

SURVEY ON

ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA



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The survey was conducted by the Center for Sociological Analysis and Investigations CIVIS as part of the project **"Enhancing Access to Justice for Living in Dignity" (A2J4Dignity)**, implemented by UNDP Moldova with financial support of Germany. The opinions and views expressed in this document are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of UNDP or the funding organization.

The survey was printed within the project "Strengthening Efficiency and Access to Justice in Moldova" (A2J), implemented by UNDP Moldova with financial support of Sweden."

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ABBREVIATIONS

HIV	Human immunodeficiency Virus
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NLAC	National Legal Aid Council
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a 2024 survey reviewing access to justice in the Republic of Moldova through a people-centred approach. The primary objective was to assess the needs and experiences of individuals in navigating the justice system, alongside their perceptions of its fairness, accessibility, and effectiveness in the past four years.

The study explored the types of legal disputes encountered, their resolution pathways, and the financial, social, and legal impacts on individuals. It also assessed respondents' trust in institutions such as courts, police, and legal aid providers, and their understanding of basic legal rights and provisions. While the general population and user satisfaction surveys revealed valuable insights into systemic obstacles, qualitative methods, such as focus groups, provided a deeper understanding of the barriers faced by vulnerable populations, including ethnic minorities, rural residents, and victims of domestic violence.

THE DIVERSE AND PERVASIVE NATURE OF LEGAL DISPUTES

The analysis reveals that legal disputes are both frequent and varied among the Moldovan citizens, with nearly one-third (31.6%) of respondents experiencing at least one dispute in the past four years. The most common disputes involve neighbours (17.3%) and social welfare or public services (12.6%), followed by police-related issues, employment, and land disputes. Patterns vary across demographic and socio-economic groups, with rural residents, men, and individuals with higher income levels reporting a higher prevalence of disputes. Lower-income individuals are disproportionately affected by disputes related to social welfare, domestic violence, and housing, highlighting the intersection of economic vulnerability and legal challenges. Disputes had substantial impacts, with over half of the participants citing significant or severe consequences, including health problems (35.8%), financial costs (34.2%), and damaged relationships (31.5%), while 5.4% of legal disputes escalated to physical violence. These findings underscore the critical need for targeted reforms to address systemic inequities and enhance access to justice for all citizens.

LIMITED PURSUIT, EVEN MORE LIMITED RESOLUTION IN LEGAL DISPUTES

The findings reveal a complex landscape of legal dispute resolution in Moldova, marked by diverse approaches and varying levels of satisfaction with the institutions involved. While a majority of disputants seek initial advice from trusted individuals (59.6%) or institutions (63.1%), the effectiveness of this guidance varies significantly. Institutions like the police and lawyers are perceived as relatively helpful, while local public authorities and other formal bodies often fall short of users' expectations.

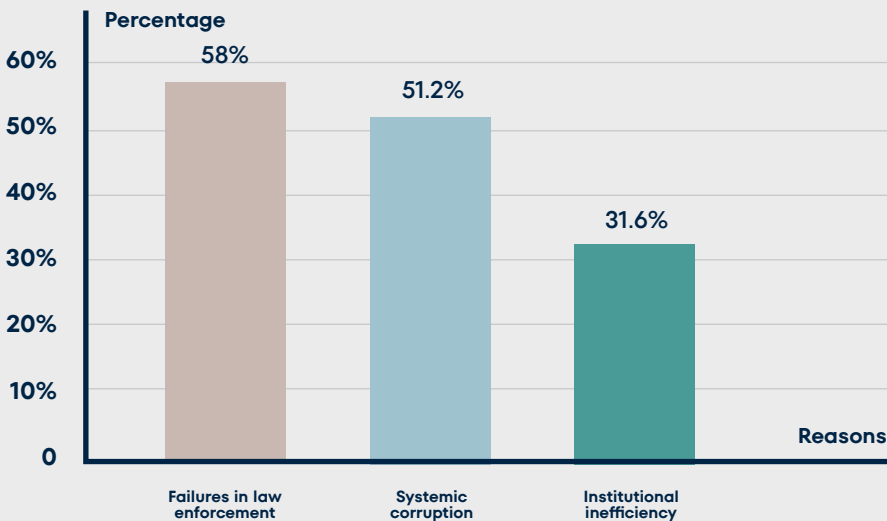
A significant proportion of respondents (55.8%) attempt to resolve disputes directly with the other party, and 41.9% report successful outcomes through these efforts. However, 57.1% of disputes remain unresolved through direct negotiation or self-action, forcing some disputants to turn to third parties. Yet, only 28.6% of all disputants ultimately seek institutional or social network support, with wealthier individuals and women more likely to do so than poorer respondents and men.

Notaries and mediators stand out as the most effective and user-friendly institutions, receiving high marks for fairness, efficiency, and respectfulness. Conversely, core justice sector institutions, such as courts, police, and local public authorities, and especially court administrations, are often criticized for inefficiency, bias, and even corruption, with 19.4% of court users reporting suggestions of informal payments or favours. Alarming, 37.5% of disputants who engaged with institutions gave up on resolving their disputes, reflecting significant systemic barriers. These findings underscore the urgent need for reforms to enhance institutional efficiency, fairness, and accessibility, particularly for marginalised groups.

SIGNIFICANT DISTRUST IN MOLDOVA'S JUSTICE SYSTEM

The findings reveal widespread distrust in Moldova's justice system, with 44.6% of respondents expressing little or no confidence, and only 11.2% reporting high levels of trust. Distrust is most pronounced among men, urban residents, older individuals, and those experiencing economic hardship, with the lowest levels of trust observed among the poorest respondents and residents of Chisinau. Key factors contributing to this distrust include perceived failures in law enforcement (58%), systemic corruption (51.2%), and institutional inefficiency (31.6%). Courts, prosecution services, and police emerge as the least trusted institutions, whereas notary services and local public authorities are relatively more trusted, attributed to perceptions of fairness and independence. Notably, individuals who directly engage with justice institutions report higher levels of trust, suggesting a gap between public perceptions and user experiences.

MAIN REASONS FOR DISTRUST



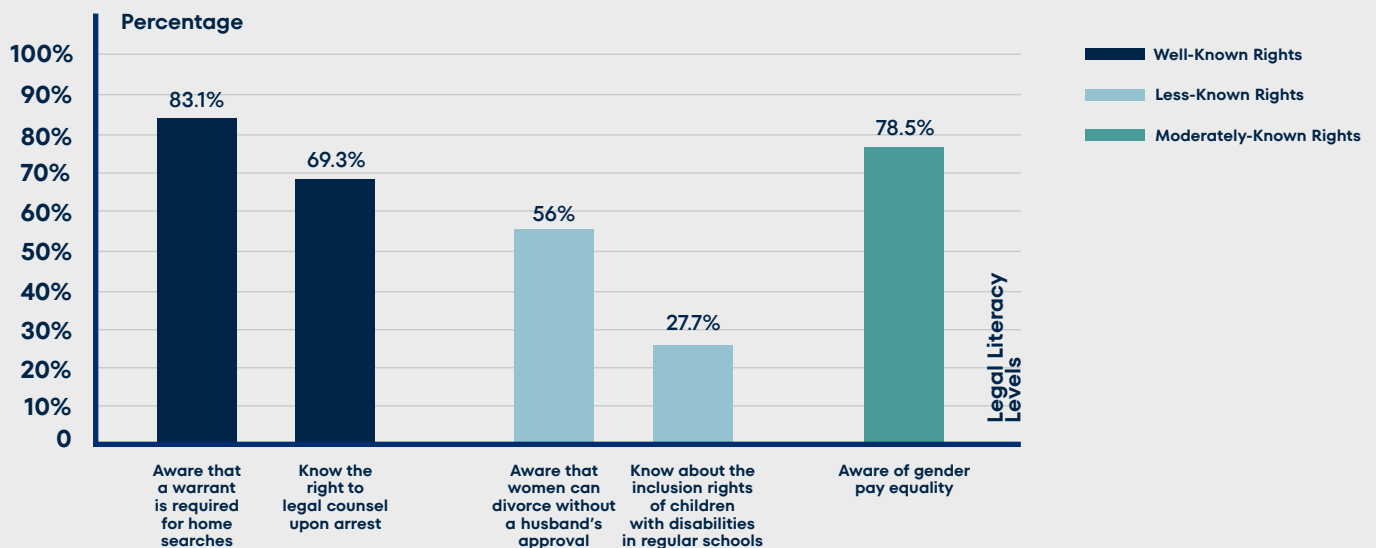
TRUST LEVELS IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM



VARYING LEVELS OF LEGAL KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS

The findings highlight significant disparities in legal literacy among Moldovan citizens, with varying levels of awareness across key legal provisions. While a majority demonstrate strong knowledge of procedural rights, such as the requirement for a warrant in home searches (83.1%) and the right to legal counsel upon arrest (69.3%), understanding of other areas remains limited. Notably, only 27.7% correctly identified the inclusion rights of children with disabilities in regular education, and just 56% were aware of women's right to divorce without a husband's approval. In contrast, broader awareness of gender equality in pay (78.5%) reflects higher familiarity with this aspect of legal rights. Education and economic status emerged as critical determinants of legal knowledge, with higher awareness among more educated and wealthier individuals.

LEGAL LITERACY LEVELS AMONG MOLDOVAN CITIZENS



JUSTICE DENIED: CHALLENGES FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

Vulnerable groups in Moldova face significant and multifaceted barriers to accessing justice, rooted in systemic inefficiencies, discrimination, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. Across all groups, a pervasive lack of trust in legal institutions is evident, driven by perceived bias, inefficiency, corruption, and a lack of accountability. Plurality of research participants report dismissive or hostile treatment by law enforcement and legal professionals, further eroding confidence in the justice system. Limited knowledge of legal rights and processes is a recurring challenge, particularly for ethnic minorities, refugees, IDPs, and persons with disabilities, with language barriers exacerbating these difficulties for non-Romanian speakers. Geographic isolation and poor infrastructure compound these issues for residents of rural and security zones, creating logistical and financial obstacles to accessing legal services.

Specific forms of discrimination also emerge, with LGBTIQ+ individuals, religious minorities, and people living with HIV facing stigma that affects their interactions with justice institutions and their broader societal standing. The physical inaccessibility of courts and legal offices disproportionately affects persons with disabilities, while systemic inefficiencies and prolonged delays deter victims of domestic violence and other vulnerable groups from pursuing justice. Informal networks and NGO support play a vital role in filling these gaps, providing legal assistance, emotional support, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. However, these informal systems often lack the authority to resolve complex legal disputes, leaving many without durable solutions.

The findings underscore the urgent need for tailored reforms to address the unique challenges faced by the general population and notably vulnerable population groups. This includes improving accessibility, promoting cultural and procedural sensitivity, reducing systemic bias, and strengthening the capacity of justice institutions to deliver fair and equitable outcomes for all.

