6
Absence of societal polarization	6.7	5.4	7.5	6.6	6.8	7	5
Availability of economic opportunities	6.7	5.7	6.8	7.6	7.3	5.5	6
Citizen participation in decision making	6.6	5.8	6.5	6.6	6.8	6.6	7.3
Access to community assets and resources	6.6	5.6	7.5	6.7	7	5.4	3.3
Availability of social welfare support	6	5.4	5.8	6.3	6.5	6.8	5.3
Access to good healthcare system	5.9	4.9	5.5	6.1	5.8	5.9	7
Absence of environmental risks	5.6	3.7	7	5.8	5	6.9	5
National authorities care	5.6	5.5	5.3	6.5	5.8	4.2	6

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Intergroup Relations dimension, which examines horizontal dynamics among community members, is the strongest of the three measured dimensions. Expert assessments indicate that intergroup relations are characterized by strong harmony and cooperation. Similarly, experts speak of a cross-cutting absence of social tensions, with political and geopolitical grievances – two major divisive factors reported in the household survey – rarely mentioned as sources of tensions. Most localities are welcoming to refugees and other outside groups; however, concerns have emerged in some localities that support to Ukrainian refugees may foster feelings of injustice among host communities. Similarly, while many experts view their communities as accepting of outsiders, discussions reveal a more complex reality, as participants appear to view their localities as predominantly homogenous. This suggests that while there is an overall sense of acceptance, underlying misconceptions could hinder true inclusivity. Additionally, when it comes to societal polarization, evaluations suggest that the target areas are not highly polarized and that there are only minor divisions on contentious topics. Overall, the expert assessment presents a very positive picture of intergroup dynamics; the target localities are free from serious societal chasms and divisions, exhibiting a general willingness to accept outsiders. This, combined with the near-universal confidence in the future of these localities, could provide a strong foundation for building more resilient and inclusive communities.

For this dimension, efforts should prioritize improving host community relations with refugees and fostering inter-group harmony, particularly in Basarabeasca, Comrat and Căușeni.

Findings about the Institutional and Civic dimension show that while the localities demonstrate relatively strong potential for collective action and adequate local government and civil society capacities, gaps remain in meaningful citizen participation, as well as in the responsiveness of national authorities. Experts believe that citizen participation is often limited to consultations rather than genuine involvement in decision-making, resulting in some local needs being overlooked. The problem is most frequently reported in Chișinău and Basarabeasca. The experts also consider that civil society organizations, while generally responsive, sometimes prioritize donor requirements over community needs, contributing to a disconnect between them and the citizens. Furthermore, the perceived lack of responsiveness and attention from national authorities fosters feelings of neglect, undermining community trust in governance as a whole. Overall, although these shortcomings are not particularly concerning, if not addressed effectively, they could weaken community cohesion in the target localities, ultimately leading to societal divisions and increased fragmentation among community members. To enhance the efficiency of local decision-making and citizen participation, further steps should build on the existing potential for community mobilization and leverage the strengths of civil society and local government actors. In doing so, they should prioritize cross-sectoral partnerships between local administrations, CSOs and community members. This could help bridge existing gaps, promoting the culture of collaboration, and strengthen community ties.

For this dimension, efforts should focus on meaningful and inclusive civic participation mechanisms in Basarabeasca and Chișinău and address the sense of neglect by the authorities in Ocnița and Taraclia.

The ECoST findings highlight several challenges in the **Welfare Dimension**, with disparities in economic opportunities, resource allocation, social welfare support, healthcare access and environmental risks. Notably, schools are generally reported to be available and of good quality, but concerns remain in some localities, such as Basarabeasca. Expert assessments also suggest moderate inequalities in economic opportunities and resource allocation, with Basarabeasca and Căușeni underperforming in both areas. Social support is also considered lacking, particularly in terms of aligning citizen needs and expectations with local govern-

ment capacities, a problem most pronounced in Căușeni and Orhei. Residents of the target localities face difficulties in accessing healthcare, with experts noting low or inconsistent quality of medical services. This issue is prevalent across all localities but is most salient in Basarabeasca and Orhei. Expert evaluations also indicate that the target localities are exposed to various environmental risks, including those related to waste management, sewage problems and concerns about water quality. Taken together, the highlighted shortcomings can create feelings of inequality, dissatisfaction and grievances among some residents, leading to a sense of marginalization, and decrease in community cohesion. Overall, these findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to address welfare needs in an inclusive way. These interventions should be holistic, encompassing all components of the dimension, but healthcare and social welfare provision should be prioritised, followed by environmental risks as an area of common concern. Importantly, these efforts should occur in conjunction with enhancing local government and civil society capacities, which could help with more effective service provision, equitable resource allocation and improved environmental management.

