

U4 HELPDESK ANSWER 2025:9

Corruption, gender and groups at risk of discrimination in Moldova

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The intersection of discrimination and corruption in Moldova is relatively understudied. However, some case studies and evidence suggests that groups at risk of discrimination are affected disproportionately by corruption, particularly when accessing healthcare and other public services in the country.

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Related U4 reading

[Moldova: Overview of corruption \(2022\)](#)

[Corruption and gender equality \(2021\)](#)

Query

What are the gender dimensions of corruption in Moldova? How are other groups at risk of discrimination also affected by corruption?

Main points

- Moldova ranks highly globally in terms of gender equality (World Economic Forum 2024). However, corruption remains an issue in the country, with relatively little research and national statistics on the gender dimensions of corruption in the country.
- Some evidence suggests that bribery in the health and education sector is an issue for women and girls, as well as a few case studies indicating that sexual corruption may also be a problem.
- Research into the impact of corruption on other groups at risk of discrimination in Moldova is also limited, but some studies have focused on and indicate that refugees are affected by bribery and that people living with disabilities are affected by corruption in the health sector.
- While separately there is attention paid to each issue of gender, corruption and other groups at risk of discrimination, there is still progress needed in harmonising each of them and acknowledging the interrelated and mutually reinforcing nature of the issues in Moldova.
- The literature recommends that the country develop gender-sensitive corruption reporting mechanisms and collect more gender-disaggregated data to bridge the gap between its anti-discrimination and anti-corruption frameworks.

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Background

Corruption, the abuse of entrusted power for private gain (Transparency International n.d.), results in reduced economic growth, distorted public spending, the deterioration of public services and an increase in inequality. While the effects of corruption can be felt at all levels of society, evidence (UNDP 2015; Unver and Koyuncu 2016; Wafa 2022) finds that corruption affects the vulnerable and those living in poverty the most.

An emerging body of research looks at how groups at risk of discrimination¹ are particularly vulnerable to both the direct and indirect effects² of corruption. There are many structural inequalities in societies that can increase the exposure and risk of these groups to corruption (Barnes 2024:128). Income inequality, for example, may increase the need for certain groups to rely on corrupt systems for basic services (Russell-Prywata 2017). Social constructions of gender, which determine the distribution of power and opportunities, can also result in greater vulnerability to corruption for women and girls (U4 n.d.; UNODC n.d.). Corruption may also be deliberately targeted towards those who are considered more vulnerable. Discriminatory corruption targets specific groups in a direct manner and is used by corrupt actors to exclude some groups from benefits that are given to others (Barnes 2024:128).

A typology of the five distinct ways that corruption and discrimination overlap and are mutually reinforcing has been proposed by Transparency International and Equal Rights Trust (Barnes 2024:124):

- discrimination can result in greater exposure to corruption
- certain acts of corruption are directly discriminatory
- the impacts of corruption are felt disproportionately by groups exposed to discrimination

¹ International law requires states to provide protection from discrimination on a range of characteristics including age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity or gender expression, health status, political opinion, religion or belief, race, sex and sexual orientation (McDonald, Jenkins and Fitzgerald 2021:11).

² The UNODC (n.d.) explains the difference between direct and indirect corruption and its impacts on women and girls. Direct corruption may include women finding themselves in a context where they are disempowered relative to men, and are direct victims of corruption, such as being pressured to pay bribes and have less power and authority to resist that pressure. Indirect corruption means that the impacts of corruption (such as undermining economic development or perpetuating poverty) may worsen existing inequalities which already affect women and girls the most. For more information, see [Gendered Impacts of Corruption](#) (UNODC n.d.).

- both discrimination and corruption result in the denial of justice
- corruption impedes the effectiveness of measures designed to advance equality

Gathering data on this emerging field of research on the intersection of discrimination and corruption is essential for both understanding the issue and developing evidence-based solutions. The significance of country-level data, particularly when disaggregated to reflect the participation of groups facing discrimination across various aspects of life, has been recognised by UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies³ (McDonald, Jenkins and Fitzgerald 2021:83). Similarly, Transparency International has called for concerted efforts by states to collect and analyse disaggregated data to monitor and address the impact of corruption on disadvantaged groups. As such, this Helpdesk Answer examines the available national-level data and uses the five typologies on corruption and discrimination to analyse to what extent corruption affects different groups at risk of discrimination (with a particular focus on gender) in the Republic of Moldova based on the available data.