INTRODUCTION

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND JUDICIAL REFORM OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

The Republic of Moldova, a small landlocked country in Eastern Europe, is bordered by Romania to the west and Ukraine to the north, east, and south. Gaining independence¹ in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moldova has since navigated a complex socio-political landscape shaped by a diverse population, historical ties, and a strategic geopolitical position.

Moldova ranks among the poorest countries in Europe, with an economy heavily reliant on agriculture.² Approximately two-thirds of its 2.4 million people are of Romanian descent, sharing substantial cultural and historical connections with Romania. Although Romanian is the official language, Russian has the status of the language of “interethnic communication”, and other languages, including Bulgarian, Gagauz, and Ukrainian, are also widely spoken. Moldova's capital, Chisinau, serves as the country's administrative and cultural hub, with Moldova encompassing an area of 33,851 square kilometres.

A prominent aspect of Moldova's history is linked to Transnistria, the industrialised region east of the Dniester River. Previously an autonomous area within Ukraine before 1940, Transnistria merged with Bessarabia to form the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic during the Soviet rule. Predominantly inhabited by Russian and Ukrainian speakers, Transnistria declared independence in 1990 amid concerns over Moldova's developing ties with Romania, leading to a 'frozen conflict' that remains unresolved and continues to challenge Moldova's sovereignty and security.³

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has deepened Moldova's internal divisions, increasing fears of instability and the risk of a crisis. Nevertheless, Moldova's government is engaged in an ambitious reform effort aimed at EU integration. A key part of this process has been the effort to strengthen the rule of law, including the justice sector.

1. Government of the Republic of Moldova, n.d. *About the Republic of Moldova*. [online] Available at: <https://moldova.md/en/content/about-republic-moldova> [Accessed on 14 October 2024].

2. Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d. *Moldova*. [online] Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Moldova> [Accessed on 14 October 2024].

3. BBC News, 2023. *Moldova country profile*. [online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17601580> [Accessed on 14 October 2024].

JUSTICE SECTOR REFORM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND ITS PERCEPTION

Operating under a constitutional framework, Moldova's justice system is comprised of institutions including the courts, prosecution services, notaries, bailiffs, legal aid providers, and law enforcement agencies. It relies on the judiciary as the primary institution for upholding the rule of law. The judiciary is structured across three tiers: district courts, courts of appeal, and the Supreme Court of Justice. An independent Constitutional Court ensures that national laws adhere to constitutional standards. Prosecution services and law enforcement agencies, including the police, work in tandem with the judiciary to uphold legal rulings.

However, despite these formal structures, the justice sector in Moldova has long struggled with pervasive issues of corruption, inefficiency, and political interference. As a result, it has been the focus of extensive reform and international attention over the past decade, particularly as the country seeks closer alignment with the European standards.

The reform efforts, initiated with the adoption of the *Strategy for Ensuring Independence and Integrity of the Justice Sector for 2022-2025*, aim to create a system that is independent, transparent, and effective in delivering justice to its citizens. A prominent example of justice sector reform is the establishment of the Pre-Vetting Commission.⁴ Launched in 2021, this effort seeks to strengthen judicial integrity by ensuring that only qualified and ethical individuals retain positions within the judiciary.

In addition, efforts toward court digitalisation and efficiency have focused on improving judicial productivity through digital tools. These reforms include the expansion of online case management systems and the implementation of virtual court hearings, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although these measures have helped reduce case backlogs and streamline judicial processes, challenges remain concerning digital literacy and access, particularly in rural areas.

Reforms have also targeted the strengthening of legal aid services to improve access to justice for vulnerable populations. The Legal Aid System, overseen by the National Legal Aid Council (NLAC), has expanded in recent years to offer more comprehensive support to low-income and marginalised groups. In 2024, Moldova introduced mandatory mediation within the state-guaranteed legal aid system, aimed at reducing court backlogs and promoting quicker, more amicable dispute resolution. Under this policy, parties in civil and family disputes are required to attempt mediation before proceeding to court. Mediation fees are covered by the state for those eligible for legal aid, ensuring broader access to justice and supporting alternative dispute resolution.

4. Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Moldova, 2021. *Draft Strategy for Ensuring Independence and Integrity of the Justice Sector for 2022-2025*. [online] Available at: https://www.justice.gov.md/public/files/directia_analiza_monitorizare_si_evaluate_a_politicilor/EN_Draft_Strategy_Ensuring_Independence_Integrity_of_Justice_Sector_2021-2024.pdf [Accessed on 14 October 2024].

This initiative is intended to ease the burden on Moldova's judiciary but also fosters a more cooperative legal culture, encouraging out-of-court resolutions that reduce both costs and delays.

Still, the transformation of a justice system is inherently challenging, particularly when efforts for reform confront entrenched interests and complex political realities. Despite the stated objectives of promoting judicial independence and enhancing transparency, the reform process has encountered criticism, delays, and questions regarding its effectiveness.⁵

The previously collected data on public trust in the Moldovan justice system reflect troubling trends – low levels of trust in the judiciary, the prosecution service and the police. Further, recent analyses of Moldova's justice sector indicate that perceptions of corruption remain deeply entrenched. According to the 2023 Rule of Law Index, Moldova ranks low as the judiciary and law enforcement are seen as particularly compromised. Efforts to address corruption have been inconsistent, often stalling due to political resistance or weak enforcement mechanisms.⁶

The latest Public Opinion Barometer provides additional insights into Moldovans' perceptions of the justice system.⁷ According to the survey, over 70% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with how courts handle cases, citing lengthy delays, high costs, and perceived biases. Similarly, a significant portion of the population believes that judicial decisions are influenced by powerful business and political actors, further eroding trust in the system's impartiality. Although legal aid services are available, they are viewed as inadequate, especially in rural areas where access to qualified legal professionals remains scarce.⁸

A PEOPLE-CENTRED APPROACH

As Moldova progresses beyond 2024, justice sector reform remains a central element of the country's EU integration ambitions. Yet, the success of these reforms remains uncertain. Although the Strategy for Ensuring Independence and Integrity of the Justice Sector is scheduled to conclude in 2025, the deep-rooted issues within the justice system are unlikely to be resolved merely by the end of a strategic timeline.

Transforming the justice system is a long-term endeavour that requires not only political commitment but also genuine insulation from vested interests and a consistent adherence to the rule of law.

5. Popil, A. and Ermurachi, A., 2024. *Efforts to implement justice reform in the Republic of Moldova*. [online] IPRE. Available at: <https://ipre.md/2024/06/19/eforturile-de-implementare-a-reformei-justitiei-in-republica-moldova-op-ed-de-angela-popil-si-andrian-ermurachi/?lang=en> [Accessed on 14 October 2024].

6. World Justice Project, 2023. *Rule of Law Index: Moldova - Absence of Corruption*. [online] Available at: <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2023/Moldova/Absence%20of%20Corruption/> [Accessed on 14 October 2024].

7. Institute for Public Policy, n.d. *Public Opinion Barometer*. [online] Available at: <http://bop.ipp.md/en> [Accessed on 14 October 2024].

8. Ibid

To effectively address the remaining gaps within Moldova's justice system, and to address the widespread scepticism among the public of justice reform efforts, a shift towards a people-centred justice approach is required. This approach would extend beyond evaluating the performance of individual institutions and instead focus on improving the experiences of citizens with legal disputes, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds. A people-centred perspective would also prioritise reforms that transcend institutional boundaries, fostering cooperation among courts, legal aid, law enforcement, and social services to collectively address the needs of justice users.

While targeted reforms in the judiciary, prosecution, and legal aid systems are crucial, the absence of a comprehensive, user-centred approach has left many systemic issues unresolved. A shift towards holistic, people-centred reforms—aimed at creating a justice system that is accessible, fair, and responsive to citizens' needs—is vital for the sustainable transformation in Moldova's justice sector. This survey is an important step in charting the justice needs of Moldova's citizens, which will enable the policymakers to measure the effectiveness of their efforts to improve citizens' experiences in resolving their disputes.

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE SURVEY

This report presents the findings of a survey conducted in 2024 to review access to justice in the Republic of Moldova through a people-centred approach. The primary objective of the survey was to explore and assess the needs and experiences of individuals in Moldova in accessing justice, as well as their perceptions of the justice system.

To achieve this objective, the research focused on five key aspects of access to justice in Moldova:

JUSTICE NEEDS OF THE POPULATION

The research investigated the types of legal disputes individuals in Moldova had encountered over the past four years, categorising these disputes by subject-matter and the opposing party involved. This aspect provided a comprehensive understanding of the legal needs and challenges faced by the population.

EXPERIENCES IN ACCESSING JUSTICE

The research further examined the pathways respondents pursued to address their disputes and legal issues. It identified five main strategies: seeking assistance from social networks (family, friends, neighbours, and others), engaging justice sector institutions (courts, police, prosecutors, and others), addressing the other party to the dispute, undertaking self-help actions, or taking no action. The analysis covered both processes and outcomes, evaluating how fair, respectful, and transparent the dispute resolution experiences were.

It also considered the financial and time costs involved, the efficiency of processes, and their social, economic, and legal impacts on respondents. Finally, it assessed the fairness, satisfaction levels, and enforcement of outcomes.

TRUST IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

The research explored the respondents' levels of trust in various justice sector institutions and actors involved in dispute resolution. These included courts, police, prosecutors, legal aid providers, the Ombudsperson, the Equality Council, mediation services, notaries, bailiffs, and local public authorities. Respondents were also asked to elaborate on the reasons underpinning their levels of trust or distrust.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAW

The survey examined respondents' understanding of basic legal provisions and their perceptions of justice, particularly in relation to citizens' rights. This provided a baseline for understanding how individuals conceptualise justice and approach their legal problems.

The first four aspects were assessed through a general population survey and a series of user satisfaction surveys targeting individuals who had interacted with justice institutions. While these methods generated valuable insights and highlighted significant obstacles to accessing justice for both the general population and institutional users, they had limited capacity to capture the experiences of certain vulnerable groups.

EXPERIENCES OF VULNERABLE GROUPS IN ACCESSING JUSTICE

The fifth aspect addressed the specific experiences of vulnerable groups, including the LGBTIQ+ community, ethnic minorities, the Roma community, refugees, internally displaced persons, rural and security zone residents, religious minorities, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV, and victims of domestic violence. These groups often face unique barriers to accessing justice due to their identities, living conditions, or circumstances. To explore their experiences in greater depth, the research employed qualitative methods, such as focus groups. This approach enabled the collection of nuanced data on the specific challenges and constraints these groups encounter when seeking justice.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating a household survey of the general population, a series of satisfaction surveys with users of specific justice institutions, and focus groups with vulnerable populations regarding their experiences with access to justice in Moldova. The quantitative and qualitative components complemented each other, facilitating a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of access to justice and related issues, which formed the basis for the findings presented in this report. The research activities took place between April and September 2024.

