

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

THE IMPACT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE ON THE MOLDOVAN RETURNEES FROM ABROAD

Data collected: February - June 2023



The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the report do not imply expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries. IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

This publication was made possible through the support provided by the Council of European Development Bank (CEB).

Publisher

International Organization for Migration
Regional Office for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia
Dampfschiffstrasse 4/10-11, 1030 Vienna, Austria
+43 1 581 22 22
Website: <https://rovienna.iom.int/>
Contact: ROViennaDataResearch-Newsletter@iom.int

International Organization for Migration
Country Office in the Republic of Moldova
Le Roi Business Center, Strada Sfatul Tarii 29,
Republic of Moldova
+373 (6) 800 33 11
Website: <https://moldova.iom.int/>
Contact: IOMMoldovaDTM@iom.int

This report was issued without formal editing by IOM.

Cover photo: Moldovan citizens waiting in the proximity of the Chisinau International Airport, Republic of Moldova.
© IOM 2023

Citation: International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2 February 2024. DTM Moldova “The impact of the war in Ukraine on Moldovan returnees from abroad” IOM, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova.
For more information on terms and conditions of DTM reports and information products, please refer to: <https://dtm.iom.int/terms-and-conditions>

Release date: 2 February 2024

© IOM 2024



Some rights reserved. This work is made available under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 IGO License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/igo/legalcode) (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 IGO).*

For further specifications please see the [Copyright and Terms of Use](#).

This publication should not be used, published or redistributed for purposes primarily intended for or directed towards commercial advantage or monetary compensation, with the exception of educational purposes, e.g. to be included in textbooks.

Permissions: Requests for commercial use or further rights and licensing should be submitted to publications@iom.int.

* <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/igo/legalcode>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Executive summary	9
2. Introduction	9
3. Respondents' location	11
Length of stay in the Republic of Moldova and age groups	13
4. Citizenship and country of stay abroad	14
5. Reasons for returning and leaving again	15
Support services needed upon return to the Republic of Moldova	16
Reasons for leaving again after returning (since 2022)	17
6. Household composition, needs and vulnerabilities	18
7. Sources of information	19
Perceptions and concerns of returnees	20
8. Intentions of returnees and household members	21
9. Conclusion	23
10. Methodology	24

LIST OF FIGURES AND MAPS

Map 1: Countries of stay prior to return, (%)	viii
Map 2: Regional distribution of surveyed households with returnees in the Republic of Moldova	11
Figure 1: Distribution of household members having members who returned from abroad	12
Figure 2: Distribution and number of households having members who had returned from abroad	12
Figure 3: Distribution of returnees by the rural/urban settlement they had been residing after returning	12
Figure 4: Regional distribution of contacted respondents and participation rate to the survey	13
Figure 5: Age distribution of returnees by gender	14
Figure 6: Distribution of respondents by dual citizenship in addition to the Moldovan	14
Figure 7: Distribution of returnees by reasons for returning home	15
Figure 8: Salary perceptions	16
Figure 9: Distribution of returnees by needs declared upon returning to the Republic of Moldova	16
Figure 10: Distribution of respondents by job specialisation and profession	16
Figure 11: Distribution of reasons why returnees left after returning since 2022	17
Figure 12: Distribution of household members who left after returning	17
Figure 13: Distribution of respondents by destination countries after leaving again	17
Figure 14: Average age and gender of household members	18
Figure 15: Average number of employed household members	18

LIST OF FIGURES AND MAPS

Figure 16: Average number of household members receiving benefits	18
Figure 17: Distribution of household members with specific needs	18
Figure 18: Distribution of household members with serious health conditions	19
Figure 19: Primary, secondary and tertiary distribution of information sources	19
Figure 20: Perceptions of likelihood of the Ukraine war to escalate	20
Figure 21: Level of concerns about the risk that the war could spill over into the Republic of Moldova	20
Figure 22: Distribution of respondents considering to leave their place of residence if conflicts escalates	21
Figure 23: Household members who would leave in the event of conflict escalation	21
Figure 24: Circumstances influencing considerations to move from current place of residence	21
Figure 25: Intended destination of respondents who plan to leave current place of residence	22
Figure 26: Distribution of household members with travel documents	22
Figure 27: Possible destination countries for respondents who plan to leave the Republic of Moldova	22

ACRONYMS

BNS - Bureau of National Statistics

CATI - Computer Assisted Telephone Interview

CIS - Commonwealth of Independent States

CIVIS - Centre for Sociological, Politological, and Psychological Analytics and Investigations

COVID-19 - Corona Virus Disease 2019

DRB - Diaspora Relations Bureau

DTM - Displacement Tracking Matrix

EUR - Euro Currency

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

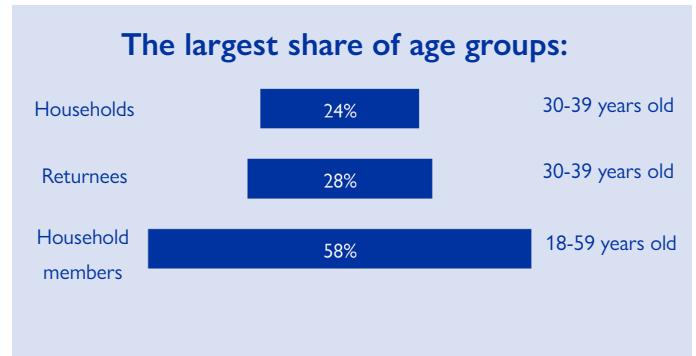
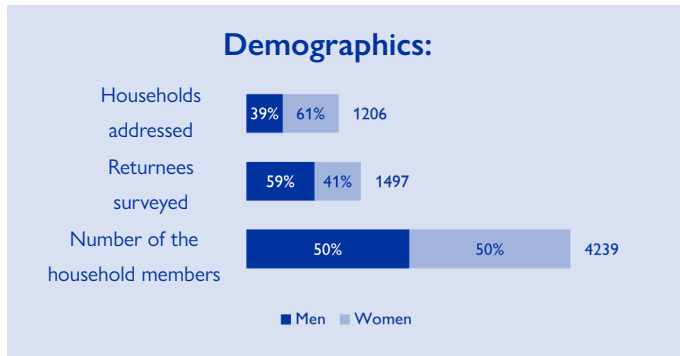
IOM - International Organization for Migration

TCN - Third-Country National

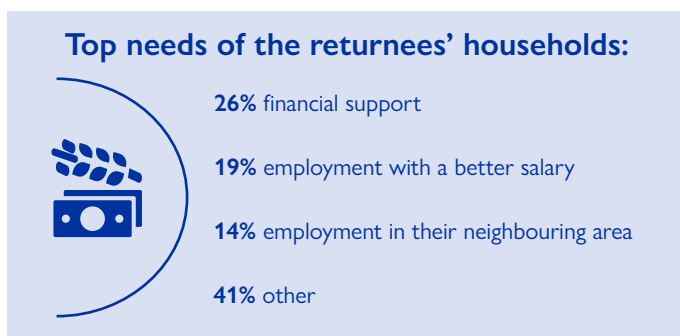
UNDP - United Nations Development Program

KEY FINDINGS

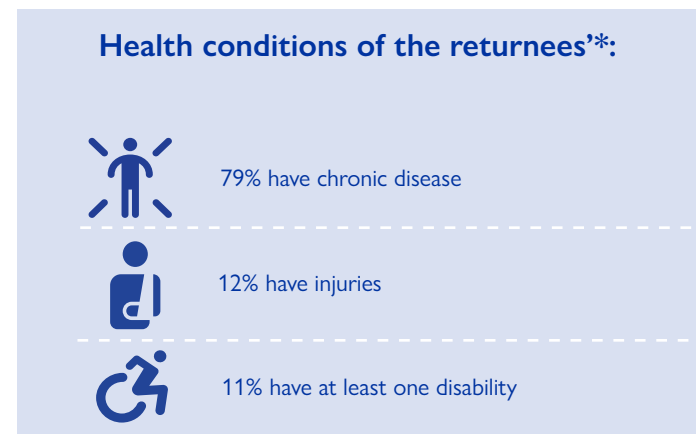
SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS:



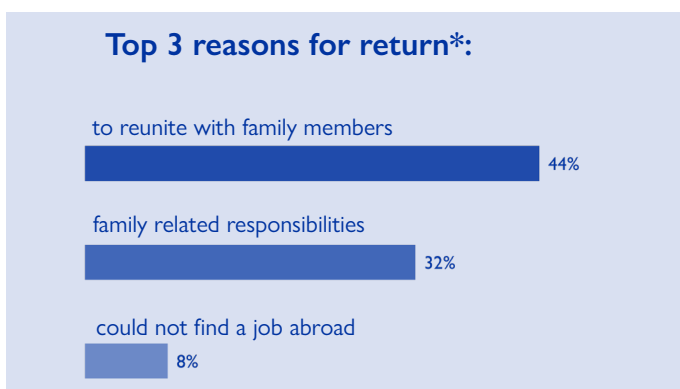
NEEDS:



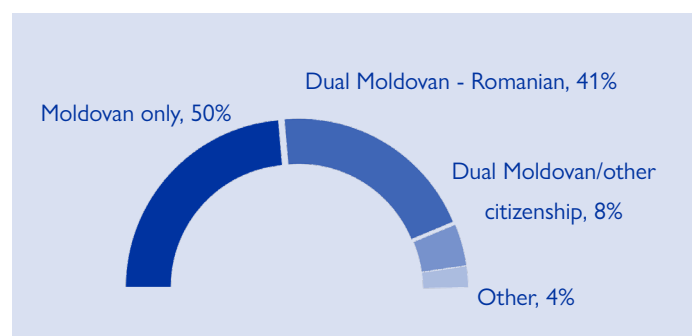
HEALTH:



RETURN & LEAVE AGAIN:

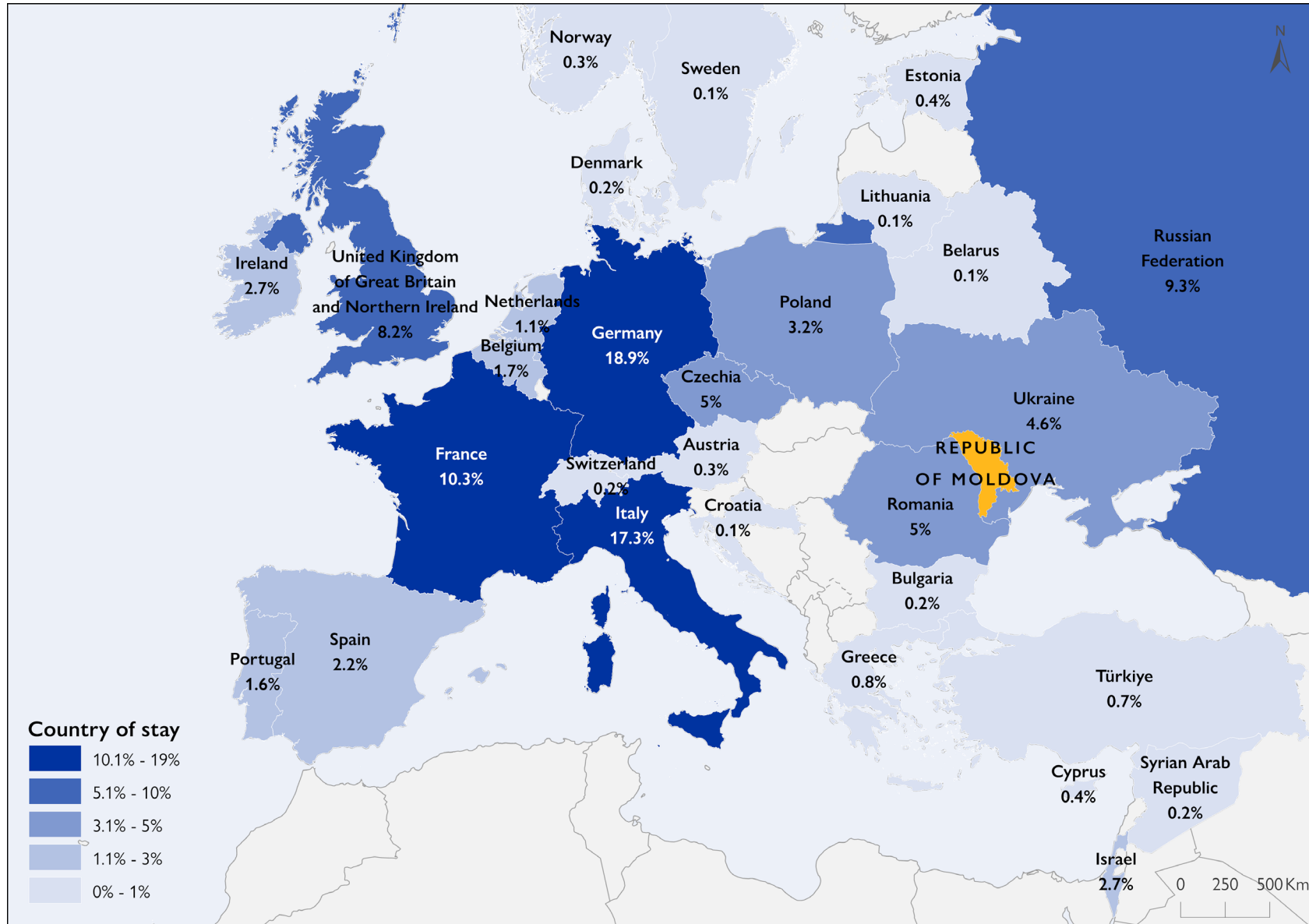


CITIZENSHIP:



* More than one answer is possible

Map 1: Countries of stay prior to return, (%)



This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

1. Executive summary

The onset of the war in Ukraine has caused substantial displacement of people both within the Republic of Moldova's borders and throughout the neighbouring region. The refugee situation is coupled with significant movement flows of Moldovan labour migrants returning from abroad, in particular from Ukraine, the Russian Federation, and other neighbouring countries. The effects of the Ukraine crisis, combined with the lingering consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic could potentially change the Republic of Moldova's migration dynamics, leading to a decrease in emigration and an increase in the number of Moldovan citizens returning home. This may have severe long term effects on the already strained Moldovan economy hindering its capacity to respond to the humanitarian and economic challenges attendant to the Ukrainian crisis. There are major gaps in data on Moldovan returnees, including information on their socio-economic profiles, needs and vulnerabilities as well as their intentions for their future. To fill those gaps the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as the leading inter-governmental organization promoting humane and orderly migration, has conducted a survey with Moldovan returnees in

order to assess how the war in Ukraine has affected them.

- **Returnees** or **returning migrants** are defined by DTM as “persons returning to their country of origin after having moved away from their place of habitual residence and crossed an international border”.

The survey identified 1,497 returnees to Republic of Moldova from 1,206 target households during the period February - June 2023 (See map 2 on page 11). This report presents the findings and elaborates a contextual analysis of the challenges, needs, vulnerabilities, and further intentions of the Moldovans returning to their home country, and the impact of the war in Ukraine on their social-economic situation. The study aims to fulfil the information needs of the relevant authorities of the Republic of Moldova and of the humanitarian actors through improved understanding of mobility dimensions and intentions, and patterns of Moldova's citizens who were abroad prior to the start of the war in 2022 but returned to the country consequently.

2. Introduction

The war in Ukraine has had significant and far-reaching socio-economic impacts on the Republic of Moldova, with particularly adverse effects on already vulnerable populations. Based on recent estimations from the World Bank, in 2022, the number of people living in poverty reached one third of the total population, an increase from 25 per cent in 2021 ([World Bank, 2023](#)). This is attributable to a number of factors; firstly, the year on year inflation rate rose from 13 per cent at the end of 2021 to 34 per cent in October 2022 and has been persistently high ever since, fluctuating around 25 per cent ([National Bank of Moldova](#)). Natural gas and electricity prices rose to their highest levels recorded in many decades. The costs of natural gas increased almost sevenfold while the price of

electricity nearly quadrupled. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that over 63 per cent of Moldovan families could become energy poor in the near future, ([UNDP, 2023](#)). Moreover, due to disrupted transport corridors, the war also has significant effects on trade flows, putting additional pressure on local enterprises to reorient their exports from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) markets to other destinations and to secure supplies from alternative sources. All these factors have affected the Republic of Moldova's economic growth, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contracting by five per cent in 2022 ([National Bureau of Statistics, 2023](#)).

In the face of these macroeconomic challenges, changing patterns in remittance flows and labour migration can potentially generate enduring consequences for Moldova's population and its capacity to handle the cumulative consequences of the war. Since the year 2000, labour migration and remittances have increasingly become a primary source of social support, affecting growth performances, public finance, the balance of payments, and exchange rates.

IOM estimates that approximately 350,000 Moldovan nationals have been involved in short term migration for work outside the country ([IOM rapid field assessment, 2020](#)). The figure that represents more than 42 per cent of the Republic of Moldova's workforce in 2021 ([World Bank, 2023](#)). The outflow of a generally young and qualified workforce caused a significant loss of human capital and jeopardized the long term development of the country. Nonetheless, the movement of temporary and skilled workers across national borders also contributed directly to poverty reduction, human resource development, and improvement in household incomes through increased remittances.

According to the World Bank's estimates, remittances to Moldova represented 35 per cent of the country's GDP in 2006. Even though, in 2021, the figure more than halved, the amount of personal transfers was still considerably high and represented about 16 per cent of the country's GDP ([World Bank, 2023](#)). Due to the importance of human migration and how it contributes to economies worldwide including the Republic of Moldova, IOM, as the leading inter-governmental organization promoting humane and orderly migration, has been working in coordination with the Government with the aim of protecting the rights of migrants and responding to their needs.

IOM's extensive experience in the region coupled with its presence in the Republic of Moldova since 2001, have positioned it at the front of the emergency response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. IOM takes an important role in addressing the needs of refugees,

host communities as well as Moldovan returnees. In particular, IOM has supported the Government's work to develop policies for sustainable reintegration of returnees, which culminated in the recent adoption by the government of the Republic of Moldova of the IOM - sponsored 'National Program on Reintegration of returning migrants' ([IOM, 2023](#)).