Moldova is a signatory and has ratified the main international human rights treaties and conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN Treaty Body Database n.d.). It has made significant progress in recent years to address gender inequality, currently ranking highly at 13 out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum 2024). Moldova is also a signatory to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). However, while these exemplify Moldova's commitment to human rights and anti-corruption issues separately, there remains a notable gap in the incorporation of human rights and gender perspectives into national anti-corruption measures and research in the country (OSCE 2023). Moreover, there is a lack of research and data on these intersections in Moldova, with the majority of the available evidence focusing on these issues separately.

This paper will focus on the available literature and data on the impact of corruption on groups at risk of discrimination in Moldova. Country-level data is important to understand gendered and discriminatory corruption, but this is an emerging field, and many countries have not yet applied this approach. This study explores the gendered and discriminatory dimension of corruption in Moldova but acknowledges that data on this has not been collected in a systematic way. Nonetheless, this

³ Some of the examples listed by the authors include: Human Rights Committee. 2019. [Concluding Observations on Belgium](#). (CCPR/C/BEL/CO/6), para 16. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2016. [Concluding Observations on France](#). (E/C.12/FRA/CO/4), paras 16 and 17. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. 2020. [Concluding Observations on Bulgaria](#). (CEDAW/C/BGR/CO/8), para 46.

analysis at a country level is useful to identify gaps in current policy and potential areas to counter both corruption and inequality.

Moldova and corruption

Moldova became an independent parliamentary republic following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (World Bank 2024). The autonomous region Transnistria keeps strong ties to contemporary Russia, as illustrated by the setup of polling stations in the region for the Russian presidential election in 2024 (Place 2024). Despite economic growth in Moldova in recent years, it remains one of the poorest countries in Eastern Europe with a current poverty rate of 31% (WFP n.d.). It has also welcomed the highest rate of Ukrainian refugees per capita globally since 2022 (WFP n.d.).

Moldova's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) score has increased over recent years, from a low of 30 out of 100 in 2016 to 43 in 2023, indicating an improvement in political corruption (Transparency International 2024). However, its score remains to have one of the lowest in Europe. Despite having legal and institutional anti-corruption frameworks in place, Moldova continues to suffer from significant corruption which stifles its economic growth (Markevych and Marinkov 2024:5).

There continues to be a perception of impunity of corrupt officials in the country and, despite ongoing justice sector reforms, many corruption cases remain unresolved, and sanctioning in corruption cases often appears lenient (Markevych and Marinkov 2024:13-14). Investigations are often focused on petty bribery, whereas experts suggest these should focus more on high-level corruption in the country (Markevych and Marinkov 2024:13). Judicial independence is a particular problem, which predominately stems from corruption and selective justice where the law is selectively enforced for politically motivated reasons (USDOS 2023).

The relationship between economic hardship and corruption in Moldova is complex. Research into Moldovan elections finds that economic hardship drives a societal tolerance of corruption (Varzari 2024). There is largely the perception in the country that corruption is an unavoidable aspect of political life, and citizens refrain from reporting corruption as it is seen as a way of life (Varzari 2024). An experimental study found Moldovan respondents were less willing to punish corruption when material benefits are at stake, particularly in a society where immediate survival needs often outweigh 'abstract concepts such as good governance' (Varzari 2024).

Finally, in the context of low wages and high unemployment there is a reliance on patronage networks (Varzari 2024). Between 40% to 50% of respondents to the 2017 Global Corruption Barometer reported paying a bribe in the last 12 months when coming into contact with a public service (Pring 2017:8).

The impact of corruption on groups at risk of discrimination in Moldova

This section provides an insight into the available evidence and data on the impact of corruption on several groups at risk of discrimination in Moldova, where there is available evidence. These include women and girls, ethnic minorities, refugees, rural communities, LGBT+ people and people with disabilities. It does so through looking at the different ways in which corruption and discrimination overlap and are mutually reinforcing to illustrate this complex relationship in Moldovan society.

However, it should be noted that the available literature on the topic in Moldova is not extensive. This literature review relies primarily on individual studies and case studies, rather than national-level data. Therefore, the following sections should be taken as illustrative rather than providing a holistic picture of discrimination and corruption in Moldova. Further primary research and analysis into the topic is necessary to produce more robust findings.