For a full overview of the methodology, please see Appendix 1.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GENERAL POPULATION SURVEY SAMPLE

- ▶ A total of 3,066 individuals aged 18 and over were interviewed in the household survey between April and August 2024. The sample, representative of the general population, covered 35 rayons across the country;
- ▶ Among the respondents, 1,722 (56.2%) were from rural areas, while 1,344 (43.8%) resided in urban areas;
- ▶ Women constituted a larger portion of the sample, with 1,724 respondents (56.2%) compared to 1,342 men (43.8%);
- ▶ The most represented age group was those aged 60 and over, comprising 1,134 individuals (37%). This was followed by respondents aged 40 to 49 (17.5%), 30 to 39 (17.2%), 50 to 59 (16.1%), and 18 to 29 (12.2%);
- ▶ The majority of respondents were educated to at least an incomplete higher or higher education level (26.2%) or had completed high school or professional school (24.5%). Additionally, 24.4% had completed secondary education (up to grade 10), 7.3% had completed primary education, and only 1.0% had no education or incomplete primary education;
- ▶ Financially, the largest group of respondents (34.8%) reported having enough resources to buy food, clothing, and small household appliances, while 16.2% could afford larger household appliances. Meanwhile, 23.0% had only enough funds for food, 9.1% struggled to afford food, and 2.9% reported no material difficulties.

SAMPLE BREAKDOWNS OF A SEPARATE SATISFACTION SURVEY WITH USERS OF JUSTICE INSTITUTIONS

The selection of survey participants among the users of justice sector institutions (which were separate from the larger household survey, mentioned above) was based on a combination of convenience and quota (non-probability) sampling among individuals using justice institution services across the country. Seven separate surveys of users of justice sector institutions were conducted, targeting users who had interacted with courts, police, bailiffs, notary services, mediation, free legal aid, and the Ombudsperson.

- ▶ A total of 555 individuals participated in the seven surveys. Among them, 30.6% were users of notary services, 19.6% had used bailiff services, and an additional 19.6% accessed free legal aid. Furthermore, 18.7% had interacted with the police, while 14% were court users. Lastly, 8.8% of participants had used the services of the Ombudsperson, and 2.5% had accessed mediation services;
- ▶ Female representation was slightly higher than male representation across most surveys, with the exception of the bailiffs' user satisfaction survey;
- ▶ Urban residents made up the majority of participants in the user satisfaction surveys, with more than two-thirds of the sample coming from cities, as compared to those from rural areas.

BREAKDOWN OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH SAMPLE

- ▶ A total of 66 individuals participated in 10 focus groups held between April and September 2024;
- ▶ Participants in the focus groups were drawn from vulnerable population groups, including the LGBTIQ+ community, ethnic minorities, the Roma community, refugees and internally displaced persons, rural and security zone residents, religious minorities, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV, and victims of domestic violence. Altogether, 10 categories of vulnerable social groups were included, selected based on various forms of social exclusion and stigmatisation, as well as personal characteristics such as gender, age, sexual orientation, health status, and socio-economic background. The average number of participants per focus group was six;
- ▶ The focus groups consisted of 17 men and 49 women. The focus groups were held in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova (both in offline and online formats).

TABLE 1. BREAKDOWN OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH SAMPLE.

Focus group category	Male	Female	Total
LGBTIQ+ population	2	5	7
Ethnic minorities	3	6	9
Roma community	2	5	7
Refugees and internally displaced persons	1	4	5
Residents of rural areas	4	7	11
Residents of security zones	1	4	5
Religious minorities	2	5	7
Persons with disabilities	1	4	5
People living with HIV	1	4	5
Victims of domestic violence	0	5	5
TOTAL	17	49	66

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE SELECTED METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Several limitations impacted the data collection process and, consequently, the research findings, which should be carefully considered.

Firstly, although the general survey sample was selected based on a target of 3,000 respondents, due to resource limitations, the analysis suggests that a larger sample could have yielded more significant insights. This is particularly relevant for the relatively small proportion of respondents who reported disputes and shared their experiences with the dispute resolution process. While the general population survey results are statistically valid and fall within an acceptable margin of error for similar surveys, a larger sample might have allowed for a more nuanced exploration of responses than is present in this report.

Secondly, the lack of representativeness in the surveys examining justice institution users' satisfaction relates to the research objectives and the sampling approach used in this stage. Quota and convenience and convenience non-probability sampling methods were employed to gain insights into user experiences within specific justice institutions rather than to achieve a representative sample of the general population, institutional users, or specific subgroups such as vulnerable populations. This approach aimed to provide detailed insights into user experiences with the justice system and individual institutions, enhancing and correlating findings with the general population survey.

Thirdly, consistency in response rates and adherence to sample quotas across sites were influenced by specific field conditions, including the concurrent implementation of the Republic of Moldova's general population census and this research. These circumstances led to higher refusal rates, hesitancy in sharing experiences, and instances where participants were willing to engage but refrained from answering certain questions.

Fourthly, it proved to be difficult to secure enough respondents that addressed certain institutions (legal aid councils, prosecutors' offices, and the Equality Council) to access justice. As a result, with the sample of users of those institutions being small, quantitative data on their experiences has not been included.

Finally, relatively low participation rates in focus groups involving vulnerable population categories led to quick saturation within specific thematic codes, resulting in less robust qualitative data. Despite strict adherence to ethical guidelines and assurance of anonymity for all participants, some members of vulnerable groups were reluctant to self-identify, which limited the ability to engage a broader range of individuals within certain groups and narrowed the depth of their experiences represented in the findings.

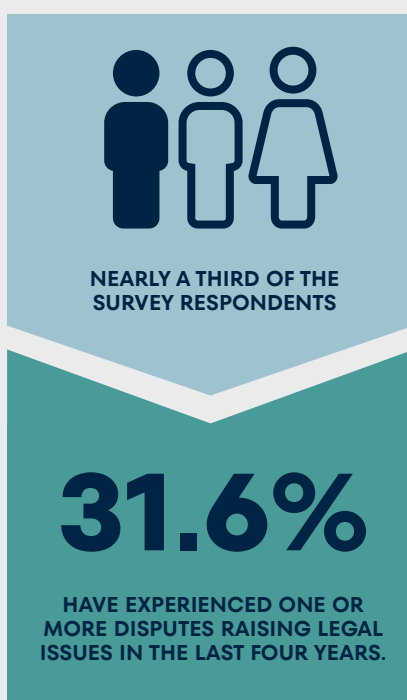


FINDINGS

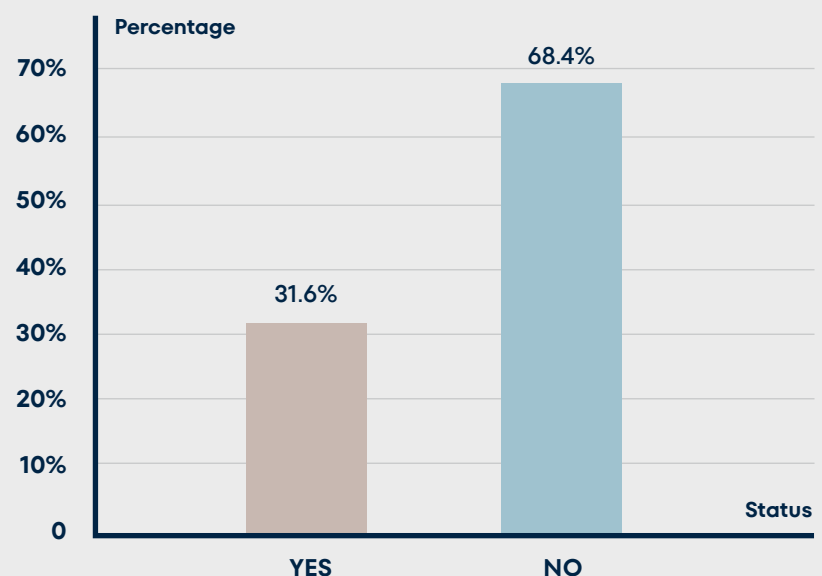
The following sections present the findings of this research, **organised around five key aspects of individuals' experiences with access to justice in Moldova**: the types of disputes encountered, experiences in accessing justice and dispute resolution strategies, levels of trust in justice institutions, knowledge of the law, and the specific experiences of vulnerable population groups in seeking justice.

1. BREAKDOWN OF CITIZENS' LEGAL DISPUTES

This section examines the disputes raising legal issues involving Moldovan citizens, focusing on the characteristics of these disputes, including their subject-matter, the opposing parties, and the types of damages incurred. It provides an overview of this data, with the subsequent chapters dedicated to analysing the means by which these disputes are resolved. At the outset, it is worth noting that 'legal disputes', 'disputes raising legal issues' and 'disputes' are used interchangeably in this report. These terms do not necessarily denote disputes that were resolved by courts or other justice sector institutions (though they encompass such disputes); rather, these are disputes that raise issues of legal rights and obligations, which may – or may not – have been resolved by justice sector institutions, influential individuals, or which may never have been raised in a formal or informal setting by an individual party to the dispute.