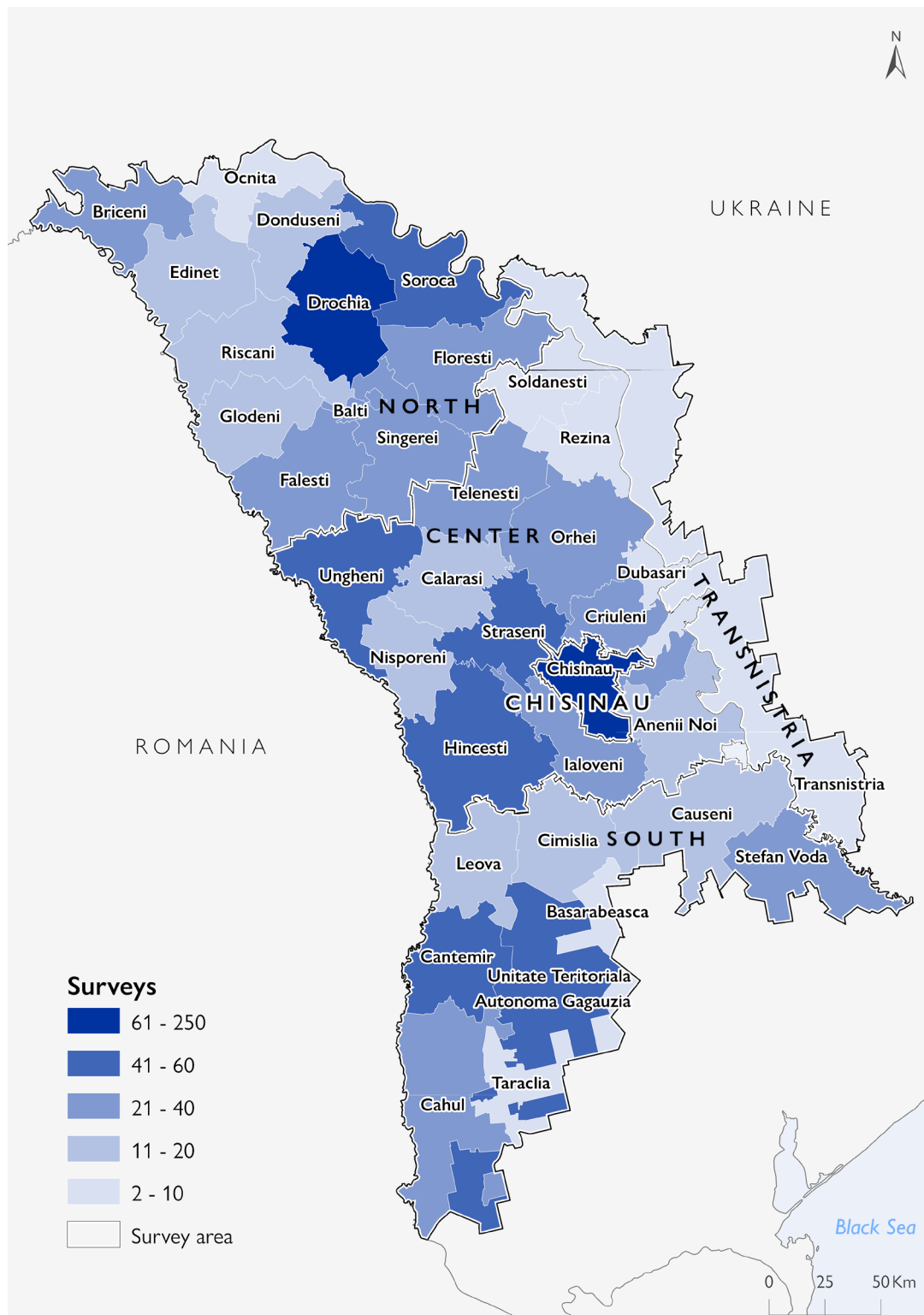
Considering all of the above, this report should be interpreted as a tool to support these efforts. There are, indeed, significant data deficiencies regarding returnees' socio-economic profiles, needs, vulnerabilities and intentions. The objective of this study was to try and address the data gaps that have been identified. This is done firstly, by assessing the incidence rate of Moldovan returnees in a statistically significant, representative, and reliable manner and secondly, by providing a contextual analysis on the main challenges, needs, vulnerabilities, and intentions of Moldovan migrants returning to the country and on how these have been and indeed may continue to be influenced by the current war in Ukraine.

Finally, the study that culminates into this report was also intended to contribute to supporting the programmatic work of IOM in the Republic of Moldova. Within the existing framework, it would inform programs, policies, and the humanitarian response in the area of post-crisis transition and recovery, targeting specifically the migrants returning to crisis affected communities.

In the broader context, this study can be valuable for future planning related to return migration, diaspora engagement as well as skills and workforce development. It can facilitate the customization of programs to provide improved pre-return information, counselling, financial and other incentives, as well as reintegration assistance. Developing a better understanding of the profile of Moldovan returnees can assist in designing sustainable reintegration programs which allow returnees to reach levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being in order for them to cope with possible migration drivers ([Glossary on Migration, IOM, 2019](#)).

3. Respondents' location

Map 2: Regional distribution of surveyed households with returnees in the Republic of Moldova

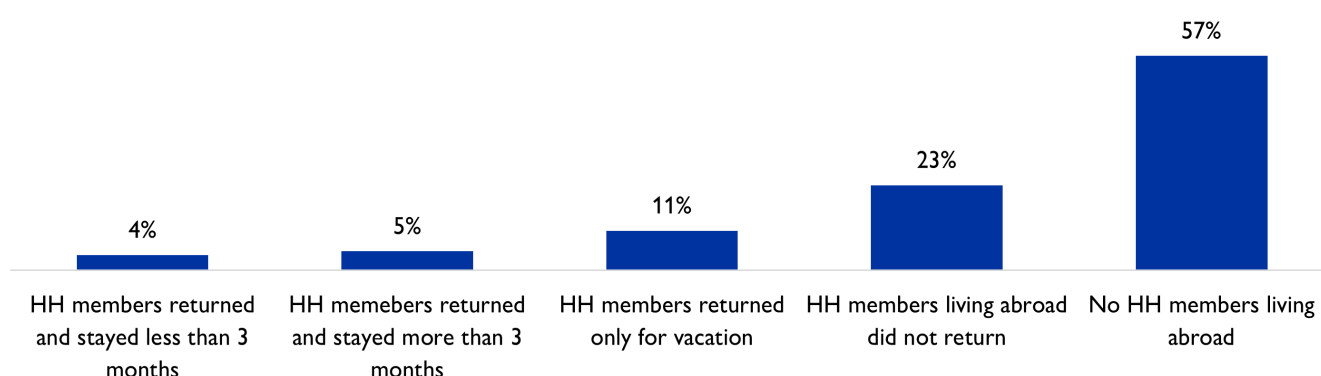


This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

One of the primary objectives of the survey was to estimate the proportion of returnees in the Republic of Moldova relative to the total population. Among the 9,546 households contacted via phone, 57 per cent reported that they had no family members living abroad. Conversely, 23 per cent indicated having a family member abroad who had not returned since February 2022, while the remaining 20 per cent reported having a family member who had come back to the Republic of Moldova since that time. Out of those, 11 per cent

returned for a vacation and were thus excluded from the research. Four per cent returned for less than three months, and five per cent returned for longer. Based on these findings, it can be inferred that approximately 43 per cent of households in the Republic of Moldova have at least one family member living abroad. In 2021, IOM made similar estimations on the number of Moldovans living abroad. Out of this group, only nine per cent fell within the definition of 'returnee' adopted by this study.

Figure 1: Distribution of household members having members who returned from abroad, (%)



When survey participants were asked about the number of household members who had returned from abroad, either for a brief or extended period, the findings indicated that 82 per cent reported one family member returning to the country, 14 per cent reported two members, three per cent reported three members, and one per cent reported four or more members coming back, therefore on average were returning 1.2 members, in Moldovan households.

Figure 2: Distribution and number of households having members who had returned from abroad, (%)

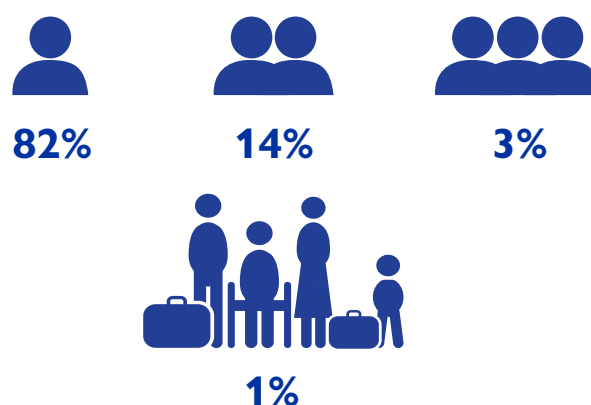
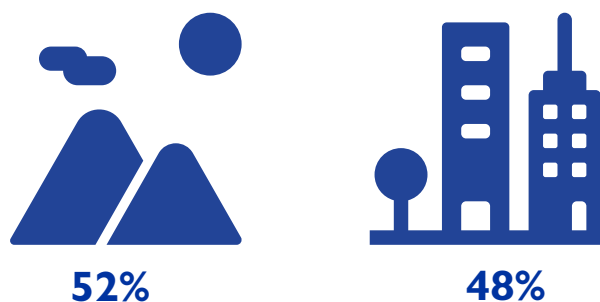


Figure 3: Distribution of returnees by the rural/urban settlement they had been residing after returning, (%)