Women and girls

Women and girls are often dependent on public services such as healthcare and education, making them more vulnerable to certain types of bribery at the point of service delivery (Transparency International n.d.). In most contexts, women bear most of the childcare responsibilities, meaning that they interact with healthcare and schools for their children (Gender Equality Index 2021). Women are also more likely to be living in poverty, with currently one in every ten women living in extreme poverty, meaning that they may rely more on public services from the government (UN Women n.d.). Others (UNDP 2008:24) have referred to ‘survival corruption’, where individuals faced with poverty and shortages will do whatever is needed to support them and their families. Therefore, at the point of public service delivery, if demands for bribes and other forms of corruption is widespread in sectors such as education or healthcare, women may be at a greater risk of exposure. For those living in poverty, bribes will represent a higher share of their income and resources, driving them further into poverty.

This is reflected in some of the research conducted in Moldova. For example, Cheeseman and Peiffer (2024) analysed data collected through surveys and focus groups in Moldova to assess the public opinion on corruption. They find that women

in Moldova are more likely to report that corruption is particularly acute in healthcare and education sectors (NDI 2023 cited in Cheeseman and Peiffer 2024). Of those surveyed, women were more likely than men to give examples of corruption associated with receiving medical services (NDI 2023 cited in Cheeseman and Peiffer 2024). Women were also more likely than men (24% compared to 14.8% of men) to accept corruption as a means to obtain better services. Finally, they were also less likely than men to report the corruption they experienced (NDI 2023 cited in Cheeseman and Peiffer 2024:21). However, the authors do not suggest the reasons why Moldovan women are less likely than men to report corruption.

Another study found that 41% of parents in Moldova surveyed reported that they would pay a bribe to prevent their children from being exposed to risks in the education sector or gain benefits such as being admitted to a particular kindergarten or school (IPN Press Agency 2022). Consequently, those without the financial resources may not access services for their children, potentially perpetuating cycles of poverty. Recently, campaigners in Moldova are attempting to discourage parents from giving their children informal gifts to pass on to teachers (IPN Press Agency 2022). Reports from other studies and the media highlight corruption in Moldova's education sector, potentially hindering efforts to promote equality through education.

Projects have been implemented in Moldova to address corruption and unethical conduct during school examinations. They aimed to address widespread corruption in the education system, in part due to the prevalence of corrupt practices being the incentive system that rewards students, teachers and school administrators for upholding extortion and embezzlement (Partnership for Transparency Fund 2018). Teachers are generally underpaid in the country, which can lead to extortion, and students know that money will buy better grades (Partnership for Transparency Fund 2018). Administrators regularly need to ask parents for 'school maintenance subsidies' to cover insufficient budgets allocated to schools (Partnership for Transparency Fund 2018). While this research does not disaggregate by gender, it does indicate that women may be paying bribes to further their child's education, although this area could be further explored.

Another form of corruption that affects women and girls is sexual corruption. Sexual corruption (or sextortion) occurs when those entrusted with power use it to sexually exploit those dependent on that power (Bergin 2024:43). While sexual corruption can affect anyone, it disproportionately impacts women and other groups at risk of discrimination (Feigenblatt 2020:2). For example, undocumented women migrants and refugees may be coerced by officials into paying a monetary and sexual bribe in exchange for food or shelter, or students may be denied a good mark if they fail to comply with their teacher's sexual demands (Feigenblatt 2020:2). A culture of silence in many contexts further harms those that experience sexual corruption as, in many

cultures, those who demand sexual favours are a perceived authority and, in some cases, violence against women is often publicly tolerated (Stahl 2021:11).

Although national-level data on sexual corruption in Moldova has not been collected, this does not mean it is not an issue. The evidence that shows that women in Moldova were less likely than men to report the corruption they experience (NDI 2023 cited in Cheeseman and Peiffer 2024) may mean that sexual corruption could be underreported due to stigma or other reasons. There have, however, been some cases of sexual corruption in the national media. In 2022, there was a case of a teacher requesting sexual favours from a student in return for grades (Mihai 2022), a 2014 case of a university professor accused of offering sexual relations to a young woman in exchange for a high grade in an exam (Pro TV 2014), and another where a university professor reportedly offered female students €300 in exchange for sexual favours (New TV 2024). If these cases exclusively targeted women and girls while excluding men and boys, they could serve as examples of inherently discriminatory corruption (targeting individuals because of their identity). However, these examples should be considered illustrative of a potential issue rather than a substitute for wider national studies.

