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FROM INFORMATION TO TRUST:

Behavioural Insights for Strengthening Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience in the Republic of Moldova

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FROM INFORMATION TO TRUST:
BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS FOR STRENGTHENING SOCIAL COHESION AND DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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a. Problem Description

The democratic resilience of the Republic of Moldova increasingly depends on the interplay between the quality of the information environment, social cohesion, institutional trust, and citizens' capacity to cooperate under conditions of uncertainty and pressure. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the energy and economic crises, geopolitical competition, migration, reforms associated with the European integration process, and successive electoral cycles have heightened the relevance of these dimensions for national security. The central challenge currently facing the Republic of Moldova is shifting from access to information towards citizens' capacity to assess information, identify credible sources, place trust in institutions, and cooperate across political, linguistic, regional, and geopolitical divides. The 2025 parliamentary elections took place in an environment described by international observers as being marked by deep political polarisation, illegal funding, cyberattacks, and disinformation campaigns. In 2024, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) had already documented foreign interference and influence operations linked to the presidential election and the constitutional referendum[2].. These pressures are compounded by varying levels of institutional trust. The Sociological Study: Public Perceptions of Security[3] indicates higher levels of trust in community-level actors, local public authorities, and institutions directly serving citizens than in central political institutions. At the same time, the Republic of Moldova's information ecosystem is becoming increasingly digital and fragmented. Social media occupies a central position in news and information consumption, while citizens combine digital sources with television, interpersonal networks, and local sources. Within this landscape, information vulnerability is associated with exposure to manipulative content, difficulties in assessing the credibility of sources, audience fragmentation, and the uneven distribution of trust.

b. Overview

The contemporary concept of security encompasses both the State's capacity to respond to external threats and society's capacity to remain functional under pressure. From this perspective, trust, intergroup relations, institutional legitimacy and willingness to cooperate become important variables of resilience. The Council of Europe defines social cohesion as a society's capacity to ensure the well-being of its members, reduce disparities and marginalisation, and manage differences and divisions within a democratic framework[4]. Based on this definition, social cohesion can be understood

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[2] Moldova 2024 Presidential Election and Constitutional Referendum: ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report. https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/elections/moldova/588014; Moldova's Parliamentary Elections Were Competitive, but the Campaign Was Marred by Cyberattacks, Illegal Funding and Disinformation, International Observers Say. https://www.oscepa.org/en/news-a-media/press-releases/2025/moldovas-parliamentary-elections-were-competitive-but-campaign-marred-by-cyberattacks-illegal-funding-and-disinformation-international-observers-say.

[3] Sociological Study: Public Perceptions of Security. https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/CBS-Reasearch.pdf.

[4] Europe's Public Administrations in Flux: Public Service under Threat? https://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp

through two complementary dimensions. Horizontal cohesion describes relations among citizens, social groups and communities and encompasses interpersonal trust, solidarity and willingness to cooperate. Vertical cohesion reflects the relationship between citizens and public institutions and encompasses institutional legitimacy, perceptions of fairness, access to participation and the capacity of public authorities to respond to society's needs. These two dimensions are interdependent. Communities characterised by strong and functional interpersonal relationships are better able to mobilise in times of crisis, while institutions perceived as competent and fair have a stronger foundation for coordinating collective action. Social cohesion can therefore be understood as a form of resilience capital accumulated during periods of stability and mobilised in times of crisis.