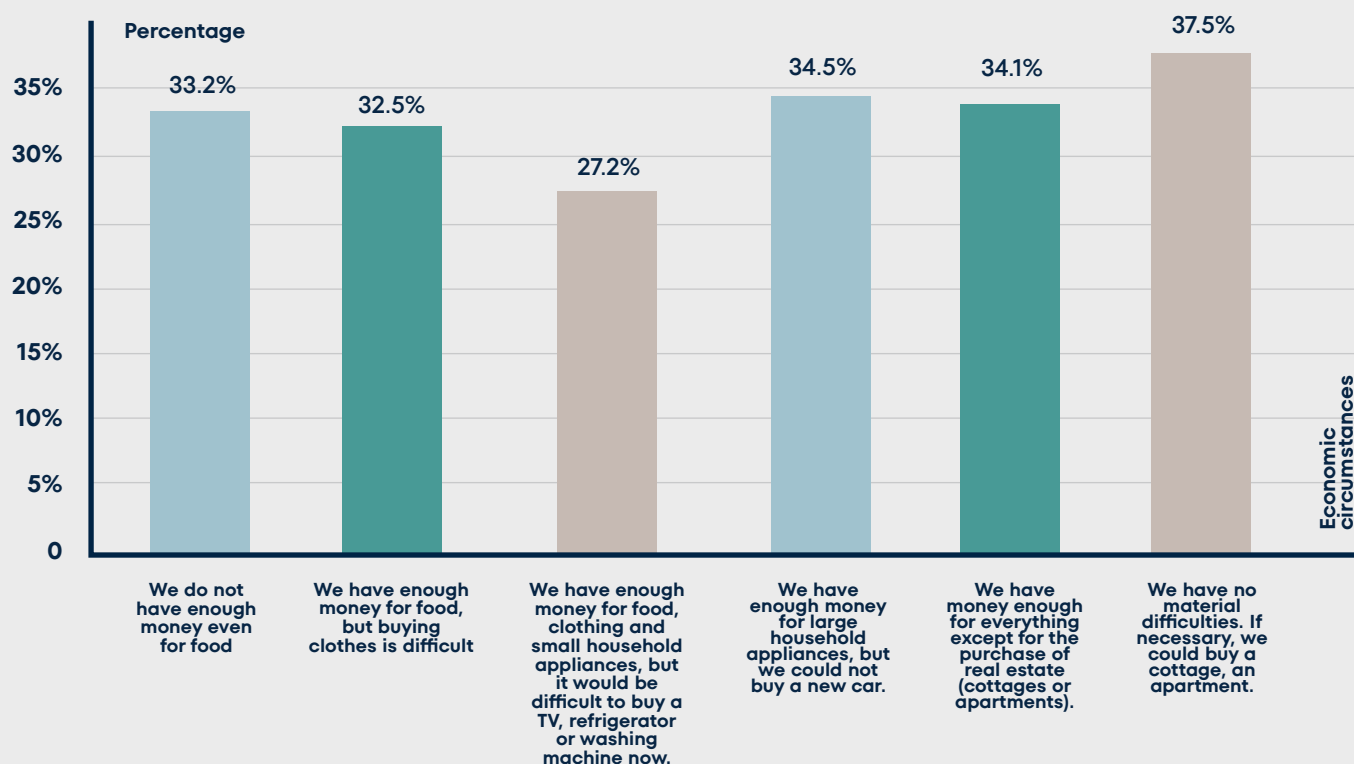
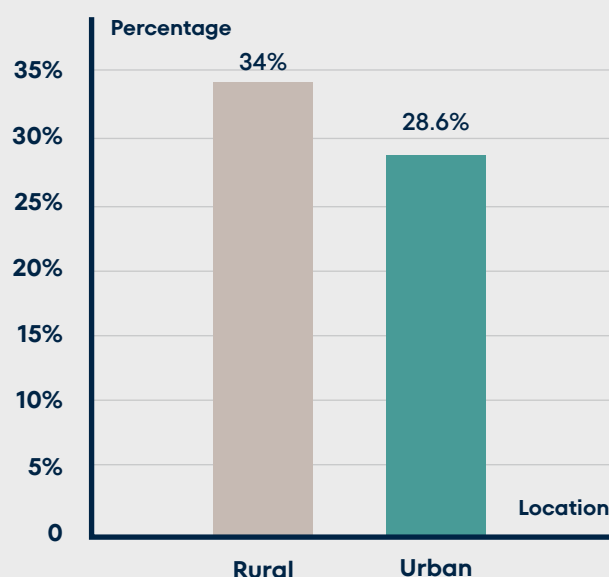
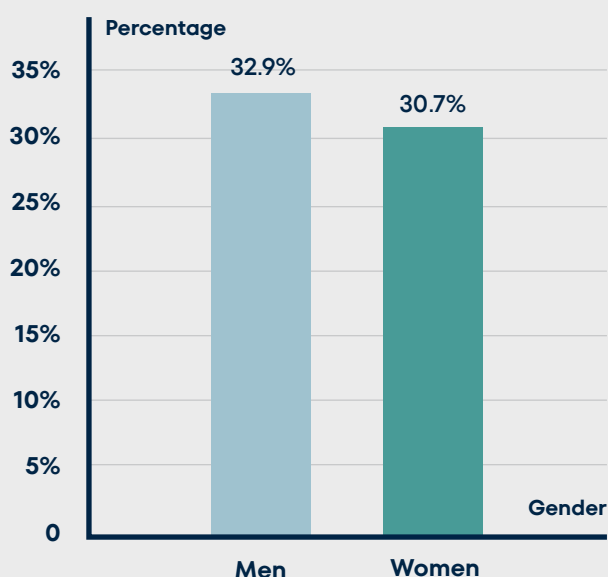
HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED DISPUTES RAISING LEGAL ISSUES IN THE LAST FOUR YEARS (SINCE APRIL 2020)?



Over the past four years, women (30.7%) were slightly less likely to engage in legal disputes than men (32.9%). Furthermore, individuals from rural areas (34%) were slightly more likely to be involved in disputes raising legal issues than their urban counterparts (28.6%). Similarly, those with the highest educational credentials (32.8% for those with higher education) were slightly more likely to experience disputes compared to individuals with lower educational attainment (26.7% for those with incomplete primary education).

Regarding the respondents' economic circumstances, the most best-off individuals were the likeliest to have disputes (37.5%).

I HAVE HAD DISPUTES RAISING LEGAL ISSUES:



Respondents were queried about the types of their legal disputes; these were categorised in simple, easily understandable language for the respondents. **The most frequent category of disputes is focused on disputes between neighbours, with 17.3% of the population having such problems, followed by disputes with social welfare and public services (12.6% of the sample).**

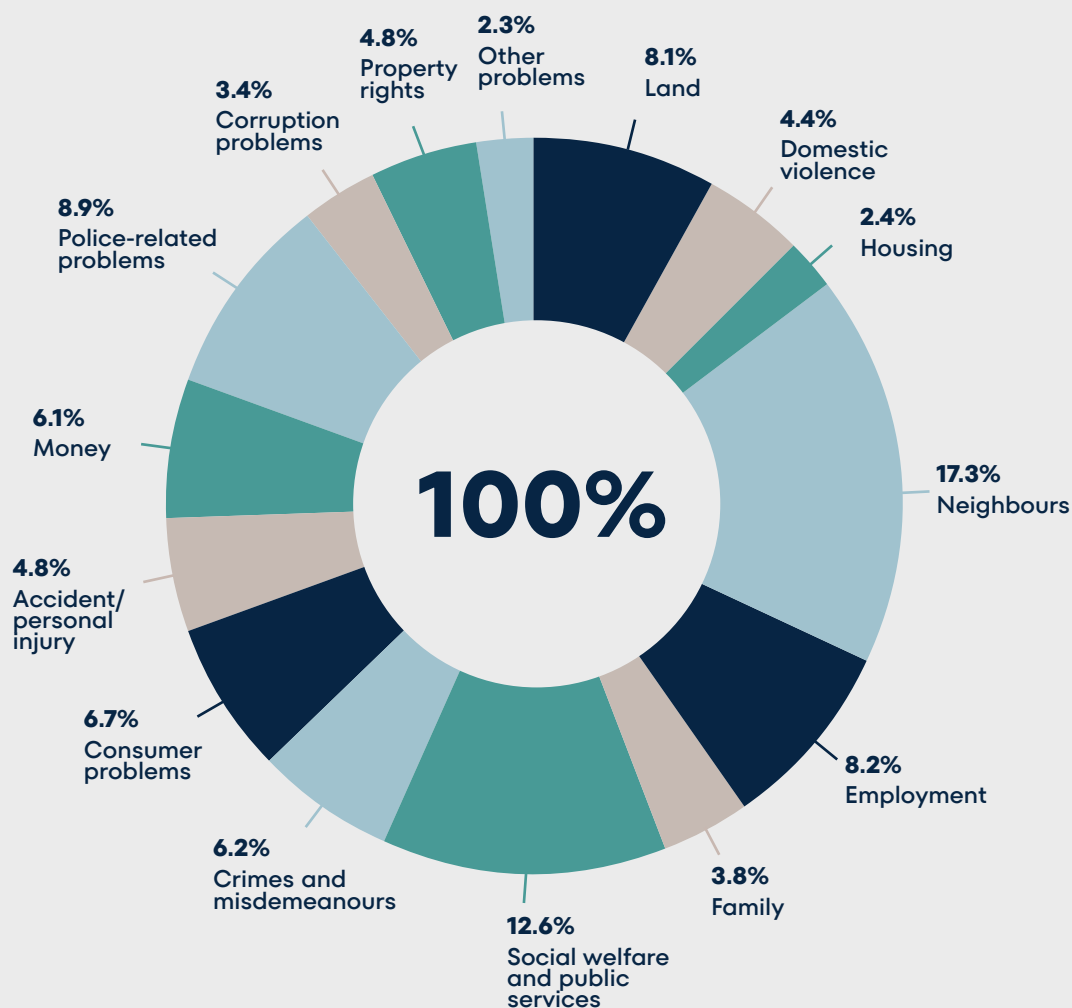
The next most frequent groups of disputes concern police-related problems (8.9%), employment (8.2%) and land issues (8.1%) as their subject-matters.

Another category of disputes among the citizenry were disputes over **consumer problems (6.7%) and money (6.1%)**, while only **6.2% of respondents highlighted crimes and misdemeanours** as the most important dispute they have had. Similarly, **domestic violence represented a problem raising legal issues for only 4.4% of respondents.**

Other, less notable, categories include disputes over accident/personal injury (4.8%) and property rights (4.8%), while a further 3.8% and 2.4% highlighted disputes over family and housing issues as the most important ones. Finally, corruption as a subject-matter of a dispute was reported by only 3.4% of the survey sample. Yet, corruption and domestic violence are frequently under-reported dispute subject-matters in large-scale surveys.