Evidence shows that certain forms of corruption in Moldova may deliberately exclude women and girls, further entrenching inequality in the country. In the context of post-Soviet cultures like Moldova, some forms of corruption are considered ‘necessary to get things done’ (Roman 2014:68). According to Roman (2014), to move up the promotion ladder or to assume an administrative position in these contexts, one needs to call on favours from power networks.

These power and *blat* networks have adapted into the new democratic contexts (Roman 2014:72). The distribution of benefits to an individual (or groups of individuals) as a means of rewarding loyalty or personal connections is a form of corruption referred to as patronage networks (U4 n.d.). Patronage networks undermine meritocracy and create an unequal environment that leads to reduced organisational effectiveness as well as economic inefficiency. They can be skewed towards a certain group of people (Schuler 2023), such as a particular gender, as the informal networks that lead to career advancement are sometimes only available to men and may deliberately exclude women and other groups.

In Barbaroşie et al.’s (2016) research conducted in three central public administration institutions in Moldova,⁴ the survey respondents cited that the main barriers to women’s advancement in public administration was found to be family, maternity and childcare as well as the stereotype of women belonging in the home

⁴ The State Chancellery of the Republic of Moldova, the Ministry of Labor, the Social Protection and Family (MLSPPF) and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS).

(Barbaroșie et al. 2016:33). Similar findings in other reports conclude that there are stereotypes in Moldovan society that women are ‘weaker’ and less talented in business than men and are not fully recognised as political leaders (NIRAS 2021:7). In some of the group discussions, it was noted that there are certain managers who prefer to only work with male civil servants, which led to discrimination of women employees (Barbaroșie et al. 2016:33), which may suggest that gendered patronage networks may be a problem in the public administration sector. One woman surveyed in Barbaroșie et al.’s (2016:25) research was quoted saying that:

‘Although surveys in this area show that women are less corruptible than men because they are more responsible and are more fearful – I do admit this – but not in our context, not in the context of our country. In our case, I think that all depends on the economic situation. Woman is affected by corruption because of the associated traditions, stereotypes and her socially low status; she can be more vulnerable, due to all these, taking into consideration that she stays with the child at home and has a lot of expenses.’

This suggests that due to the stereotypes of women in Moldova, they are perceived as vulnerable and of socially low status, that they are less likely to be perpetrators of corruption and are affected disproportionately by corruption.

Some research draws a similar conclusion of corruption and discrimination against women in the private sector. A country gender profile on Moldova by NIRAS on behalf of the European Union (2021:26) finds that Moldovan women have less access to finance and are treated unequally by banks and public authorities. There have been reported cases of women business owners applying for a bank loan and being told that they must pledge four times the collateral than men do, that they are being subjected to more severe tax scrutiny than their male counterparts and have been requested for informal payments to tax inspectors (NIRAS 2021:26). While the report does not specify reasons for this behaviour, it can be inferred that stereotypes portraying women as vulnerable and less involved in business may see them perceived as easier targets for informal payments. As a result, this corruption could further entrench women in poverty.

Finally, research shows that men are the primary perpetrators of corruption in Moldova. The Moldovan national anti-corruption centre (CNA) found that, of corruption defendants in the country, 92% were men and only 8% were women (NAC 2021). While this does not necessarily suggest that women are the primary targets, it does highlight a gender imbalance among those involved in corrupt activities. However, there could be other causes of this imbalance, such as women’s access to the circles and networks that perpetuate corruption. Moreover, the CNA’s data also finds that the involvement of corruption is generally caused by the defendant’s low salaries, leading to corrupt acts to generate additional income for their family (NAC

2021). This may indicate the societal pressure that is placed on men to provide for their families, a cultural belief that men in Moldova are perceived as the primary breadwinners of the family (Barbaroşie et al. 2016).

Ethnic minorities and refugees

In 2021, the Moldovan equality council received 310 complaints of discrimination (Council of Europe 2023:13). Of these, 25% concerned a violation of human dignity, 25% a discrimination at work and 14% regarding access to justice. The Moldovan equality council also reported that people's negative attitudes were strongest towards 'Muslims, Roma and people of African descent' (Council of Europe 2023:13). Romani people are considered as one of the most vulnerable groups in Moldova and face a higher risk of marginalisation and underrepresentation in political decision-making, with lower levels of education, less access to healthcare and higher rates of unemployment than the general population (USDOS 2023). A 2019 survey of 476 Romani women from 48 localities conducted by the Roma Women Network revealed that Roma women still experience limited access to education, the job market, healthcare services and information about health and hygiene (NIRAS 2021).