The European Union's experience confirms this link between cohesion and resilience. The European Commission's 2025 Strategic Foresight Report, Resilience 2.0, addresses pressures on well-being and societal resilience, regional disparities, algorithmically amplified polarisation and disinformation as interconnected challenges. It identifies strengthening democracy, empowering communities and safeguarding democratic standards as key areas for action. In the Republic of Moldova, this approach could be adapted by incorporating indicators relating to trust, participation, intergroup relations and willingness to cooperate into security and resilience assessments, thereby linking security policies with regional development, education and community participation[5]. For the Republic of Moldova, this dimension is also relevant given its geopolitical position, regional diversity and European integration process. The state's capacity to implement reforms and respond to external pressures also depends on the extent to which citizens perceive institutions as legitimate, decisions as fair and political processes as inclusive. OECD research identifies reliability, responsiveness, integrity, openness and fairness as key drivers of public trust6. These drivers make it possible to move beyond simply measuring trust towards analysing the mechanisms through which it is generated. Trust is built through the interaction of communication, performance, participation and fairness. Institutional communication contributes to public understanding of decisions by explaining the rationale, objectives and criteria underpinning them. Institutional performance demonstrates the capacity of public authorities to translate decisions and commitments into tangible results and effective public services. Citizen participation creates opportunities for people to engage in decision-making by expressing their views, putting forward proposals and contributing to the identification of solutions. Fairness influences how public rules and decisions are perceived, particularly in terms of their consistent, impartial and equal application across different social groups. Together, these dimensions help strengthen institutional legitimacy and citizens' trust in governance. Differences in levels of trust between central institutions and local actors highlight the importance of institutional proximity. Local public authorities, teachers, healthcare professionals, local journalists and representatives of community organisations maintain direct and regular contact with citizens, giving them an important role in facilitating communication between institutions and communities. Through their proximity to the population and knowledge of the local context, these actors help communicate and explain information of public interest in an accessible manner adapted to community needs. Leveraging this local infrastructure strengthens risk communication, public preparedness for crises, the explanation of public policies and dialogue between citizens and institutions.

[5] 2025 Strategic Foresight Report. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/strategic-foresight/2025-strategic-foresight-report_en

[6] OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions 2026 Results: Navigating Rising Expectations and New Horizons. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2026/06/results-of-the-2025-oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions_96323a65/9eb63fec-en.pdf

The Republic of Moldova's information environment is characterised by linguistic diversity, regional differences and the simultaneous use of multiple sources of information. Social networks, television, digital platforms, local media and interpersonal networks form a hybrid information ecosystem. This environment shapes how citizens understand security, public policies, electoral processes and their relationship with institutions. Information fragmentation therefore has effects that extend beyond media consumption, affecting the common ground needed for democratic dialogue. This assessment is consistent with the EU's approach to societal resilience against information manipulation. The European Commission combines digital and media literacy, education, critical thinking and practical tools for recognising manipulation. Ahead of the 2024 European elections, a joint campaign by the Commission and the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services was conducted across all 27 Member States and in all 24 official EU languages. For the Republic of Moldova, the transferable element is the principle of linguistic adaptation combined with the simultaneous use of digital, media and educational channels. In practice, materials in Romanian and Russian, complemented by Gagauz where justified by the local context, could be disseminated through schools, libraries, local media, local public authorities and community organisations.
In this context, three main mechanisms can be identified through which the information environment influences perceptions, trust and social relations. The first is the fragmentation of perceptions of reality, whereby the same events are interpreted through different information frames, leading to divergent understandings of societal issues and developments. The second mechanism involves activating andreinforcing existing cleavages through political or geopolitical messages that exploit cultural, linguistic, identity-based or regional differences and turn them into sources of division between groups. The third mechanism is the transfer of distrust between information sources and public institutions: declining trust in a media source affects perceptions of the institutions associated with the information it disseminates, while low levels of institutional trust reduce receptiveness to official communication. Disinformation therefore extends beyond the strictly informational sphere and affects relations among citizens, social groups and institutions. Its effects are reflected in how institutions and public decisions are assessed, in the quality of relations among different groups in society, and in citizens' willingness to cooperate, participate in public processes and support collective action.