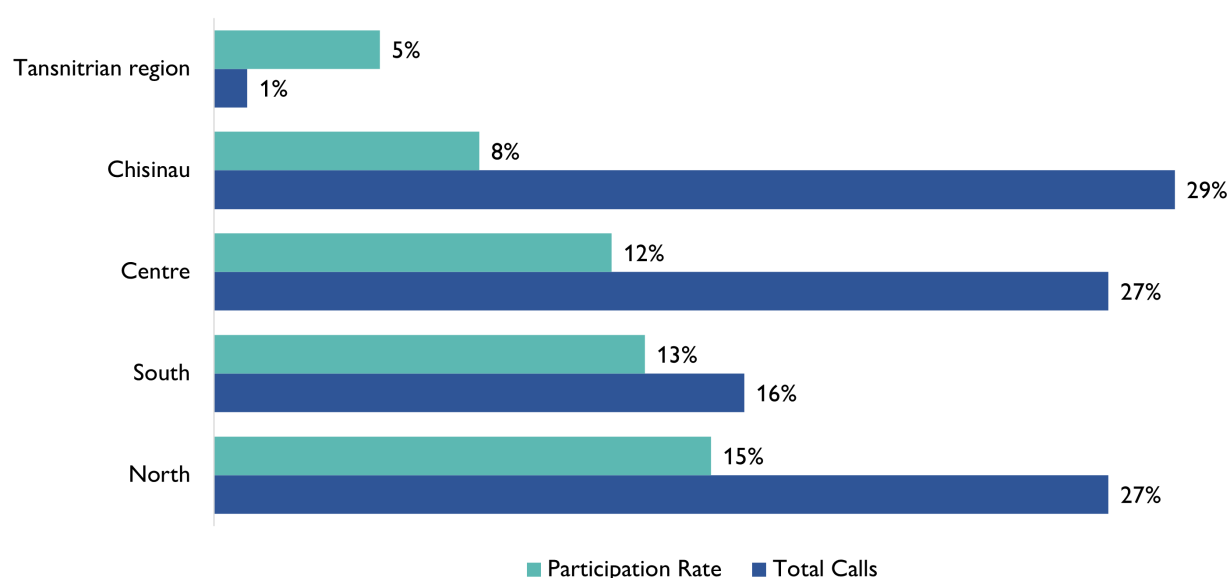


A total of 1,497 individuals were reported to have returned among 1,206 households, with more than one individual per household in 18 per cent of cases. Fifty-two per cent of respondents were residing in rural areas while the rest (48%) resided in urban areas.

Approximately 29 per cent, of all successful phone calls resulted in responses from individuals in Chisinau, with 27 per cent in the North and Center regions of the country, 16 per cent in the South region, and one per cent in the Transnistrian region. When comparing the regional distribution of the total contacted population to those who agreed to participate in the survey, it was observed that a higher proportion of respondents

expressed willingness to respond in the North region and South region (15 and 13%, respectively), while lower percentages were observed in Chisinau and the Transnistrian region (8 and 5%, respectively). While most respondents lived in rural areas, most phone contacts were made in the municipality of Chisinau although the response rate was lower than in the other regions in the country.

Figure 4: Regional distribution of contacted respondents and participation rate to the survey, (%)



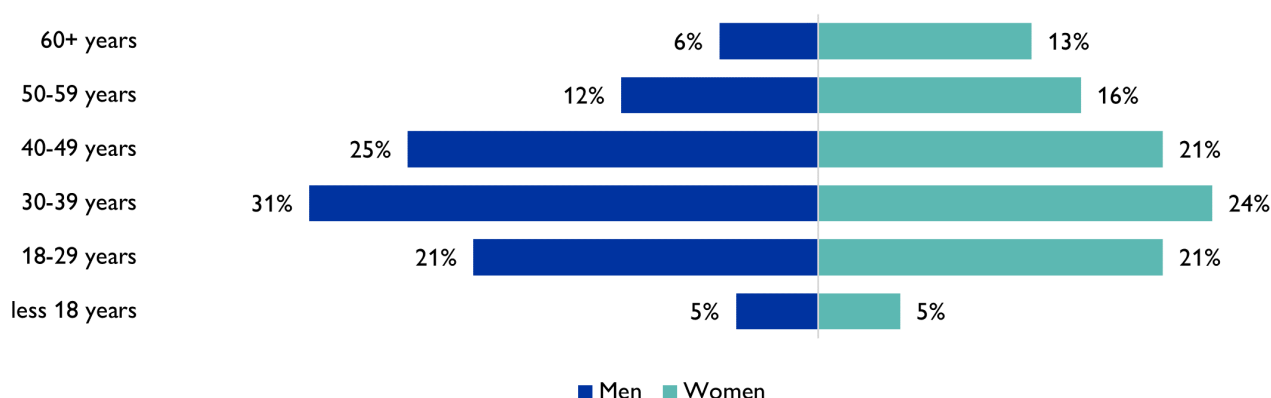
Length of stay in the Republic of Moldova and age groups

Concerning the duration of stay for individuals returning in the Republic of Moldova, data indicated 62 per cent of those surveyed reported that their family members stayed for more than 3 months upon returning, while 38 per cent stated that the members stayed for less than 3 months. It was observed a slight tendency for women to come back for than 3 months (65%) compared to men (60%), in other words they returned for a period of more than three months. Men aged 60 years and above exhibited a higher probability of returning home for a period

exceeding three months (73%), surpassing the overall average duration of stay. Conversely, 60 per cent of women in the same age group reported returns lasting three months or more. The age-disaggregated data shows that on average male returnees were younger than female returnees (38 years for men and 42 years for women). The proportion of older returnees was higher among women (13%) compared to men (6%). Almost one third of male returnees were between the ages 30-39 years old and one quarter of females (24%) were in the same age group.

Data disaggregated by gender revealed that 59 per cent of returning individuals were men, while 41 per cent were women. Nearly all respondents identified as citizens of the Republic of Moldova (96%).

Figure 5: Age distribution of returnees, by gender, (%)



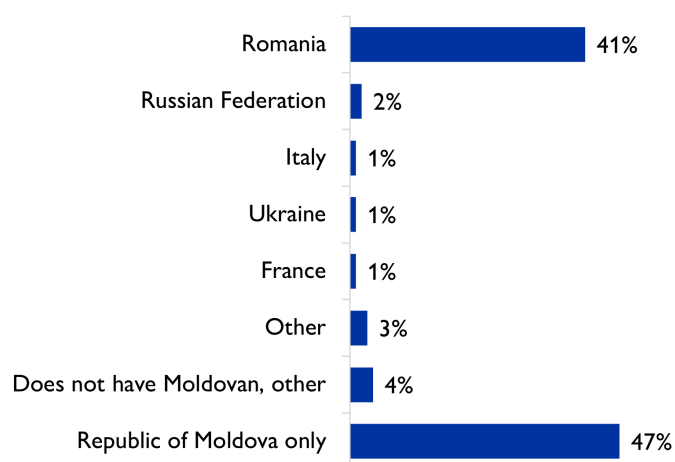
4. Citizenship and country of stay abroad

Out of the 1,479 reported returnees, a significant majority, constituting 96 per cent, held citizenship of the Republic of Moldova, totaling 1,434 individuals. Out of them, 49 per cent reported having a second citizenship, including Romania’s citizenship (41%), followed by the Russian Federation (2%), Italy, Ukraine and France (1% each), and other countries (3%). The remaining four per cent (63 individuals) did not possess Moldovan citizenship.¹ Among them, 43 individuals were citizens of Ukraine, followed by the Russian Federation (8%), Romania, and Canada (6% each), Syria (5%), United Kingdom (3%), and Ireland (2%). Additionally, one person declined to respond to the citizenship question.

As already mentioned, most respondents who held dual citizenship held Romanian Citizenship. However, in comparison to earlier IOM surveys focusing on the return of labour migrants to the Republic of Moldova, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic ([IOM rapid field assessment, 2020](#)), the study revealed a stable number of returnees from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, with the Russian Federation taking the lead.

The CIS, of which the Republic of Moldova is a member, has consistently been a significant destination for Moldovan immigrants, owing to shared culture, language, and history.

Figure 6: Distribution of respondents by dual citizenship in addition to the Moldovan, (%)



¹ It can be assumed that respondents did not possess Moldovan citizenship but were permanent residents of the Republic of Moldova who had returned from working abroad.