Research into the impact of corruption in Moldova suggests that it leads to unfair outcomes for Romani people⁵ as well as refugees. Moldovan authorities have reportedly been deliberately housing Romani refugees from Ukraine separately from others in a way that constitutes discriminatory treatment (HRW 2022). Romani leaders have accused law enforcement bodies of failing to investigate hate speech and discrimination towards them (USDOS 2023), although it is unclear whether this has been motivated and/or facilitated by corruption or not. Moreover, in one case, a customs inspector at the Tudora customs post had been systematically demanding bribes from a volunteer who provided transportation services for refugees from Ukraine (Info1 2024).

In 2024, the head of the Interpol Moldova office was arrested for 30 days on suspicion of manipulating red alert notifications and other Interpol data (Digi24 2024). The Moldovan chief anti-corruption prosecutor stated that suspects were accused of paying various intermediaries and public figures from Moldova to inform criminals when they appear in Interpol's red notice alert system. They were not only informing suspects but deleting information about them from the Interpol database.

⁵ Interestingly, when asked which social problems are the most pressing for the 2020 Ethnobarometer in Moldova, 63% of Moldovans listed corruption in their top three (CIVIS 2021: 46). However, 50% of Ukrainians listed corruption, and only 27% of Romani listed corruption (CIVIS 2021:46). This indicates that corruption is not considered such a high priority for ethnic minorities compared to the majority of Moldovans.

Individuals from Russia and Ukraine who were wanted by Interpol were able to obtain asylum or refugee status in Moldova due to their records being erased and could enter the country and be granted refugee or asylum status (Digi24 2024). Corruption and fraud in the asylum process may result in delays in processing legitimate cases and increased discrimination and harassment towards real refugees and those in need.

Several studies and reports also indicate that Moldova's law enforcement and justice sectors struggle with corruption and discrimination, particularly against vulnerable and marginalised groups. Organised criminals running human trafficking rings have reportedly targeted young and impoverished women in Moldova (Dean 2017). Moldovan women have fallen victim to false job offers or advertisements to study abroad, which result in them ending up in brothels in countries such as Türkiye or the United Arab Emirates (Dean 2017:21).

As noted by the US Department of State, human traffickers have increasingly exploited domestic and foreign victims in Moldova and alongside women, these can be migrants, those living in rural areas, people with disabilities that live in residential institutions and Romani people (USDOS 2023). The Romani community, who are largely undocumented, are also at particular risk of labour trafficking in the agricultural sector (USDOS 2024).

Human trafficking has been, in part, enabled by corruption in Moldova (The Borgen Project 2022). The USDOS (2024) notes that official complicity in trafficking crimes continues to be a problem the country. For example, in 2023, an employee of the General Inspectorate of the Border Police (GIBP) was detained on suspicion of receiving bribes to help human traffickers escape criminal liability. This indicates that there are issues of corruption within the border police, further enabling human trafficking of vulnerable individuals.

Finally, the link between poverty and corruption in rural areas has been highlighted by multiple sources, particularly in how corruption leads to an increase in poverty (Lupusor 2017; IPN 2014; UNDP 2016:5). Disparities between rural and urban dwellers in Moldova is particularly pertinent, with one survey showing that 67% of rural respondents stated that they could not afford to travel abroad compared to 45% of those living in cities (Malcoci and Mocanu 2018:111). UNDP (2016:5) notes that corruption in Moldova has increased the inequality of income and poverty, reduced the progress of the tax service and efficiency of social costs and perpetuated the unequal distribution of power, locking these people into cycles of poverty.

LGBT+ people

There is little evidence on the impact of corruption on LGBT+ people in Moldova. However, there have been many reports of violence and harassment towards the community, and the same evidence suggests that they do not report this to the police, highlighting their distrust of law enforcement officials in the country (USDOS 2023). According to a report by GenderDoc-M which was published in 2012, police officers in Moldova regularly discriminate against and extort LGBT+ people and many LGBT+ individuals note a difficulty in accessing justice when they are victims of crimes (Amnesty International 2012:15-16).