Behavioural insights provide an analytical framework for understanding how citizens receive, interpret and use information when forming opinions and making decisions. Processes such as selective attention, information overload, emotional responses, identity affiliation, the influence of social norms and the level of credibility attributed to a source shape both how messages are understood and the reactions and behaviours they generate. Integrating behavioural insights into public communication makes it possible to design interventions based on an analysis of audiences' actual behaviour, test different types of messages and systematically assess their effects. Public communication thus becomes an evidence-based process grounded in testing and results measurement, allowing messages to be adjusted in response to the reactions of different audience groups.

[7] Misinformation and Disinformation: An International Effort Using Behavioural Science to Tackle the Spread of Misinformation. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/an-international-effort-using-behavioural-science-to-tackle-the-spread-of-misinformation_b7709d4f-en.html
[8] Video Inoculation against Election Misinformation across 12 EU Nations. https://www.nature.com/articles/s44271-025-00379-3
[9] IREX, Annual Report: Data for Impact & Applied Learning. https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/component/hompage_-flex/files/irex-annual-report-2018-data-impact-applied-learning.pdf

Experimental evidence shows that relatively simple behavioural interventions can help reduce vulnerability to disinformation. An OECD experiment involving a sample of 1,872 people found that short media-literacy prompts reduced participants' intention to share false news by approximately 21%[7]. The intervention sought to direct users' attention to the accuracy of information immediately before they decided whether to share it. In the context of the Republic of Moldova, this mechanism could be applied by introducing simple verification prompts: Who is the source of the information? When was it published? What evidence is provided? Is the information corroborated by other independent sources? Another relevant approach is information inoculation, or prebunking, which seeks to develop people's ability to recognise manipulation techniques before they encounter specific narratives. Unlike interventions that respond to false information after it has already been disseminated, this approach familiarises the public with techniques such as emotional appeals, false dilemmas, the discrediting of sources, polarisation and the use of misleading contexts. The results of 13 experiments conducted in 12 EU Member States, involving 19,735 participants, indicate an improved ability to identify manipulation techniques[8]. For the Republic of Moldova, the relevance of this approach lies in its potential to strengthen general information-resilience skills that can be applied regardless of the topic or narrative involved. The focus therefore shifts from countering each individual false claim to developing citizens' capacity to recognise the mechanisms through which information is manipulated. At the same time, prebunking tools can be adapted to the linguistic, regional and information-related characteristics of different communities. The experience of IREX's Learn to Discern programme provides a relevant regional example of the sustainability of such interventions. Assessments conducted 18 months after the training showed that participants were 13% more likely to identify false information and 25% more likely to consult multiple sources of information. These findings demonstrate the importance of moving beyond one-off information activities towards developing skills that influence information-related behaviour over the longer term[9].

Information resilience requires an integrated approach connecting the individual, community and institutional levels. At the individual level, it relies on citizens' capacity to assess the credibility of sources, verify information and recognise manipulation techniques. At the community level, an important role is played by trusted local actors and the networks through which information circulates and is validated within communities. At the institutional level, resilience is supported by the capacity of public authorities to communicate rapidly, coherently and transparently, explain decisions and respond to citizens' concerns. Interaction among these three levels strengthens society's capacity to manage information risks and maintain trust and cooperation during periods of uncertainty and crisis.

c. Current Situation

In recent years, the Republic of Moldova has developed initiatives and mechanisms aimed at strengthening information resilience, public communication, social cohesion and community participation. Nevertheless, the analysis highlights the need for more systematic links between security policies, institutional communication, social cohesion, information behaviour and community-level interventions.

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[10] EU Actions to Protect Democracy.
https://commission.europa.eu/topics/democracy/eu-actions-protect-democracy_en;
European Centre for Democratic Resilience. https://commission.europa.eu/european-centre-democratic-resilience_en

[11] Study on the Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of the Population in the Districts of Comrat, Ceadîr-Lunga, Vulcănești and Taraclia Regarding Sources of Information,
Gender Equality and the Role of Women in Public Life. Available at:
https://ivcmoldova.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/stu-diu_RO_20.03.pdf