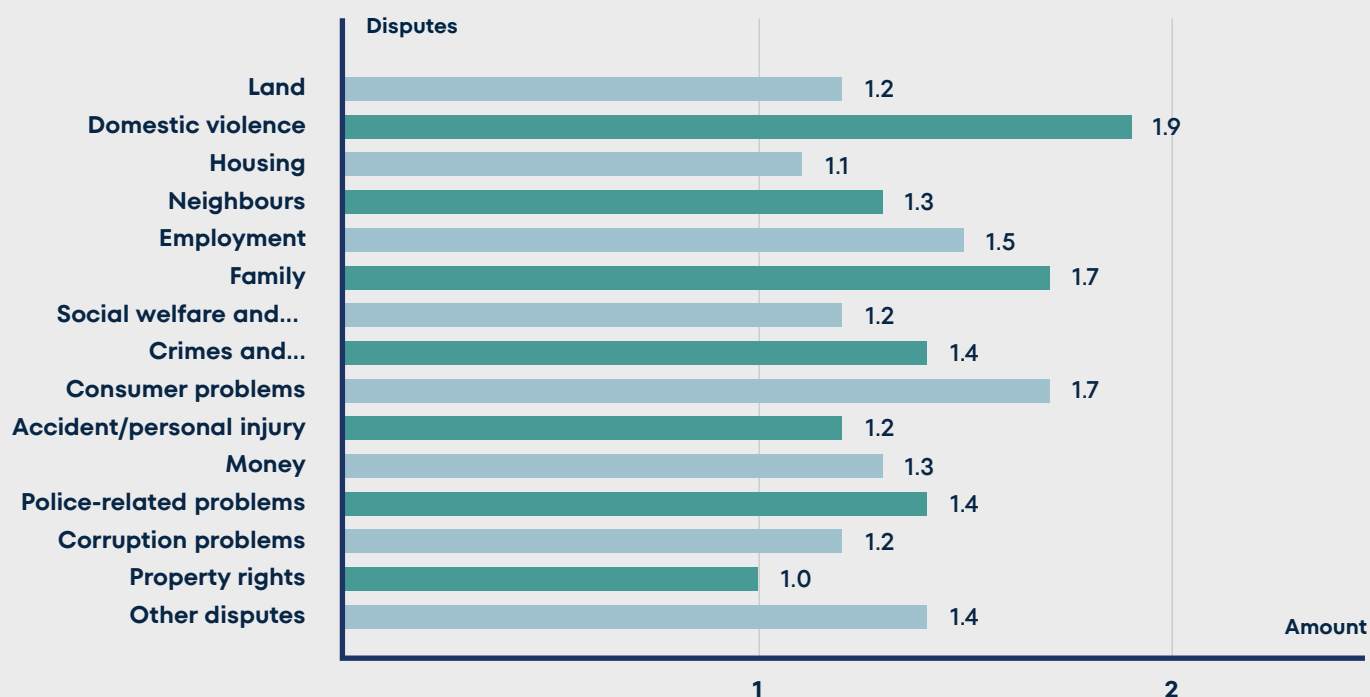


SUBJECT-MATTER OF DISPUTES



The analysis of data indicates that domestic violence as a form of dispute is likeliest to recur. Those reporting disputes on this subject-matter had an average of 1.9 such disputes (NB – of course, there are serious limitations inherent in collecting data about the frequency of domestic and sexual- and gender-based violence, which is presumably under-reported in household surveys such as this one). Other frequently recurring types of disputes involved family members, and disputes over consumer issues (both at 1.7 disputes per disputant on average), followed by employment related disputes (1.5 on average per disputant), crimes and misdemeanours disputes and police-related problems (both at 1.4 disputes per disputant on average).

FIGURE 1. AVERAGE NUMBER OF DISPUTES PER RESPONDENT.

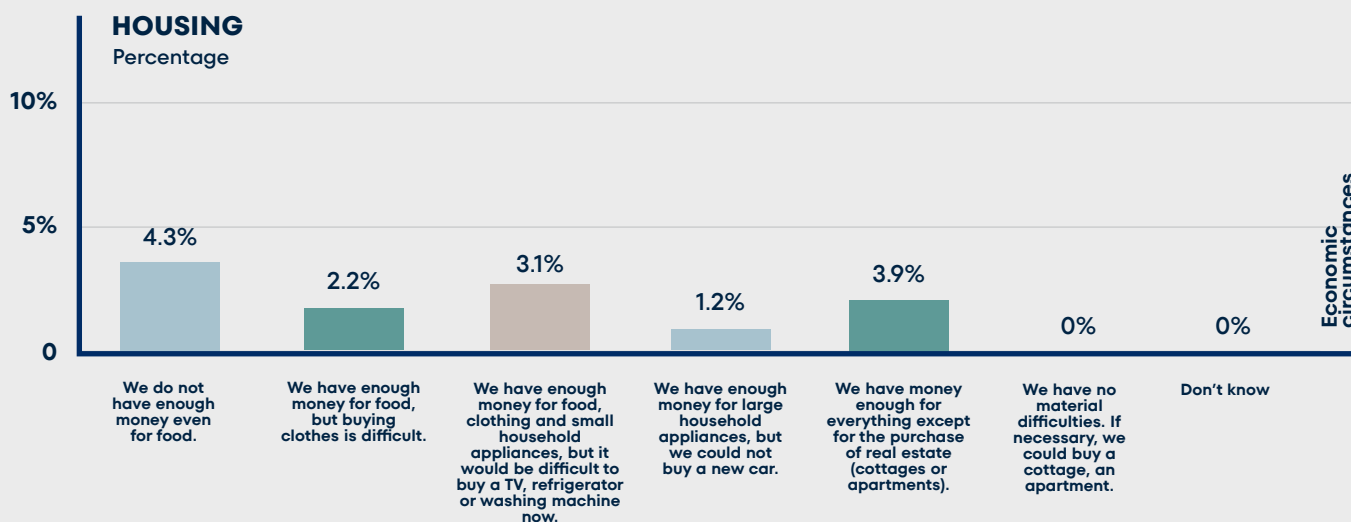
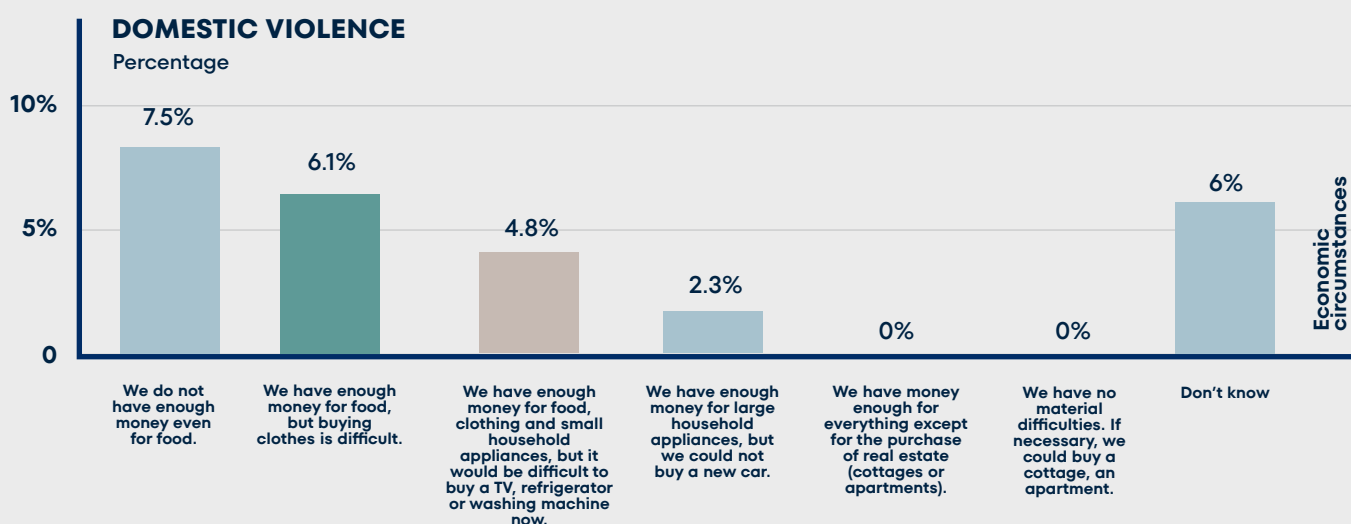
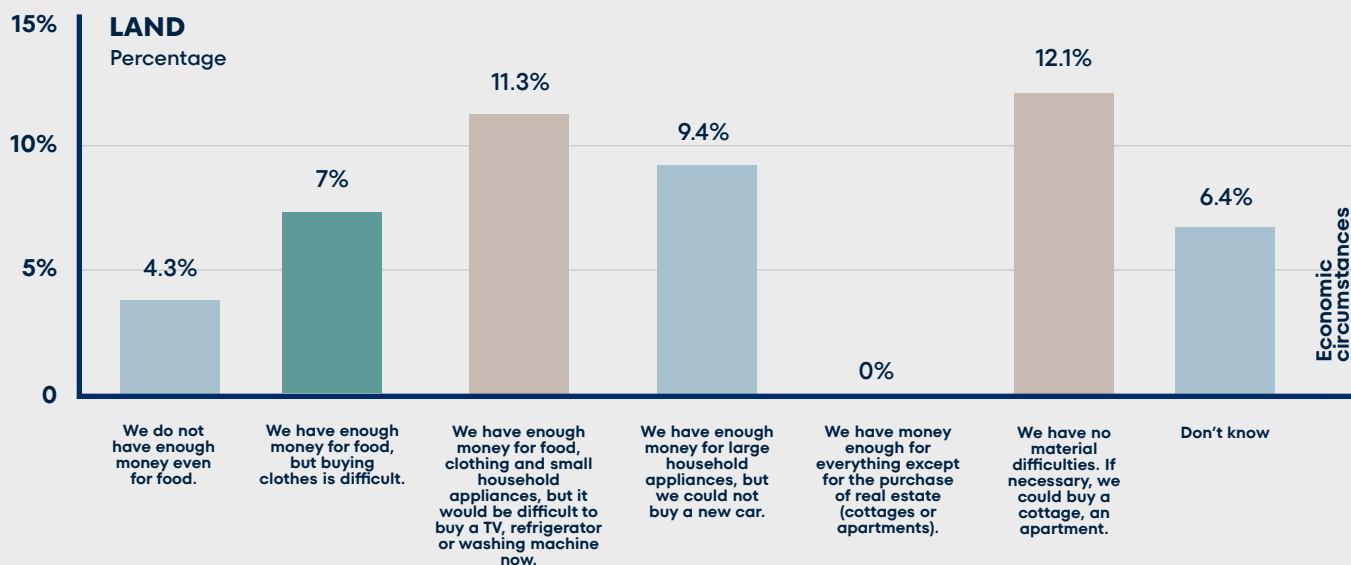