When they do report, the police reportedly show more interest in their lifestyles than the crime itself (Amnesty International 2012:15-16). For example, one individual was robbed in 2021 and submitted a complaint to the police, but the reporting officer instead interrogated him about his private life, which resulted in a later robbery and no resolution by the investigating officers (Amnesty International 2012:15). His complaint to the prosecutor general's office about the discriminatory treatment also resulted in no substantive report. While there may be no link to corruption in this particular case, it highlights a potential disconnect between the law enforcement and justice sector and LGBT+ people in the country, indicating that if these groups were to encounter corruption, they may be reluctant to report.

People with disabilities

Corruption in Moldovan healthcare is systemic (Vremea 2024) and not only disproportionately affects women and girls but those living with disabilities and other long-term health issues. Research examining the impact of corruption on human rights in Moldova conducted by the Centre for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR 2021) show those most affected by corruption such as unofficial payments and other violations in the health sector are people with health and social vulnerabilities, particularly individuals with disabilities (CCPR 2-21:58).

Access to healthcare in Moldova is covered by mandatory health insurance, which covers roughly 90% of the population (European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies n.d.). However, in some cases, corruption has hindered access to healthcare, allowing those with the financial means to receive priority treatment and showing how corruption can impede the effectiveness of measures designed to advance equality. The Moldovan equality council database includes several cases that reinforce the existence of delays in treatment for those who are entitled to receive it. The council also found instances of discrimination where insured patients are asked

to pay so they may move up in priority for a delay that is potentially artificially created (CCPR 2021:57)

An official at the Territorial Service for Determining Disability and Work Capacity Rezina was accused of committing influence peddling by claiming and receiving monetary bribes from people interested in being granted the degree of disability, or for their relatives (NAC 2023d). This case suggests that in order to obtain a certificate of disability, individuals were required to pay bribes to public officials, meaning that those who are unable to afford the bribes could not obtain evidence of their disability, further excluding them from social protection programmes they may rely on.

Additionally, two department heads from the Ialoveni District Hospital were suspected of receiving illicit funds through charging sums of money from patients that were not reflected in the hospital's accounting (NAC 2023c). One of the suspects had claimed and systematically accepted funds from patients to speed up the process of performing medical examinations out of schedule (NAC 2023c). The other suspect had demanded and accepted bribes to expedite imaging and radiological investigations (NAC 2023c).

In another case, a deputy director and three heads of department at Moldova's oncological institute, which is the only specialist cancer hospital in the country, were detained for corruption and allegedly demanding and receiving bribes from patients for treatment that should have been free of charge (Vremea 2024).

Finally, a corruption scheme was also uncovered which involved two heads of the Florești district hospital, where the two officials had demanded and accepted illicit bribes from patients in exchange for services that were beyond their functional duties (NAC 2025). They acted in complicity with several other people in the system, through influence peddling, and managed to issue examinations to determine the degrees of disability while the patients were physically absent (NAC 2025). They also issued patients with medical referrals at private diagnostic centres, and for each examination they received a 15% commission from economic agents for each service provided (NAC 2025).

Gender-sensitive and inclusive anti-corruption measures in Moldova

This section reviews the available anti-corruption measures aimed towards groups at risk of discrimination. However, as noted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE 2023) in an analysis of Moldova's legal framework, there is a need to further prioritise actions for promoting an integrated approach that addresses corruption, human rights and gender equality in Moldova. While separately, there is attention paid to each issue on its own, there is still progress needed in harmonising each of them and acknowledging the interrelated and mutually reinforcing nature of the issues.

Addressing the challenges arising from the intersection of discrimination and corruption in Moldova is a complicated task. However, the literature proposes several measures that can help mitigate some of the issues faced by affected communities. This section highlights key strategies aimed at tackling both discrimination and corruption, while emphasising that broader good governance and anti-corruption initiatives across the country remain equally important.

National equality framework

Moldova has national frameworks and institutions designed to address discrimination, along with an established anti-corruption framework. To effectively counter gendered corruption and corruption affecting other at-risk groups, states should review and amend their existing anti-corruption and anti-discrimination laws and policies (Barnes and Bergin 2025). Additionally, they should take measures to ensure the complementary enforcement of these frameworks for a more cohesive and effective approach (Barnes and Bergin 2025). Governments could develop specific legal frameworks on forms of corruption that target certain groups, such as sextortion (Peifer 2023:26). However, the majority of countries do not currently have specific legislation covering these issues, including Moldova.