An additional reference point is provided by the European Democracy Shield, presented by the European Commission in 2025, which structures the protection of democracy around safeguarding the integrity of the information space, strengthening democratic institutions and independent media, and enhancing societal resilience and citizen engagement. The European Centre for Democratic Resilience strengthens this architecture by facilitating cooperation among EU institutions, Member States, candidate countries, civil society and academia10. The European Commission describes the Centre as a framework for exchange, operational cooperation and coordination that also involves EU candidate countries and independent stakeholders. The existence of trusted local infrastructure is another important element. Local public authorities, teachers, healthcare professionals, local journalists and community organisations are in direct contact with citizens. Their proximity to communities and knowledge of the local context enable them to explain information of public interest, facilitate risk communication and connect central institutions with local communities.

SOUTHERN MOLDOVA: VULNERABILITIES AND SOURCES OF RESILIENCE

The Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, Taraclia and Cahul represent a particularly relevant area for analysing the relationship between diversity, identity, trust, information behaviour and resilience. Linguistic and cultural diversity, specific patterns of information consumption, and relations among central, regional and local authorities create a distinct context. At the same time, the region possesses significant social capital built through family ties, neighbourhood relations, traditions, cultural events and community activities. These resources make it possible to distinguish three forms of cohesion. Cultural and community cohesion is built through traditions, festivals, local identity and social interaction. Functional cohesion reflects the capacity of local actors to cooperate in addressing concrete issues, such as community safety, crisis preparedness, the protection of vulnerable people and local development. Information cohesion entails the availability of credible sources, access to verified information and the capacity to assess information and messages critically.

In the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia and Taraclia, close interpersonal ties are an important resource for social cohesion and community resilience. Research points to strong solidarity within close personal networks: more than 80% of respondents state that they rely on family members, friends and neighbours in times of crisis. At the same time, only 38% believe that people in their community genuinely care about one another11. This difference indicates that trust and support are concentrated within close personal relationships, while cooperation across the wider community remains more limited.The same pattern of trust is also reflected in information behaviour. Accordingly, 56% of respondents identify family and friends among their sources of information, while 42% obtain information primarily through social media.At the same time, 83% consider disinformation to be a problem for the Republic of Moldova, 46% report difficulties in distinguishing true information from false information, and nearly 60% take no action when they encounter information, they consider suspicious[12]. The data highlight the link between relationships of trust and the ways in which information circulates and is assessed at the local level.

[12] Ibidem.

[13] Gagauzia Dialogue. https://gagauziadialogue.md/

[14] Lingobarometer Moldova: Representative Opinion Poll for Target Regions, 2024. https://www.edu.gov.md/sites/default/files/lingobarometru_moldova_2024_en.pdf

[15] With the Assistance of the European Union, over 150,000 People from the ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia District Have Improved Their Living Conditions. https://www.undp.org/moldova/press-releases/assistance-europe-an-union-over-150000-people-atu-gagauzia-and-taraclia-district-have-improved-their-living-conditions

Family members, friends and close personal networks simultaneously provide support and act as information intermediaries. Under these circumstances, strengthening resilience requires extending existing trust-based social capital beyond immediate personal networks and connecting it with community actors and credible sources of information. In this context, local public authorities, teachers, local journalists and civil society organisations have an important role in developing local communication and cooperation networks. Involving these actors in risk communication, media literacy, the explanation of public decisions and crisis preparedness helps transform solidarity within close personal networks into a broader resource for community and information resilience. At the same time, relations between Chișinău and Comrat represent an important dimension of vertical cohesion. The quality of dialogue between central and regional authorities affects the functioning of governance mechanisms, institutional cooperation and the relationship between citizens and State institutions. The experience of the Parliamentary Working Group on Gagauzia illustrates the importance of a permanent cooperation mechanism between Chișinău and Comrat, based on institutional dialogue and the identification of shared solutions[13]. Strengthening this relationship requires continuity of dialogue, the presence of central institutions in the region, consultation with local stakeholders and the adaptation of public communication to the linguistic characteristics of local communities. Data from the 2024 Lingobarometer Moldova confirm the importance of this dimension: when interacting with local public authorities, Russian is used by 81% of respondents in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia and by 68% of those in Taraclia, while 29% of respondents in Gagauzia also use the Gagauz language[14].