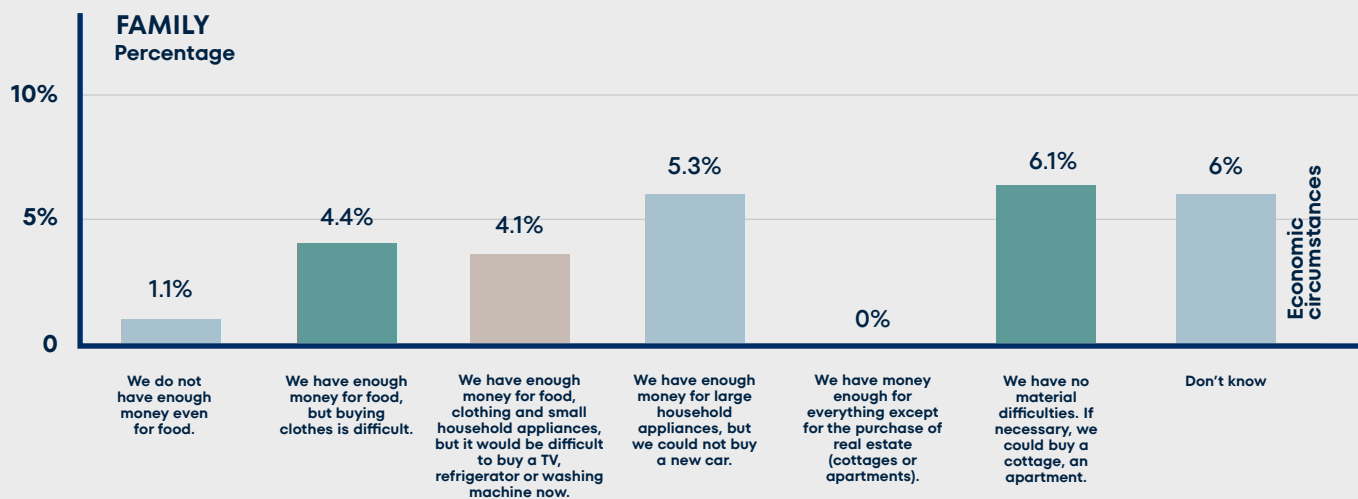
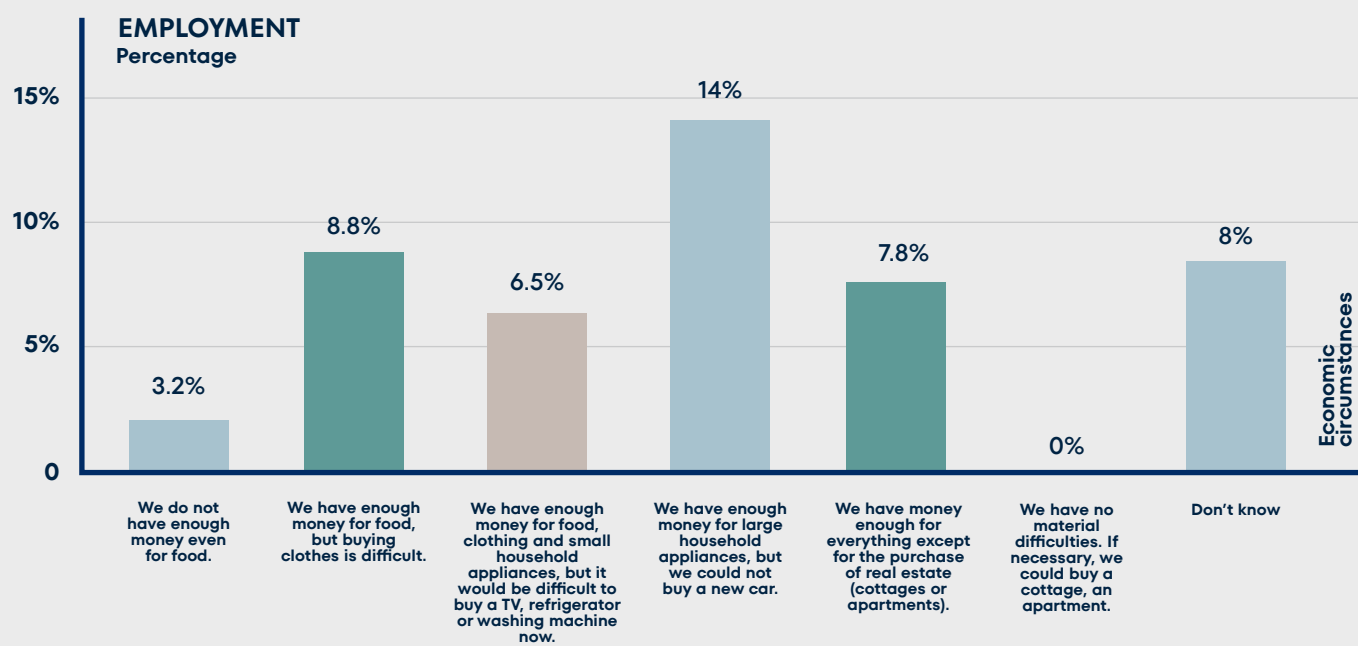
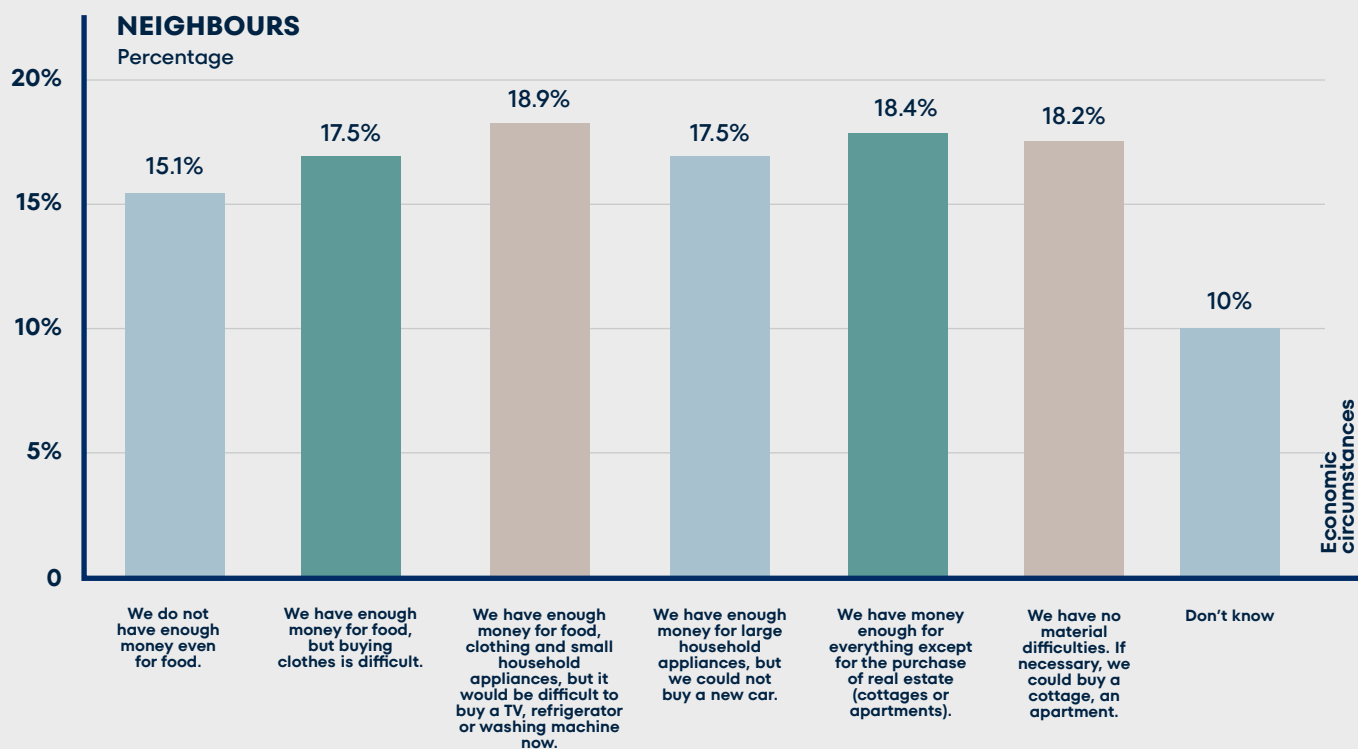
The poorer a person is in Moldova, the likelier they are to have a variety of types of disputes, including over social welfare and public services, domestic violence, housing and police-related problems.

For instance, 7.5% of the poorest respondents (those that describe themselves as not having enough money even for food) indicated domestic violence as their most important dispute, while the same is true of none of those from the wealthiest category (self-described as having no material difficulties). Similarly, nearly a quarter of the poorest respondents had disputes over social welfare and public services (23.7%), while only 12.1% of the wealthiest respondents indicated such disputes as most important.

Additionally, while the poorest segment of the population reported disputes with neighbours as the second most common type of conflict they encountered (15.1%), this issue was even more prevalent among other economic brackets, with those in wealthier strata being the most affected.

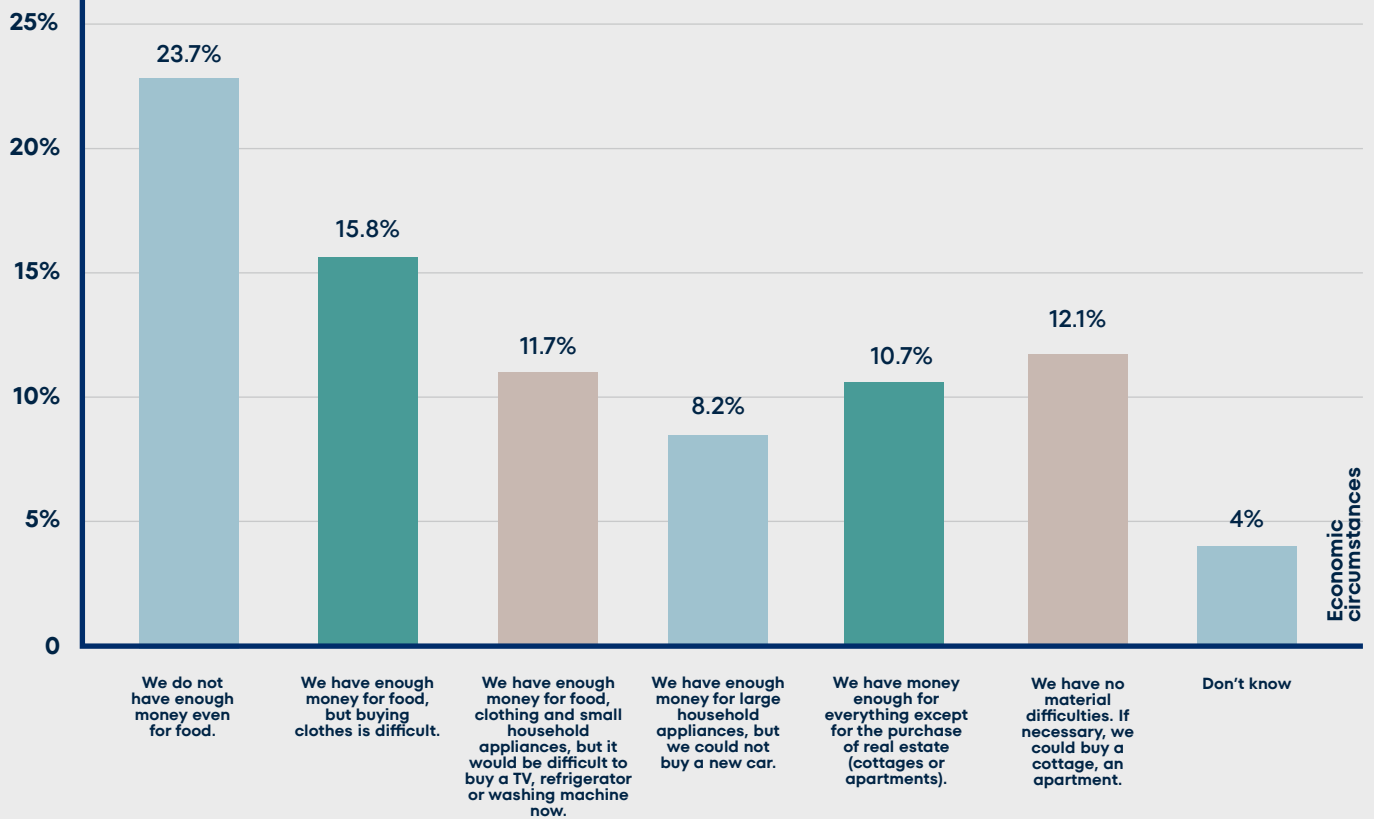
FREQUENCY OF DISPUTES (BY %): SUBJECT-MATTER OF DISPUTES – BY LEVELS OF WEALTH.