In Moldova, the violation of equal rights of citizens is prosecuted and sanctioned under art. 365/3 of the criminal code of the Republic of Moldova. This offence is categorised as an offence against political, labour and other constitutional rights of citizens (chapter V of the criminal code). Certain acts of discrimination may be

sanctioned as a contravention (administrative offence). In this sense, the following articles are relevant:

- prohibited electoral agitation (art. 52 of the contravention code of the Republic of Moldova)
- discrimination in the field of education (art. 65/1)
- incitement to discrimination (art. 70/1)
- victimisation (art. 70/3)
- discrimination regarding access to services and goods available to the public (art. 71/1)
- violation of the legislation regarding the provision of internet access services (art. 250/2)
- violation of the rules of spectator behaviour at official sports competitions held in sports halls or stadiums (art. 365/3)

Regarding the vulnerable groups and risks of discrimination, in general, the Moldovan Council for Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination and Ensuring Equality provides useful information. The council is an autonomous, impartial and independent public authority established to prevent and protect against discrimination, to ensure equality and to promote equal opportunities and diversity.

Its mandate covers individuals and legal entities from the public and private sphere and is responsible for reviewing complaints of alleged discrimination on all protected grounds and issuing legally binding decisions unless challenged by the courts (Council of Europe 2023:12). It also drafts laws from the perspective of equality and non-discrimination. Additionally, it:

- monitors implementation of legislation
- examines complaints and reinstates the rights of victims of discrimination
- raises awareness and informs society to eliminate all forms of discrimination
- reporting mechanisms ensure equal treatment of petitioners. There are no special legal provisions regarding differentiation of persons that are reporting corruption.

Concerning discrimination, it can be reported under the conditions of special laws:

- law no. 121/2012 on ensuring equality
- law no. 298/2012 on the activity on the equality council

Additionally, reporting can be done through the council's web page.

Disaggregated research and data collection

The UNODC (2023) highlights the importance of quantitative and qualitative data collection on the gender dimensions of corruption (UNODC 2023). They recommend that national data collection should go beyond sex-disaggregation to include targeted questions and analysis that unpack the nuanced relationship between gender inequalities and corruption to provide a basis for evidence-based policy solutions. Moreover, intersectional data approaches, which include the different aspects of a person's identity (such as ethnicities, genders, religions, disabilities or sexual orientation, among others) can help states to identify how aspects of identity overlap to create and deepen discrimination (Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data n.d.).

Many official statistics collected in Moldova are not currently disaggregated by gender (NIRAS 2021). While some are collected, such as women in government, the participation of women in the labour force and gender-based violence (UN Women n.d.), there remains a gap in terms of corruption. NIRAS (2021:46) notes that gender-disaggregated data is the foundation of any gender analysis, meaning that there is a need to support the collection of high-quality statistical data, especially on the national economy through the prism of the gender statistics, for a better understanding of the issue. It notes that currently, some of the gender-sensitive interventions in the country rely on data collected in 2016 and/or earlier and from a small and non-homogenous range of gender-disaggregated indicators, highlighting the need for more up to date evidence from the country (NIRAS 2021).

There is also incomplete reporting on gender and other groups at risk of discrimination by the national anti-corruption agency (the Centrul National Anticoruptie – CNA). The agency's 2023 annual report notes the gender ratio within the agency itself, which is 30% women and 70% men (CNA 2024:7). The 2021 annual report disaggregates the number of those investigated for corruption by gender (148 men and 32 women) but does not record data on the number of women affected and/or targeted by corruption (CNA 2021). Disaggregation by other groups is also not mentioned in the reports.

Reporting mechanisms and awareness raising

Corruption reporting mechanisms in Moldova are not fully gender-sensitive, despite offering certain guarantees, such as anonymous reporting. Truly gender-sensitive whistleblowing and reporting systems are those that are tailored to victims' experiences and specific needs (Zúñiga 2020:2-3). They are designed so that they do not reproduce inequalities of society or the workplace and typically reflect gender (or

other) preferences in incentives that motivate people to report (Zúñiga 2020:7). In terms of gender, research finds that mobile units, online platforms and hotlines, the use of inclusive language and communication, and cooperation with women's organisations and other organisations are important (Zúñiga 2020).

The law on whistleblower protection in Moldova is currently considered to be inadequate given that it does not provide an effective mechanism to ensure whistleblower protection nor does it guarantee consultation with the whistleblower(s), as well as other important aspects (OECD 2022:4). While the majority of the research on inclusive reporting mechanisms focuses on gender, it is likely that other groups at risk of discrimination may not be considered in the design of reporting mechanisms.