In this context, multilingual communication is a means of making public information more accessible and bringing institutions closer to local communities. The Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia and Taraclia also have experience in developing community-level cooperation. Under the SARD Programme, 44 localities in the region and neighbouring areas were mobilised into eight Local Action Groups, bringing together public authorities, civil society and the private sector. Through the LEADER approach, 105 local projects were implemented, while development priorities in 40 communities were established through public consultation[15]. This experience demonstrates the existence of local participation and cooperation infrastructure that can also be used to strengthen resilience. Recent social cohesion initiatives confirm the importance of dialogue and community activities. The UNDP-UNFPA programme on strengthening social cohesion includes Comrat and Taraclia among the communities in which dialogue platforms, participation mechanisms and local initiatives aimed at building trust and cooperation are being developed[16]. At the national level, ten civil society organisations implemented community initiatives involving more than 1,400 participants and resulting in, among other things, intergenerational dialogue platforms, cultural activities, volunteer networks and local participation mechanisms[17].

A relevant experience for the south of the country is the Regional Hackathon for Social Cohesion and Information Resilience, held in Cahul from 6 to 8 August 2026. The event brought together 30 participants from Cahul, Cantemir, Taraclia, Comrat, Ceadîr-Lunga and Vulcănești, who worked in teams to address challenges facing their communities and developed six concepts for digital solutions.

[16] Enhancing Social Cohesion in Moldova through Dialogue and Community Empowerment. https://mptf.undp.org/sites/default/files/documents/2025-04/00140823_social_cohesion_unfpa_undp_annual_report_2024_moldova_2030_fund_phase_ii.pdf

[17] Enhancing Social Cohesion in Moldova through Dialogue and Community Empowerment (Phase 1), Republic of Moldova, 2024–2026. https://www.undp.org/moldova/projects/closed-enhancing-social-cohesion-moldova-through-dialogue-and-community-empowerment-phase-1

The initiatives addressed, among other matters, countering disinformation, civic participation and strengthening links among communities in southern Moldova[18]. The hackathon experience demonstrates the value of participatory formats that bring together people from communities with different linguistic and social profiles to address common challenges. Such mechanisms connect social cohesion with information resilience and transform community dialogue into a process focused on cooperation and the development of practical solutions. This community infrastructure provides a foundation for connecting social cohesion with community and information resilience. Integrating media literacy, crisis preparedness, first-aid training, familiarisation with official information sources, and dialogue on risks and community safety into local activities extends cooperation beyond its cultural and social dimensions towards strengthening communities' capacity to respond to uncertainty and crises in a coordinated manner. Southern Moldova provides a relevant setting for piloting behavioural insights interventions aimed at strengthening social cohesion and information resilience. Cahul, Comrat, Taraclia, Ceadîr-Lunga and Vulcănești encompass different social, linguistic and information environments, allowing interventions to be developed and assessed in accordance with the specific characteristics of individual communities.

The EU's experience suggests that pilot initiatives in southern Moldova should combine the information dimension with local participation and community cooperation. The European Democracy Shield places media literacy for people of all ages, civic education and citizen participation, including at the local level, within the same societal resilience framework. For Cahul, Taraclia and the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, adaptation entails using existing community infrastructure for activities that bring together media literacy, crisis preparedness, intercommunity dialogue and feedback mechanisms for institutions. European experience would therefore be transferred by adapting it to the region's linguistic, social and institutional profile, rather than by mechanically replicating EU instruments[19].