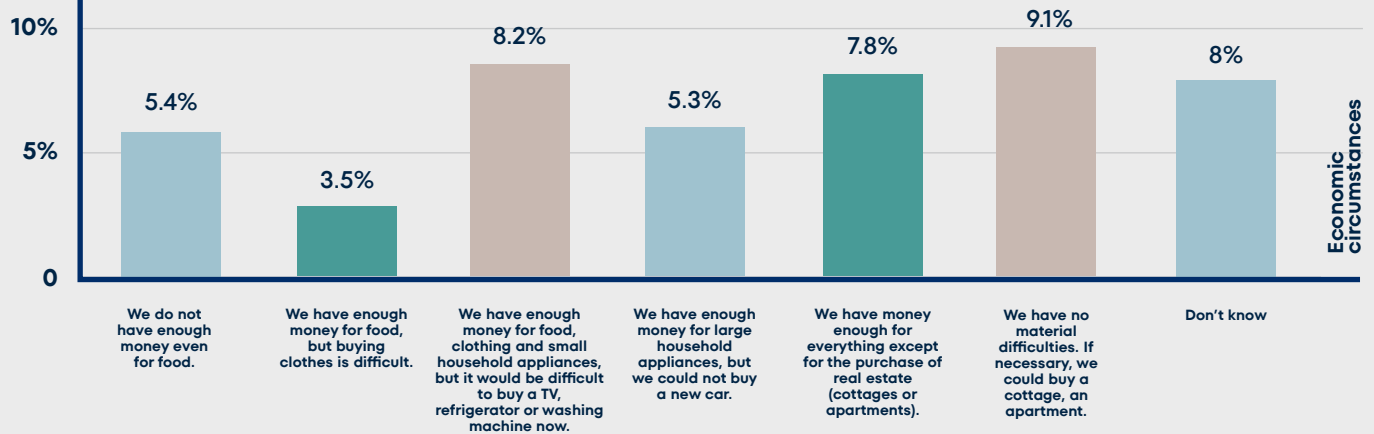
SOCIAL WELFARE AND PUBLIC SERVICES

Percentage



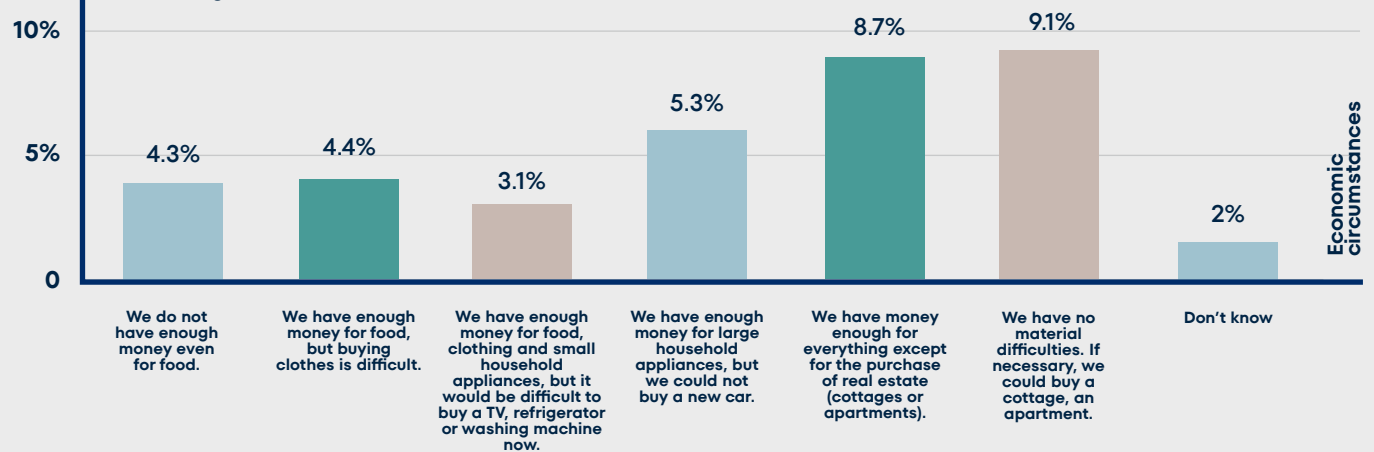
CRIMES AND MISDEMEANOURS

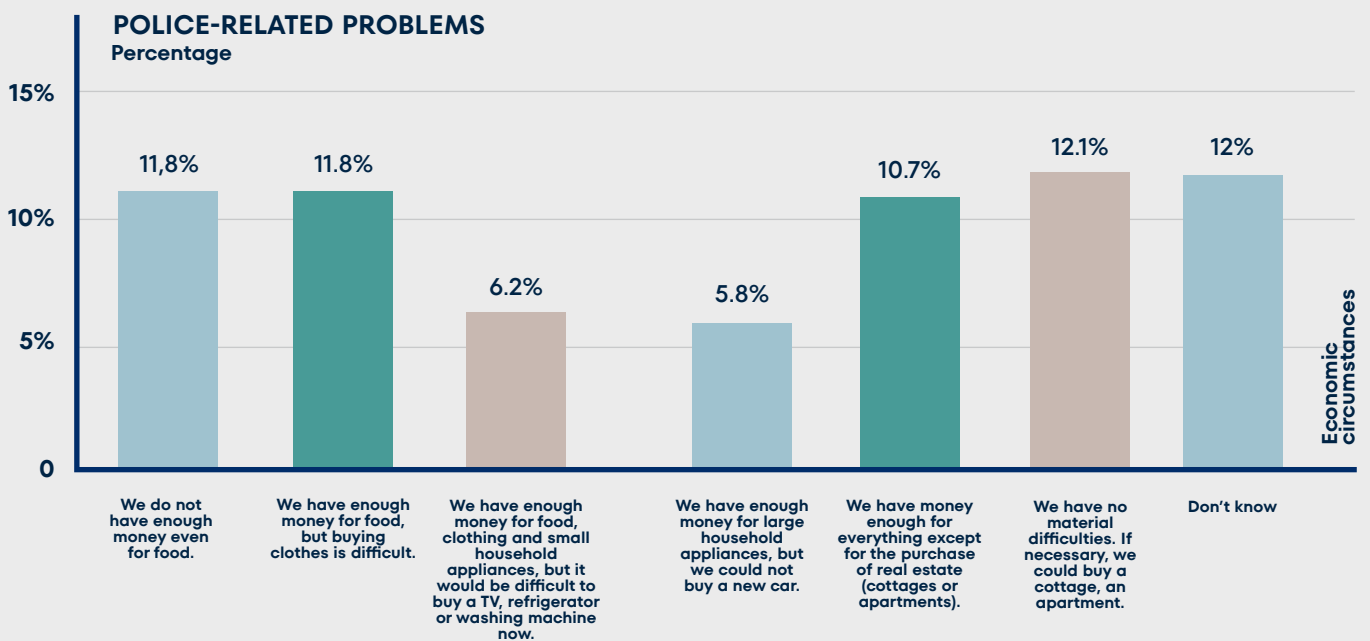
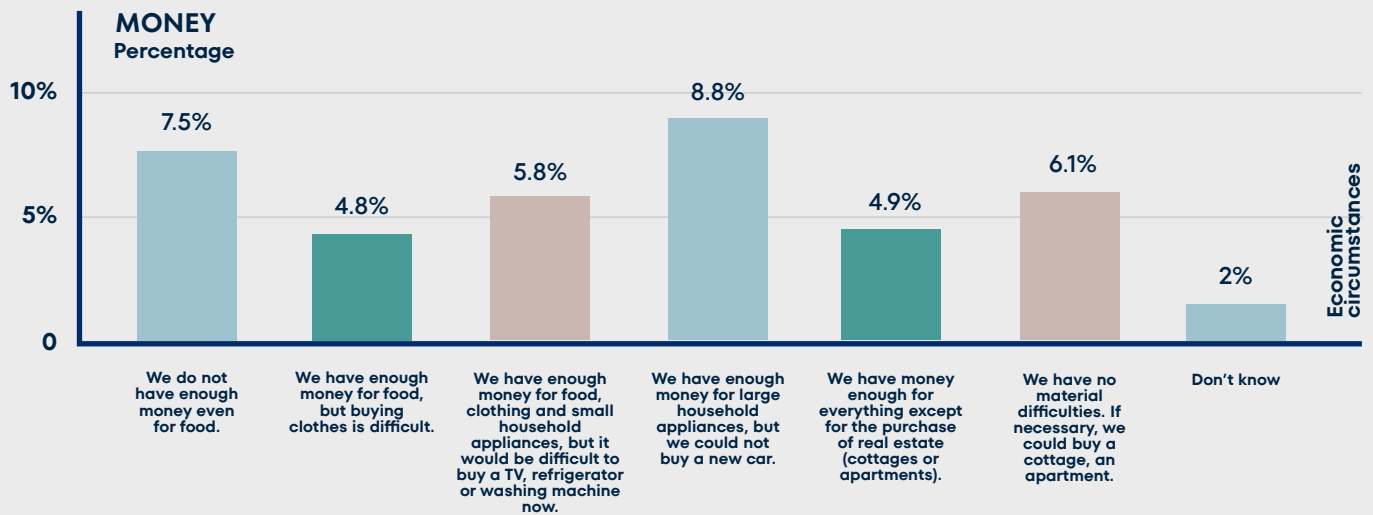
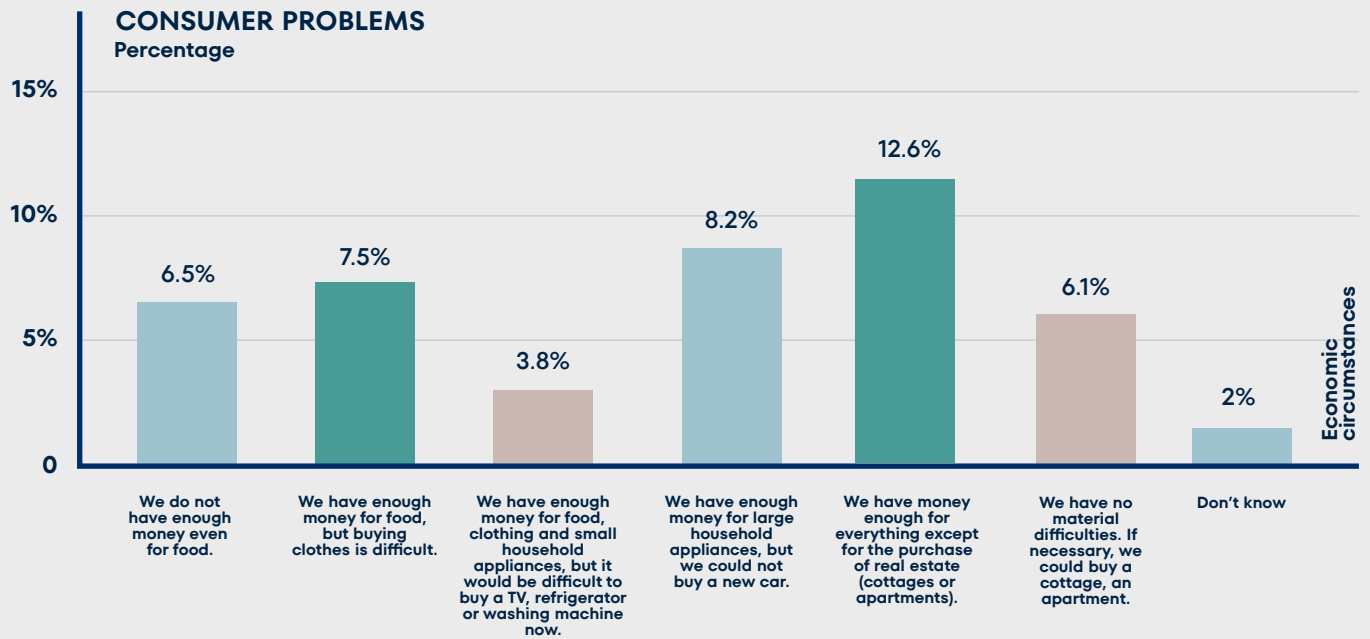
Percentage