Out of the 1,497 returnees, 19 per cent of had returned from Germany, 17 per cent from Italy, 10 per cent from France, nine per cent from the Russian Federation, and eight per cent from the United Kingdom. A smaller number had returned from Romania, Czechia, and Ukraine (5% each). Others arrived in the Republic of Moldova from Poland, Ireland, and Israel (3% each), as well as Spain, Belgium, and Portugal (2% each). The remaining participants came from the United States of America, the Netherlands, Greece, Türkiye, and Canada, each

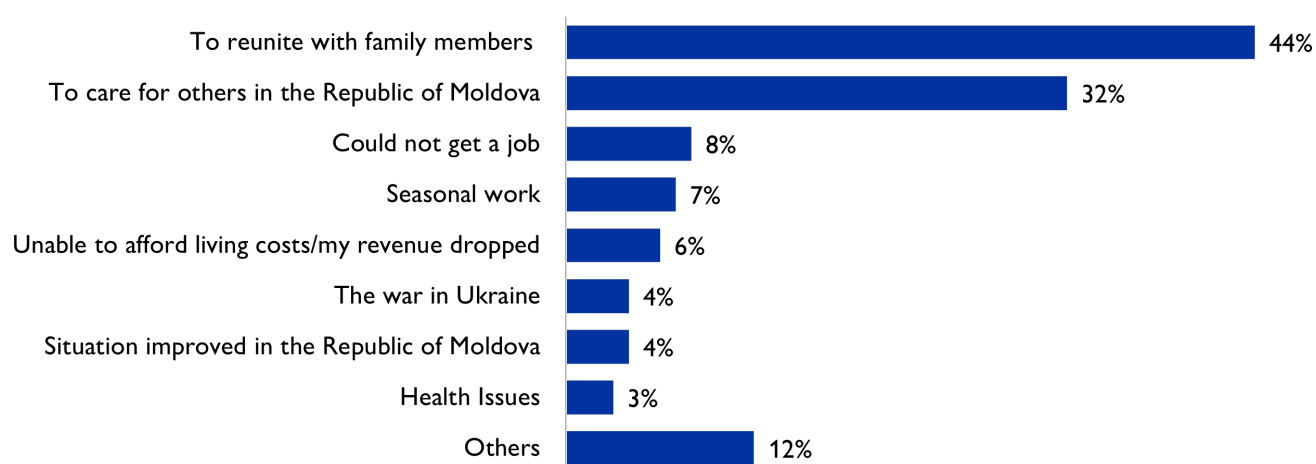
representing one per cent. Additionally, another one per cent came from various other locations. One per cent of respondents chose not to respond to the question. The countries identified as having the largest Moldovan diaspora, in descending order, are the Russian Federation, Italy, Israel, Germany United Kingdom and Portugal ([Mapping Moldovan Diaspora, 2017](#)). It is notably that most returnees come from Germany and Italy which do not host the largest Moldovan diaspora.

5. Reasons for returning and leaving again

Nearly 44 per cent of the respondents indicated that their motive for returning to the Republic of Moldova was to reunite with family members, while 32 per cent returned to fulfil care giving responsibilities for sick or elderly relatives. Other primary reasons for return included the inability to secure employment abroad (8%), engagement in seasonal work (7%), financial constraints or reduced incomes (6%), the impact of the conflict in Ukraine (4%), an improved

situation in the Republic of Moldova (4%), to take care of personal problems (3%), family problems (3%), challenges in finding housing or accommodation abroad (2%), and various other unspecified reasons (8%). It is conceivable also that many of the returnees could have considered returning home after staying long periods of time unable to travel back due to travel restrictions induced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 7: Distribution of returnees by reasons for returning home, (%) (More than one answer is possible)



Support services needed upon return to the Republic of Moldova

The highest percentage of the returnees, constituting 26 per cent indicated that they were in need of financial assistance. Furthermore, 19 per cent, also indicated that they needed employment with a decent salary, while 14 per cent sought employment within their locality or neighboring areas. Significant other support services required upon return included support with healthcare and treatment for 11 per cent of the returnees, employment in their field of specialty or within their profession seven per cent, support to open or run a small business, five per cent, and support with residence documents or citizenship two per cent. The study with returnees also highlighted that some require support with registration at schools or universities, importation of personal goods acquired abroad, recognition of qualifications and language training for children one per cent each. Interestingly, around ten per cent of respondents reported no need for support, while two per cent were unsure what assistance they needed, and an additional two per cent did not provide a response to this particular question. This information outlines the diverse needs and preferences among the returnees in terms of support services upon their return.

Figure 9: Distribution of returnees by needs declared upon returning to the Republic of Moldova, (%)

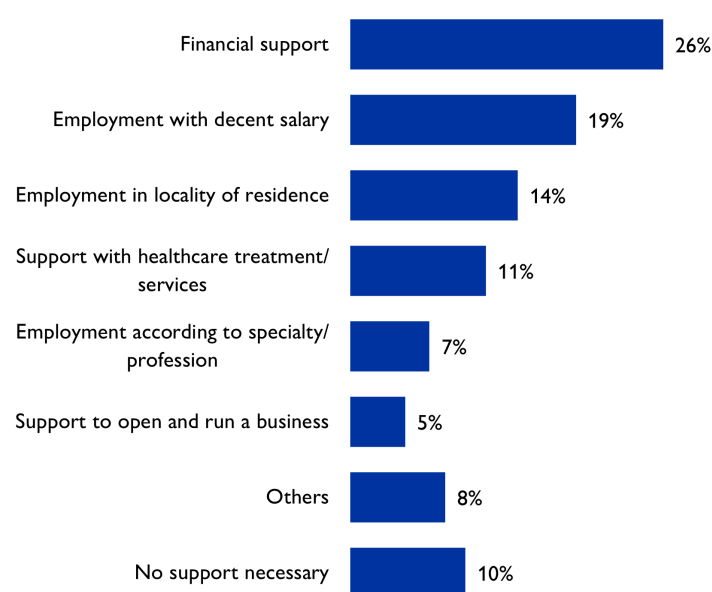
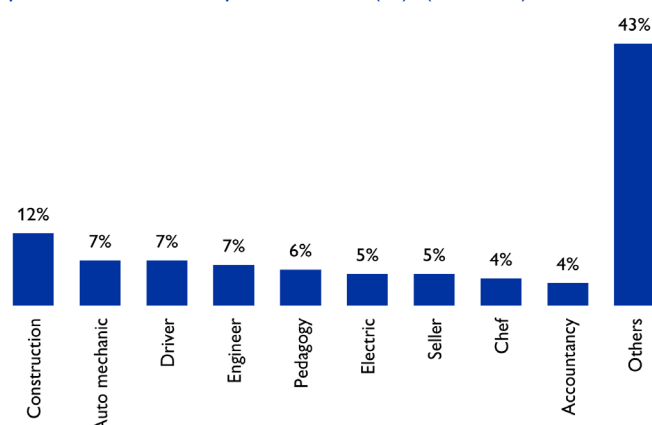


Figure 8: Salary perceptions



Individuals who specified the need for support with finding employment offering a “decent salary” (N=388) were further queried about what they perceived as a decent salary in Moldovan Lei (MDL). The salary figures ranged from a minimum of 5,000 MDL to a maximum of 80,000 MDL per month. The average monthly salary considered as decent among respondents was 18,000 MDL. The information was considered without taking into account different professions, minimum level of education as well as years of experience. In 2023 the minimum wage country wide was 4,000 MDL per month, and the average wage was 11,700 MDL.

Figure 10: Distribution of respondents, by job specialisation and profession, (%) (N=136)

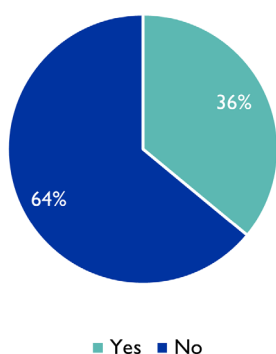


One hundred and thirty six individuals specified the profession in which they would like to seek assistance in finding employment. The figure above shows the respondents distribution among these specific individuals.

Reasons for leaving again after returning (since 2022)

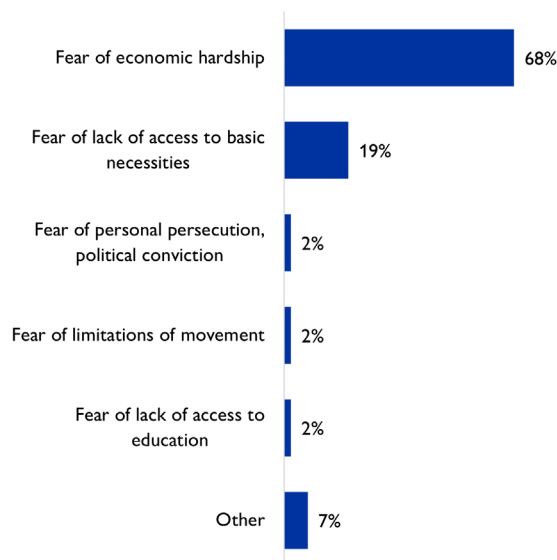
The survey also sought to find out if there were any citizens of the Republic of Moldova who had returned to the country during the study period, but had left again for certain reasons. Out of the 1,206 households surveyed, 36 per cent (equivalent to 430 households) reported that they had family members who returned in 2022 but later left the country again. Within these households, there were instances of multiple family members who initially returned, totalling 547 individuals who had come back to the Republic of Moldova but subsequently departed again. The study did not capture the average duration it took for household members to return abroad after their initial return in the country.

Figure 12: Distribution of household members who left after returning, (%)



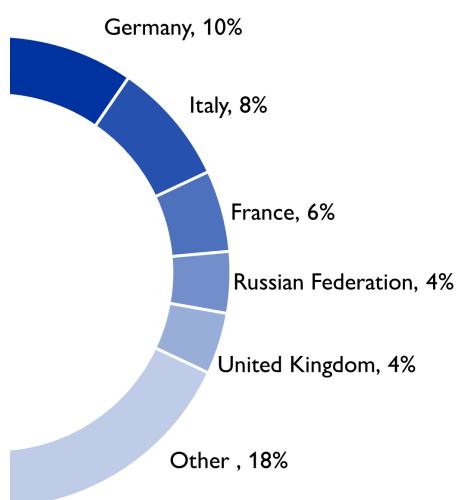
The study underscored that labour migration, particularly the decisions of returnees to leave the Republic of Moldova once again, are influenced by socio-economic factors both domestically and internationally. While the factors driving the initial returns are primarily driven by social and family connections, the motivations for subsequent departures are more closely tied to economic considerations and disparities in living standards between the Republic of Moldova and destination countries. A majority of respondents cited concerns about potential financial challenges, job loss, and income reduction as their main reasons for leaving again (68%). Additionally, concerns about limited access to essential necessities such as food, water, electricity, and sanitation were mentioned by 19 per cent of respondents.