The pilot model could be structured around four interconnected levels. At the individual level, interventions would seek to develop people's capacity to verify information, assess sources and recognise manipulation techniques. At the relational level, emphasis would be placed on identifying and involving trusted community actors, including teachers, local journalists and representatives of public authorities and civil society organisations. At the community level, local dialogue labs would bring citizens and institutions together around issues such as media literacy, crisis preparedness and community safety. At the institutional level, interventions would seek to improve public communication, consultation and feedback mechanisms. Connecting these four levels would make southern Moldova a relevant setting for developing an integrated model of social cohesion and information resilience. The experience gained in the region would provide a basis for adapting and scaling up effective interventions at the national level.

[18] Six Teams, Six Digital Solutions and a Region Connected through Ideas: Results of the First Regional Hackathon Organised by the ECOU Association. https://www.ecou.md/blog/sase-echipe-sase-solutii-digitale-si-o-regiune-conectata-prin-idei-rezultatele-primului-hackathon-regional-organizat-de-asociatia-ecou

[19] Democracy and Electoral Rights. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/democracy-eu-citizenship-anti-corruption/democracy-and-electoral-rights_en

To translate this model into practical policy, interventions could be organised as a common portfolio in which information-related measures relate to community and institutional mechanisms. The first component would be multilingual information inoculation through short materials explaining manipulation techniques such as decontextualisation, discrediting, fear induction and blame attribution. The second component would involve introducing accuracy prompts that direct attention to the source, date, supporting evidence, and independent corroboration before content is shared. The third component would consist of explanatory fact-checking, combining factual verification with an explanation of the relevant context and manipulation technique. These tools become more effective when connected with local trust labs in which local public authorities, schools, libraries, media outlets, civil society organisations and citizens work together on concrete issues related to community security, crisis preparedness and information resilience[20].

At the institutional level, this portfolio could be complemented by a public communication standard focused on procedural transparency. When addressing sensitive issues or crises, communication should systematically clarify what information has been confirmed, the data on which the institution's assessment is based, which elements remain under review, which developments are relevant to citizens, and how feedback can be submitted. Such a structure connects communication with the drivers of public trust – reliability, responsiveness, integrity, openness and fairness – and shifts the focus from the volume of information provided to the quality of the relationship between institutions and citizens[21].

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From 2027 onwards, implementation could be supported by an interinstitutional capacity in the form of a Behavioural Insights and Democratic Resilience Lab, bringing together public institutions, researchers, civil society and independent experts to conduct audience analysis, message testing, A/B experiments and impact assessments. The purpose of such a mechanism would be to transform communication and resilience interventions into a process of testing, learning and adjustment based on observed behaviour. In parallel, a National Barometer of Social Cohesion, Trust and Information Resilience could integrate indicators relating to interpersonal and institutional trust, sense of belonging, intergroup relations, civic participation, information-verification behaviour and crisis preparedness. The UNDP/SeeD mechanism for monitoring social tensions already provides a relevant methodological basis for developing such an integrated measurement framework[22].

[20] Misinformation and Disinformation. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/an-international-effort-using-behavioural-science-to-tackle-the-spread-of-misinformation_b7709d4f-en.html

[21] OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions 2026 Results: Navigating Rising Expectations and New Horizons. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2026/06/results-of-the-2025-oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions_96323a65/9eb63fec-en.pdf

[22] Understanding Social Tensions in Moldova: An Expert Assessment of Community Dynamics – Wave II. https://www.undp.org/moldova/publications/understanding-social-tensions-moldova-expert-assessment-community-dynamics-wave-ii

From an evaluation perspective, success indicators should capture behavioural and relational change: the capacity to recognise manipulation techniques, the practice of checking a second source, the use of feedback and reporting channels, repeated participation in community mechanisms, willingness to cooperate across groups, and changes in levels of trust in institutions that demonstrate transparency and effective performance. This approach makes it possible to distinguish between the visibility of a campaign and its actual impact on resilience. It would also provide a basis for scaling up, during 2028-2029, interventions that demonstrate results in communities with different linguistic, generational and territorial profiles.