For this dimension, the efforts should focus on access to social welfare support services in Basarabeasca and Căușeni.

Glossary of indicators

Indicator	Definition
Absence of environmental risks	The degree to which one believes that there is a good environmental policy and no real exposure to pollution and other risks in their locality.
Absence of social tensions	The degree to which one believes that there are no social tensions in their locality and diverse social groups coexist together in harmony.
Absence of societal polarization	The degree to which one believes that there are no significant divides on polarizing topics in their locality.
Acceptance of other groups outside of the community	The degree to which one believes that their community is highly inclusive and welcoming towards individuals from diverse backgrounds.
Access to community assets and resources	The degree to which one believes that resources, such as infrastructure, parks, public spaces, land and water resources, natural resources, etc. are distributed fairly and equitably in their locality.
Access to a good healthcare system	The degree to which one believes that there is an equal opportunity for access to high-quality health services in their locality.
Availability of economic opportunities	The degree to which one believes that there is plenty of economic opportunities accessible to all residents in their locality.
Availability of social welfare support	The degree to which one believes that there is a good welfare system and a decent level of social support in their locality.
Citizen participation in decision making	The degree to which one believes that all social groups are represented in decision making processes at all levels and major decisions are thoroughly discussed through participatory mechanisms in their locality.
Community attitude towards Ukrainian refugees	The degree to which one believes that their community has a very positive attitude towards refugees and is welcoming for them.

Community mobilization potential

The degree to which one believes that the community response to emergencies such as COVID-19 pandemic or the influx of Ukrainian refugees was swift and efficient in their locality.

Confidence in locality's future

The degree to which one believes that the citizens are fully confident in the future of their locality.

Positive intergroup relations

The degree to which one believes that relations between different social groups in their locality are characterized by strong harmony, cooperation and mutual respect.

National authorities' care

The degree to which one believes that national authorities are highly responsive and effective in addressing the needs and concerns of their community.

Overall assessment of the capacity of local government

The degree to which one believes that the capacity of public authorities is excellent across most sectors in their locality.

Presence of an efficient associative sector

The degree to which one believes that there is a dynamic and active associative sector that contributes significantly to community development in their locality.

Quality and accessibility of schools

The degree to which one believes that schools are easily accessible and provide qualitative education in their locality.

About SeeD

The Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) works with international development organisations, governments and civil society leaders to design and implement evidence-based and people-centred strategies for the development of peaceful, inclusive and sustainable societies. Working globally, SeeD provides policy advice for social transformation that is based on citizen engagement strategies and empirical understanding of the behaviour of individuals, groups and communities.

About UNDP

UNDP is the leading United Nations agency fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality and climate change. Working with abroad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, it helps nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and the planet.

About STMM

The expert scoring on the community level, alongside the household survey and the digital media monitoring on the national level, constitutes the three components of the Social Tensions Monitoring Mechanism (STMM). Developed by SeeD, the STMM is a research tool designed to understand and monitor societal grievances and assess the potential for contentious behaviour at the individual, community, group and national levels.

The ECoST methodology builds on the household survey component of the STMM, conducted from December 2023 to January 2024 across Moldova (excluding the left bank of the Nistru River). On its part, the measurement metrics and indicators of the household survey were designed based on a contextually tailored conceptual and theoretical framework, informed by a comprehensive literature review and qualitative research.

While all three components of the STMM framework provide evidence to identify current or potential tensions and contentious behaviour, they do so at different levels. The household survey explores the perceptual aspects of social tensions, while the expert assessment investigates the more objective conditions of these tensions. The third component, the digital media monitoring, is currently under development as of the publication of this report.