Figure 11: Distribution of reasons why returnees left after returning since 2022, (%) (N=430 Households)
(More than one answer possible)



The leading destinations for individuals who decided to leave the country again were Germany (19%), Italy (17%), France (11%), the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom (8% each). It is noteworthy once again that Moldovan migrants are not necessarily inclined to move in CIS countries.

Figure 13: Distribution of respondents by destination countries of leaving again, (%) (N=547)

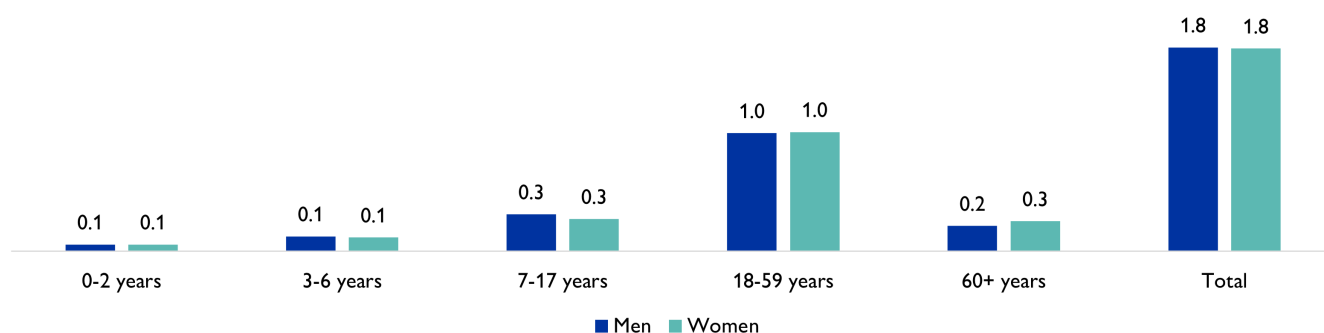


6. Household composition, needs, and vulnerabilities

The average household comprised 3.6 members, and this was the same for both male and female respondents, with an average of 1.8 individuals for each gender. In every household, there was at least one woman and one man between the ages

of 18 and 59. The proportion of female household members aged 60 and above was slightly higher than among men in the same age group (0.3 for women 60+ compared to 0.2 for men 60+). For the other age categories, the gender distribution was the same.

Figure 14: Average of age and gender of household members



On average, 1.3 persons per household were employed, encompassing those in full-time, part-time, irregular, or seasonal work. Additionally, 0.7 persons per household were receiving pensions or other social benefits, which included compensation for maternity leave.

Figure 15: Average of employed household members

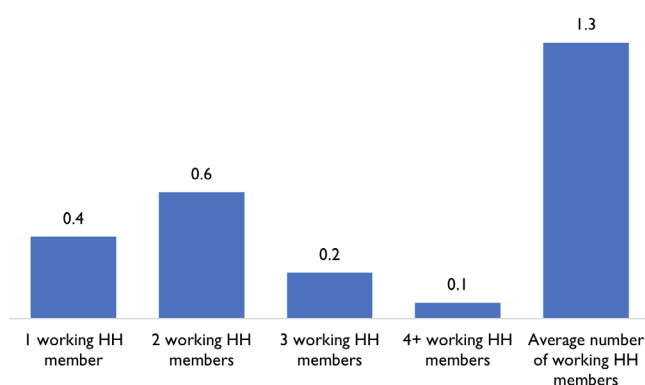


Figure 16: Average of household members receiving benefits



Respondents were asked about assistance they would require in managing their households and if they were getting any help doing so. Fifty-four per cent of respondents stated that they handle the responsibilities alone, while 46 per cent were receiving help from various individuals such as their spouse, partner, parent, other relative, or sibling. Additionally, nearly one fifth of the participants (21% or 257 respondents) reported having a family member with health problems and specific needs.

Figure 17: Distribution of household members with specific needs, (%)

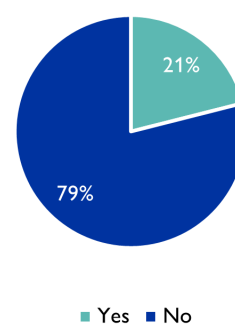
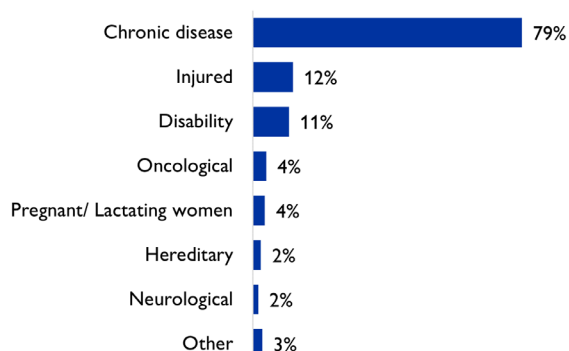


Figure 18: Distribution of household members with serious health conditions, (%) (More than one answer possible)



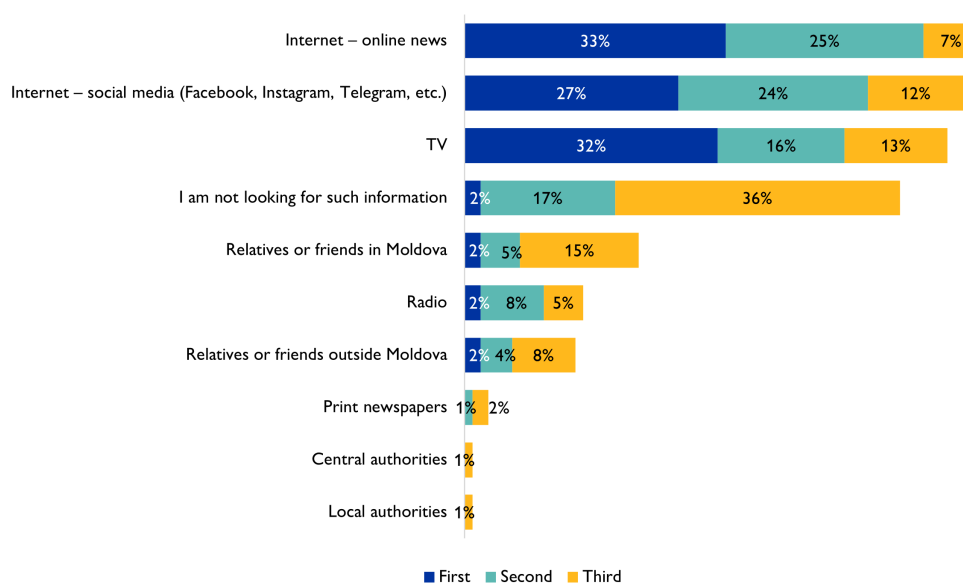
Among the households with members who had serious health conditions, the majority mentioned having at least one household member with a chronic illness (79%), being wounded or injured (12%), or having a disability (11%). Some respondents also specified having household members with oncological problems (4%), hereditary and neurological conditions (2% each), and other health related concerns (3%). Lastly, pregnant or lactating women accounted for four per cent of the total sample.

7. Sources of information

The majority of respondents indicated their primary sources of information about the current situation in Ukraine and the Russian Federation. The most popular sources of information among the respondents were online news (65%), social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram (63%), and television (TV, 61%). A smaller percentage of respondents reported relying on the following other sources, relatives and friends in the Republic of Moldova (22%), relatives and friends

outside the Republic of Moldova (15%), radio (15%), and print newspapers (3%). Only one per cent relied on local or central authorities for information without indicating how this information was disseminated. These findings highlight the diverse channels through which individuals seek information about the current situation in Ukraine and the Russian Federation and then use it to form their opinions about the outlook of the situation in the Republic of Moldova as well as their intentions to stay or move back abroad.