CONCLUSIONS:

The analysis highlights the direct relationship between social cohesion, institutional trust, information resilience and the capacity for cooperation. Fragmentation of the information environment and differences in levels of trust affect relations between citizens and institutions, as well as interactions among groups and communities. If these vulnerabilities persist, they increase the risk of polarisation, reduce receptiveness to institutional communication and limit the capacity for collective mobilisation in times of crisis. In the context of hybrid threats and the European integration process, these effects are directly relevant to national security and democratic resilience.

Local actors constitute an important resource. Local public authorities, teachers, media outlets and civil society organisations form a proximity-based infrastructure that can facilitate public communication, community dialogue, information literacy and public preparedness for crises.

Southern Moldova highlights both existing vulnerabilities and available resources. The Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, Taraclia and Cahul possess community capital, experience of cooperation and local participation mechanisms that provide a basis for progressing from cultural and community cohesion towards functional and information cohesion.

Strengthening resilience therefore requires a cross-sectoral approach connecting security, strategic and public communication, education, research, regional development and community participation. Accurate and transparent information remains essential, but its effectiveness depends on institutional credibility, the adaptation of messages to audience profiles, the availability of feedback mechanisms and the involvement of actors trusted by local communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

At the level of the Government and the State Chancellery, social cohesion, trust and information resilience should be integrated into the national security and resilience architecture. Establishing a National Barometer of Social Cohesion, Trust and Information Resilience would create a common basis for identifying vulnerabilities and regional, generational and linguistic differences. Integrating behavioural insights into the design and evaluation of public policies would connect institutional communication with audiences' actual behaviour. In addition, an interinstitutional capacity in the form of a Behavioural Insights and Democratic Resilience Lab would enable interventions to be tested, assessed and adjusted before being scaled up nationally.

In the security and public order sector, resilience assessments should be expanded to include indicators relating to trust, cohesion and information behaviour. Risk and crisis communication should be adapted to the profiles of individual communities and connected with local networks of trust. Sustained cooperation with local public authorities, civil society, the media and community leaders strengthens the capacity of institutions to communicate and act during periods of uncertainty.

At the parliamentary level, social cohesion and information resilience should be incorporated into mechanisms for monitoring security policies. Regular hearings on trust, polarisation, participation and information-related vulnerabilities would introduce the societal dimension into resilience assessments and connect the national security agenda with developments in the regions.

At the local and regional levels, emphasis should be placed on transforming existing social capital into cooperation and response capacity. Community dialogue, feedback mechanisms, information literacy and crisis preparedness create a link between social cohesion and community security. Cahul, Taraclia and the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia provide a relevant setting for developing pilot models that bring together communities with different social, linguistic and information profiles.

In relations between Chișinău and Comrat, sustained institutional dialogue and multilingual public communication are components of vertical cohesion. Incorporating community security, crisis preparedness and information resilience into local activities extends cooperation beyond the cultural dimension and creates opportunities for joint action around shared interests.

Civil society and the media are components of the social infrastructure for resilience. Civil society organisations facilitate dialogue and connect groups and communities with institutions, while local and regional media provide access to credible and explanatory information adapted to the linguistic context. Integrating these actors into communication and crisis preparedness mechanisms strengthens relations between institutions and communities.

Academia and educational institutions provide a foundation for developing applied research on trust, cohesion and information behaviour. Cooperation among researchers, public institutions and communities supports the development of behavioural insights tools and ensures that interventions are evidence-based.

International and development partners have an important role in supporting the transition from stand-alone projects to coordinated, multiannual interventions. Priority should be given to programmes that connect social cohesion, information resilience and community security, support cooperation among regions and develop sustainable local capacities. Drawing on EU experience, external support can facilitate the Republic of Moldova's participation in European exchanges of expertise on democratic resilience, foster the development of multilingual media literacy and strengthen the evaluation of interventions, including through mechanisms accessible to candidate countries.