A 2010 experimental survey (Feldman and Lobel 2010) found that women's individual motivation for blowing the whistle is greater when there are anti-retaliation protections and legal duties. A victim-centric approach that recognises and addresses the rights of those affected by corruption, which includes restitution and support services for victims, is also important, as well as a human rights impact assessment (OSCE 2023). Finally, transparency in the investigation, such as keeping the public informed about the progress without compromising the integrity of the process, is also important to build public confidence (OSCE 2023). In 2023, this was replaced by law no 165/2023 on integrity whistleblowers, but the same criticisms of this law remain.

Cheeseman and Peiffer (2024) recommend that awareness raising campaigns on corruption should be conducted at clinics and health centres to target Moldovan women. This could include raising awareness of health related entitlements that could encourage women to demand bribe-free healthcare. It could aim to empower women to refuse to pay bribes through the communication of positive norms, particularly those aimed at dismantling certain gender norms between healthcare professionals (Cheeseman and Peiffer 2024:21)

One of the main focus areas that the authors suggest is to focus on explaining how and where to report corruption. Of those surveyed by Cheeseman and Peiffer (2024:18), 41% said that they 'do not trust the authorities to investigate' and 26% stated that they do not report because they are afraid of punishment or ashamed. The authors conclude that creating anonymous corruption hotlines and protecting whistleblowers, and ensuring that these protections are widely known, would encourage more people to come forward.

They also suggest that these reporting mechanisms could be managed by a respected civil society group(s) or an independent body (Cheeseman and Peiffer 2024:18). This could be particularly relevant in the case of women and other groups at risk of discrimination, who may be more prepared to come forward to report corruption if

the reporting channels were managed by an organisation that understood their particular needs. There are also several women-led civil society organisations (including Roma women-led organisations) in Moldova that are an area of opportunity for collaboration and consultation on anti-corruption measures (Corpadean and Pantea 2024; IWPR 2024). For example, one of the biggest platforms is the Platform for Gender Equality, which is a voluntary association of individuals and NGOs that promote gender equality.

There have been some steps towards raising awareness of corruption among other groups at risk of discrimination. In 2023, over 100 refugees from Ukraine in Moldova participated in a community event where they learned about the rights they have in the country which should not be compromised by corruption (Moldova.org 2023). This was implemented by GIZ Moldova and the national anti-corruption centre and involved giving participants the opportunity to ask questions, participate in discussions and learn about institutions they can turn to if they encounter corruption. Such targeted events for specific at-risk groups are an important step in ensuring that they understand their rights and how to report corruption.

Gender affirmative policies

Regarding the public administration sector, Barbaroşie et al. (2016) compiled a number of recommendations after analysing perceptions and experiences of civil servants in the central administration with regards to corruption and gender. These broadly include:

- to organise systematic and continuous training workshops for the central public authority representatives regarding the diversity of existing forms of corruption in the public service
- to combine anti-corruption policies with efforts aimed at the consolidation of women's role in the institutional management, including their involvement in planning and monitoring of anti-corruption activities
- to develop explicit provisions for the regulations aimed at guiding and reinforcing standards for recruitment, promoting and management of human resources. To increase the level of transparency related to the recruitment and promotion of staff via diversification of ways to inform employees
- to encourage and facilitate women's participation in professional development opportunities through institutional policies aimed at ensuring equal access to training and travel opportunities, including flexible arrangements for employees with personal obligations (Barbaroşie et al. 2016:5-6)

While these recommendations are targeted specifically at Moldova's central administration, these can be applied to all areas of the public sector. Of particular

note, the transparency and revision of procedures of recruitment and promotion can be used to break up patronage networks where certain groups may be excluded from career progression due to social norms and expectations (such as patriarchal stigma against women). The inclusion of recommendations, such as flexible arrangements for employees with personal obligations, targets women who also care for children and other relatives, ensuring that they are able to fulfil their career ambitions without this compromising their home life.

Regarding the private sector, women's entrepreneurship has become an official priority as Moldova has included it in the agendas of government offices dealing with socio-economic and employment policies (NIRAS 2021:26). These important steps could be further strengthened with policies aimed at preventing and curbing specific forms of corruption faced by women entrepreneurs, such as demands for illicit payments.

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