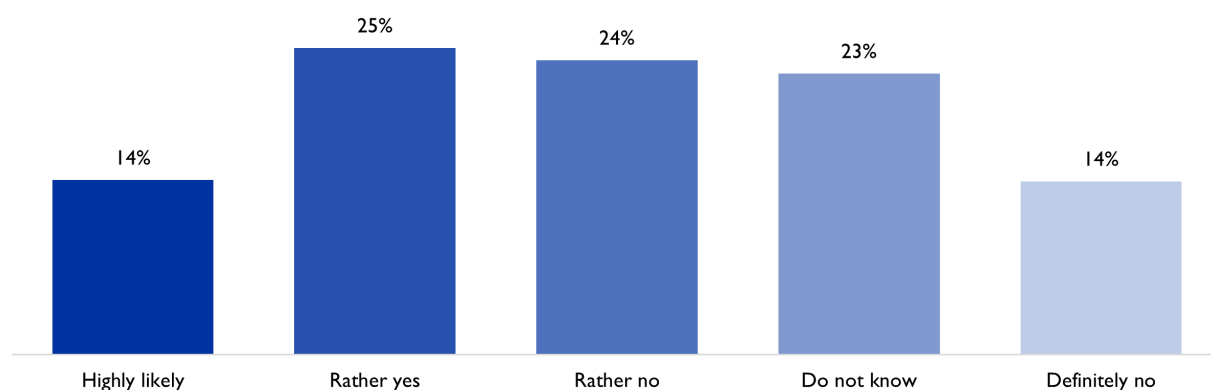
Figure 19: Primary, secondary and tertiary distribution of information sources, (%)



Perceptions and concerns of the returnees

Part of the study was also to solicit the perceptions and opinions of returnees regarding the evolution of the war in Ukraine as well as its potential consequences on the economic and political stability of the country. There was a wide spectrum of opinions regarding the future evolution of the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

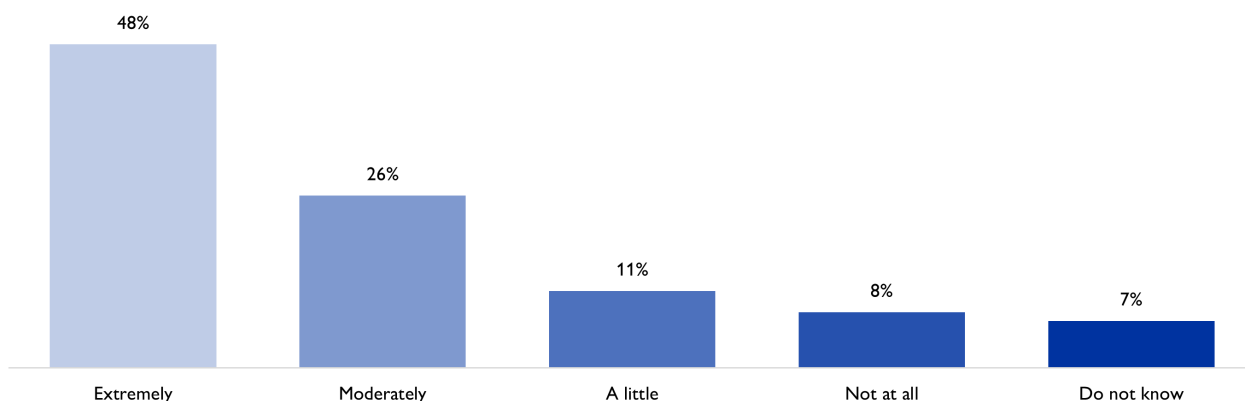
Figure 20: Perceptions of likelihood of the Ukraine war to escalate, (%)



The perceptions of the returnee respondents were based on whether they thought the war was likely to continue or escalate in the foreseeable future. Figure 18 shows the percentages of the respondents and their assessment of the likelihood of the Ukraine war to expand. Subsequently, respondents were also asked to indicate on a developed scale, how concerned they were that the war could spill over into the Republic of Moldova. The findings are represented in figure 21. The two figures illustrate the fact that while returnees to the Republic of Moldova sound

generally indifferent about whether or not the war might escalate, there was a high degree of concerns among them that it might spill over to the Republic of Moldova. In the past, a part of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), currently the country inclines towards closer integration with the EU (officially granted candidate member status by the EU in June 2022). Due to its historical and political background, and geographical proximity, a substantial level of concern within society regarding the war in Ukraine that started in 2022 might be observed.

Figure 21: Level of concerns about the risk that the war could spill over into the Republic of Moldova, (%)

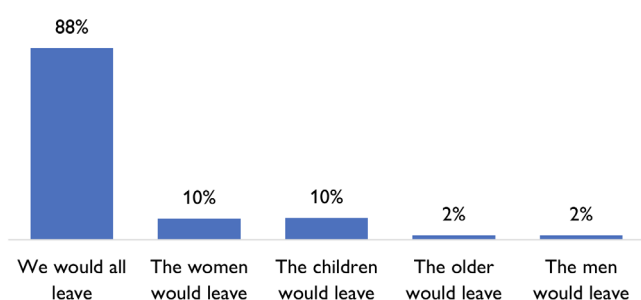


8. Intentions of returnees and household members

A very critical aspect of the study was to get to understand the intentions of the returnees vis a vis their experiences since coming back from abroad, their general outlook on the economy as well as concerns about the ongoing war in Ukraine. Respondents were again requested to rank the “likelihood” of them leaving their current place of residence as well as the intentions of other members of their household.

Figure 23: Household members who would leave in the event of conflict escalation, (%) (N=538)

(More than one answer possible)



It was also important as part of the study to understand the circumstances under which returnees would seriously consider leaving their current place of residence or leaving the country again. It was unequivocally clear from the findings

Figure 24: Circumstances influencing considerations to move from current place of residence, (%) (More than one answer possible)

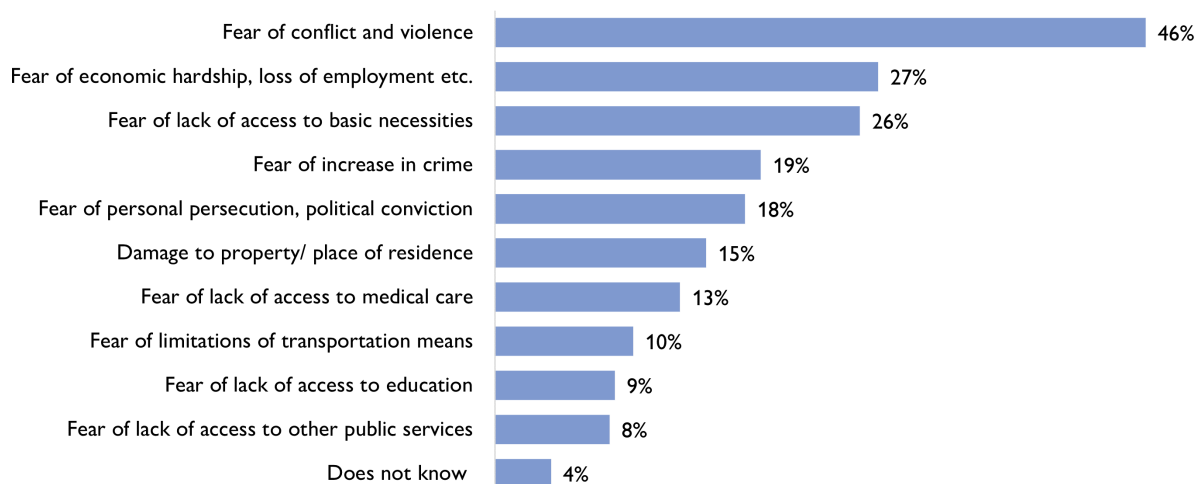
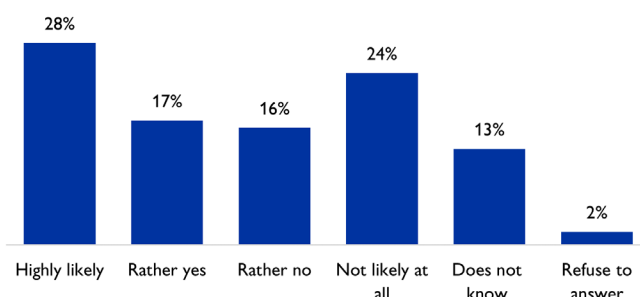


Figure 22: Distribution of respondents considering to leave their place of residence if conflict escalates, (%)



Among the 538 respondents who indicated a likelihood of leaving the country, majority of respondents expressed the intention to depart with all members of their household, accounting for up to 88 per cent of the whole study sample (figure 22). These findings shed light on the significant portion of the population considering the prospect of relocation in the event of an escalation in the conflict.

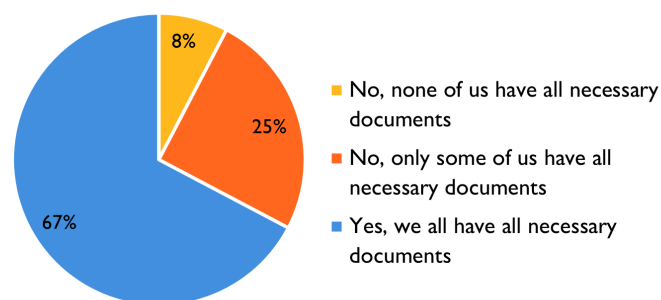
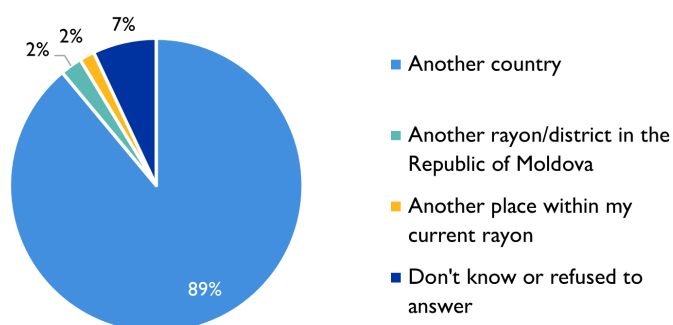
that the fear of conflict, violence, economic hardship and loss of employment, were the main circumstances that would drive respondents to move from where they currently reside or back abroad.

Eighty-nine per cent of the respondents indicated that when moving from their current place of residence, they would opt to move to another country instead of move to another place within the Republic of Moldova where their fears and concerns would otherwise be addressed. Among the 483 members

who indicated that they would relocate to another country 67 per cent had the necessary documentation for travel abroad i.e passports. An additional 25 per cent reported that only some members of their household possessed such documents.

Figure 25: Intended destination of respondents who plan to leave current place of residence, (%)

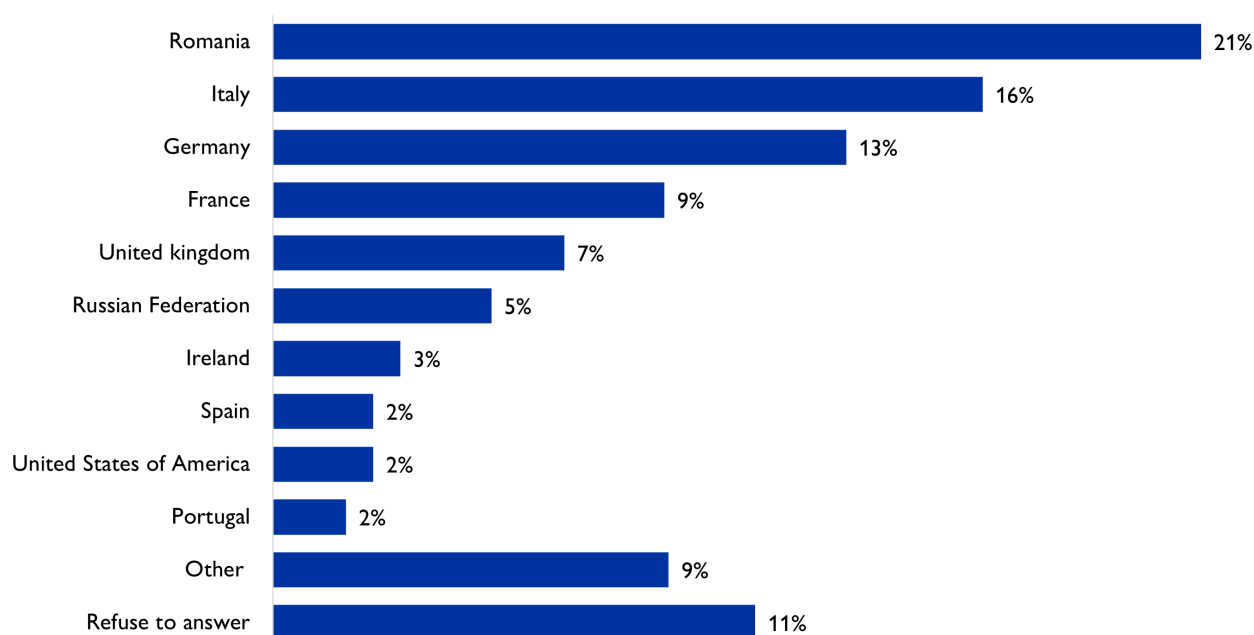
Figure 26: Distribution of household members with travel documents, (%)



Whereas Germany, Italy and France were the top three countries of stay abroad for returnees as well as the top three destination countries for those who had left the country since return, the top three intended destinations for those yet to

leave were Romania, Germany and France. It is possible that Romania's proximity to Republic of Moldova both geographically and culturally makes it an easy choice when people are forced to move.

Figure 27: Possible destination country for those who plan to leave the Republic of Moldova, (%) (N=483)



9. Conclusion

Ever since the conflict in Ukraine commenced, a considerable number of Ukrainians and TCNs have sought refuge in nearby countries. The destruction of property, infrastructure, and livelihoods happening in Ukraine, since the onset of the war in February 2022, continues to lead to forced displacement and increased vulnerabilities. The war in Ukraine has not only caused immense destruction and loss of life within the country but has also had a profound impact on the neighbouring countries, resulting in substantial increases in energy prices, high inflation, and disruption of trade flows within the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. All these compounding effects imperilled development progress and affected Moldovan economic growth, leading the country into a state of recession with GDP contracting by five per cent in 2022 ([National Bureau of Statistics, 2023](#)).

Given the difficult macroeconomic conditions, changing migratory patterns could have long-lasting effects on the Moldovan population and their ability to manage the cumulative impact of the war. For this reason, IOM has been working with the government of the Republic of Moldova, since 2001, with the aim of protecting the rights of migrants and responding to their needs. One such effort focuses on developing policies for sustainable reintegration of returnees, a priority for the Government, which culminated in the adoption of the IOM - sponsored 'National Program on Reintegration of returning migrants'.

The study was thus a further contribution to the efforts aimed at addressing the data deficiencies present, and the lack of information about Moldovan returnees. The study managed to give an estimation of the number of Moldovan returnees in a statistically significant, representative, and reliable manner. In doing so, it also provided a contextual analysis of the main challenges, needs, vulnerabilities, and intentions of Moldovan migrants returning to their home country and how these may have been influenced by the current conflict. Drawing upon the findings of the study, and in line with previous IOM assessments, it can be concluded that one in three households has at least one family member

currently residing abroad. The share of households with returning migrants since February 2022 represents nine per cent, of whom four per cent returned for a short term and five per cent returned for a long term.

In comparison with a 2020 study on Moldovan returnees during the COVID-19 pandemic, the data presented highlighted an increased number of returnees coming from CIS countries, with nine per cent coming from the Russian Federation and almost five per cent coming from Ukraine ([IOM rapid field assessment, 2020](#)). These figures could be directly attributable to the war in Ukraine. Moreover, the primary countries of residence for Moldovan returning migrants are predominantly within the European Union. This finding can be considered as a proxy indicator of the main destination countries for the Moldovan diaspora.

In general, the data resulting from this research pointed to how migration, and in this case, the decision of returnees to leave the Republic of Moldova once again, is the result of socio-economic considerations. While the reasons of leaving are linked with economic considerations, the factors motivating a return are primarily social and linked to the family situations. The majority of those that returned to the Republic of Moldova did to reunite with family members, or to fulfil some care responsibilities.

This report aims to further contribution to IOM's programmatic work in the Republic of Moldova. The data presented will inform programs, policies in the area of post-crisis transition and recovery, targeting the migrants returning to their communities. It should also give a valuable contribution to future planning related to return migration, facilitating the creation of tailored assistance and support programmes, both within the Republic of Moldova and in the countries of residence of the Moldovan Diaspora.

10. Methodology

IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a system to gather and analyze data to disseminate critical multi-layered information on the mobility, vulnerabilities, and needs of displaced and mobile populations that enables decision makers and responses to provide these populations with better context-specific assistance. This survey is part of IOM's DTM activities conducted in the Republic of Moldova to offer evidence-based insights on migration and displacement phenomena within and outside the country. The Centre of Sociological, Politological and Psychological Analysis and Investigations (CIVIS) was selected as implementing partner for this exercise through an open bidding process. The research was carried out at the national level, in all regions of the Republic of Moldova, covering both rural and urban areas. It covered 372 localities for the main questionnaire and over 600 for screening forms. A random Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) combined with the snowball method of selection and interview either by phone or in person was used to analyze the Moldovan households with returnees, who returned for long or short term since February 2022. A total of 1,206 respondents were interviewed between 15 February and 4 June 2023. The language, in which the interviews were conducted was Romanian or Russian, depending on the respondent's spoken language. Almost 83 per cent of the interviews were completed in Romanian and 17 per cent in Russian. The length of the interview ranged from 7 minutes to 49 minutes.

A total of 9,546 valid screening forms via phone calls were completed, out of which 875 target households (i.e. with a family member who returned home since February 2022 for a short or long period) were identified. The incidence rate of the target group was 9.2 per cent households with returnee migrants since February 2022, of whom returned for a short term, i.e., less than three months (4.1%), and for a long term, i.e., more than three months (5.1%).

Out of 875 identified target respondents, 292 (or 33%) refused to continue the survey and complete the main questionnaire (either from the very beginning or during interviewing process). In addition to phone interviews, 583 face-to-face interviews were conducted using random sampling to identify additional potential respondents from the target group. As a result, 623 target respondents were identified through a snow-ball method. Therefore, out of 1,206 completed questionnaires, 583 were conducted by phone, and 623 were face-to-face interviews.

To carry out 9,546 valid screening forms, 35,334 randomly generated telephone numbers were contacted. Thus, the gross rate of participation in the survey at the screening stage (resulting from the total number of phone numbers called) was 27 per cent. The net survey participation rate (excluding calls with a not active number or ineligible respondents) is 50 per cent.

Several measures were implemented to ensure the quality control of the collected data. Firstly, the data collection software allowed for the establishment of rules and logical principles to guide the completion of the questionnaire, including skips and warning messages for incoherent answers and unintended errors. Secondly, the software monitored the time taken to complete each question and section of the questionnaire. The real-time verification of questionnaires was recorded on the server. Additionally, an online monitoring system was in place to track the progress of fieldwork, and at least 30 per cent of the conducted interviews underwent verification. Control measures were also applied to phone transcripts, audio records, and the logical connections between questions. After conducting quality control checks in the field, 175 questionnaires were rejected as they did not belong to the target group.

DTM

Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a system to track and monitor displacement and population mobility. The survey form was designed to capture the main displacement patterns – origin country and region – for refugees of any nationality fleeing from Ukraine because of the war. It captures the demographic profiles of respondents and of the group they are travelling with, if any; it asks about intentions relative to the intended final destination and prospects of permanence in the country of the survey/first reception; it gathers information regarding a set of main needs that the respondents expressed as more pressing at the moment of the interview.

Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, several IOM's DTM tools were deployed in countries neighbouring Ukraine and in other countries particularly impacted by the new arrivals of migrants and refugees from Ukraine.

For more information, please consult: <https://dtm.iom.int/responses/ukraine-response>
DTM is part of IOM's Global Data Institute.