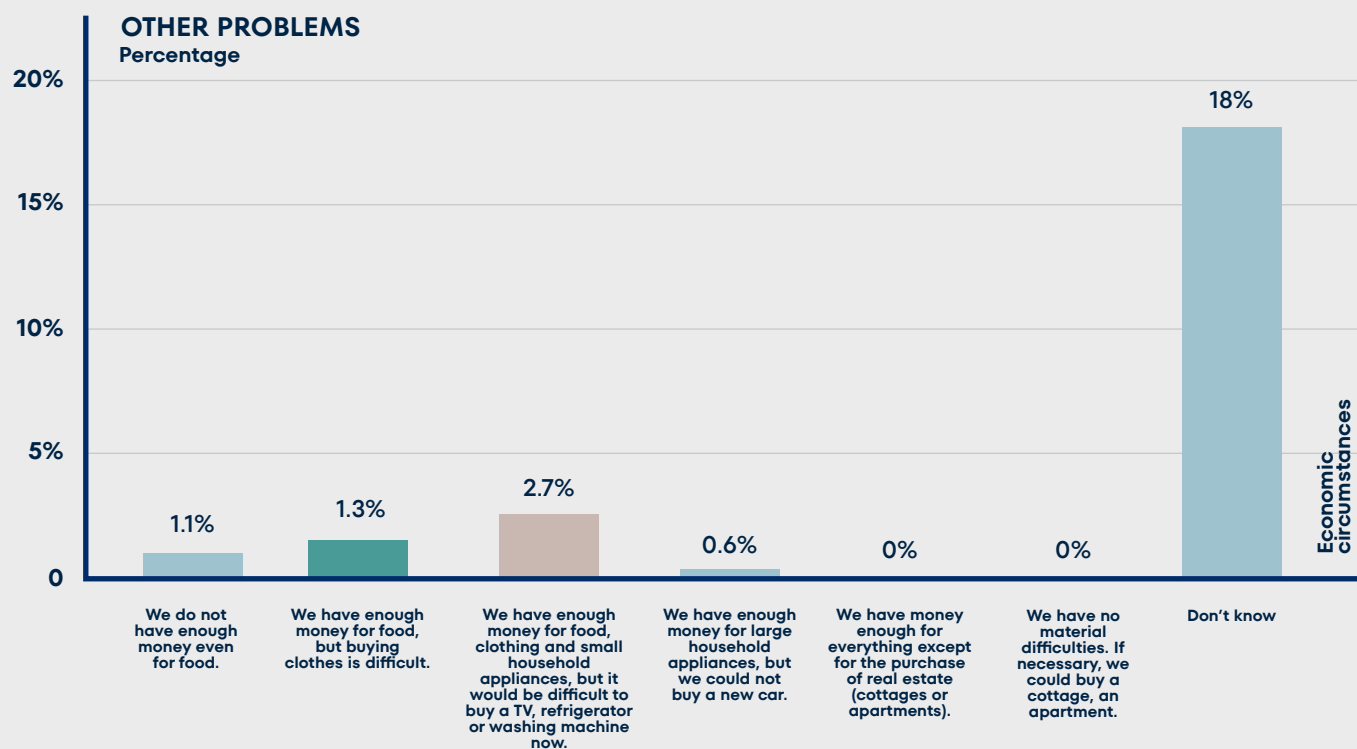
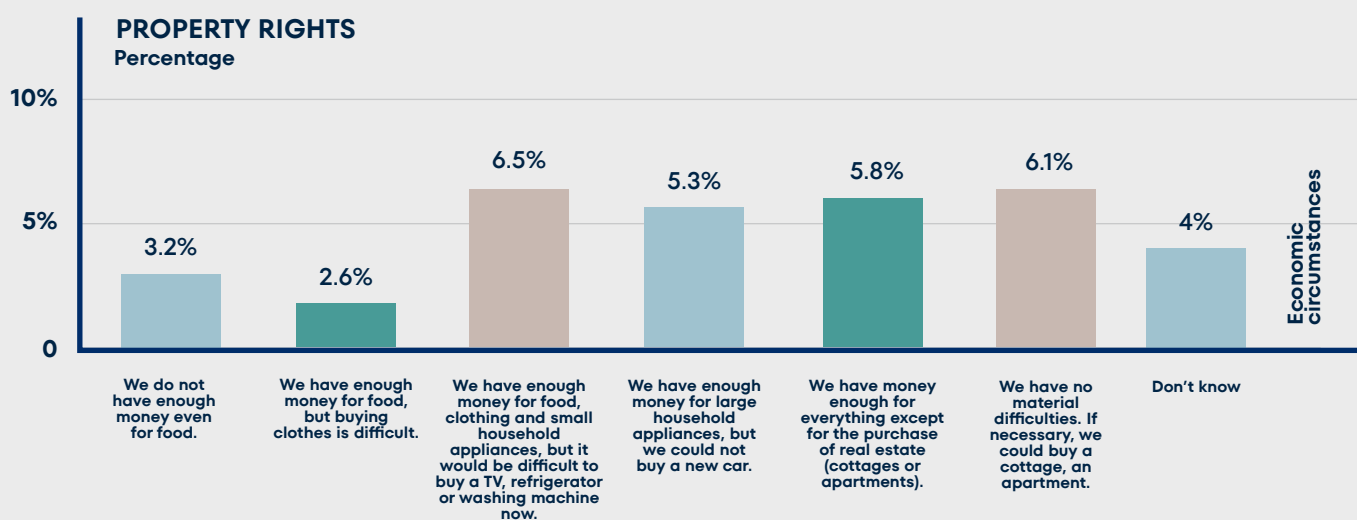
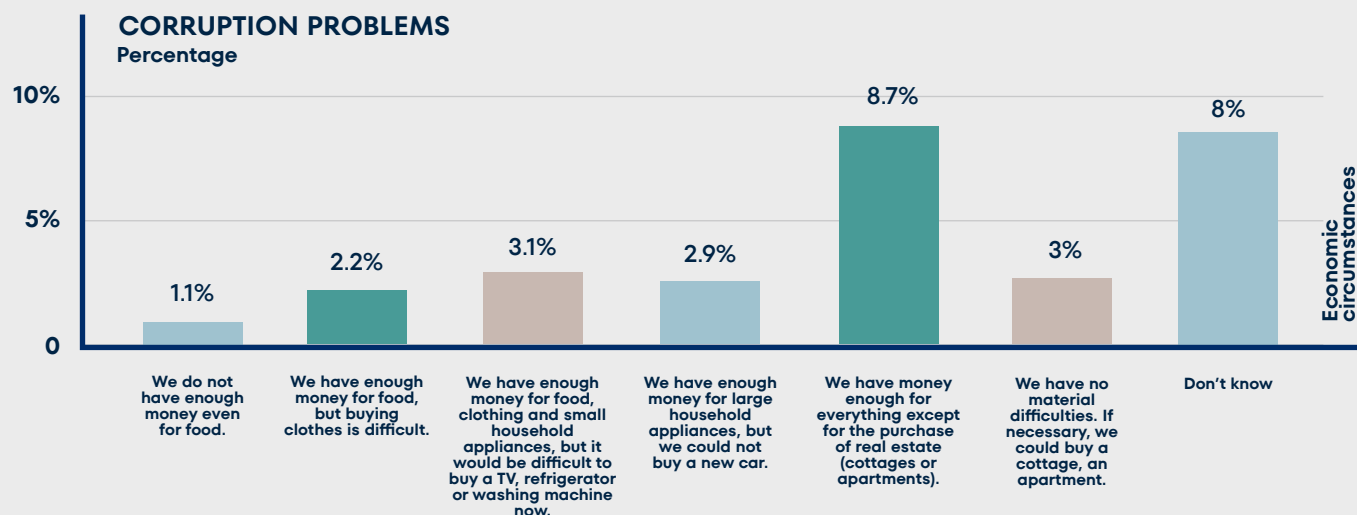


ACCIDENT/PERSONAL INJURY

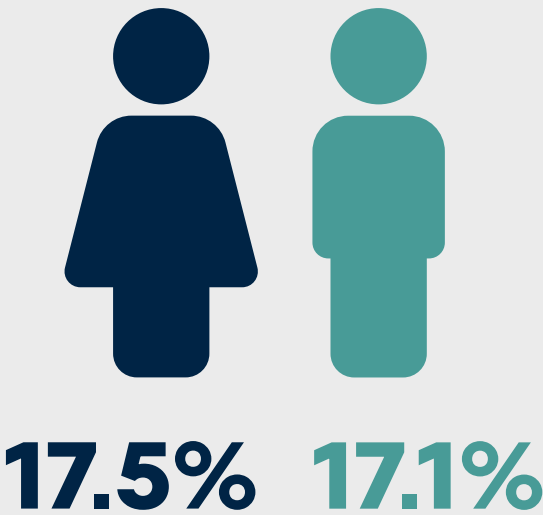
Percentage







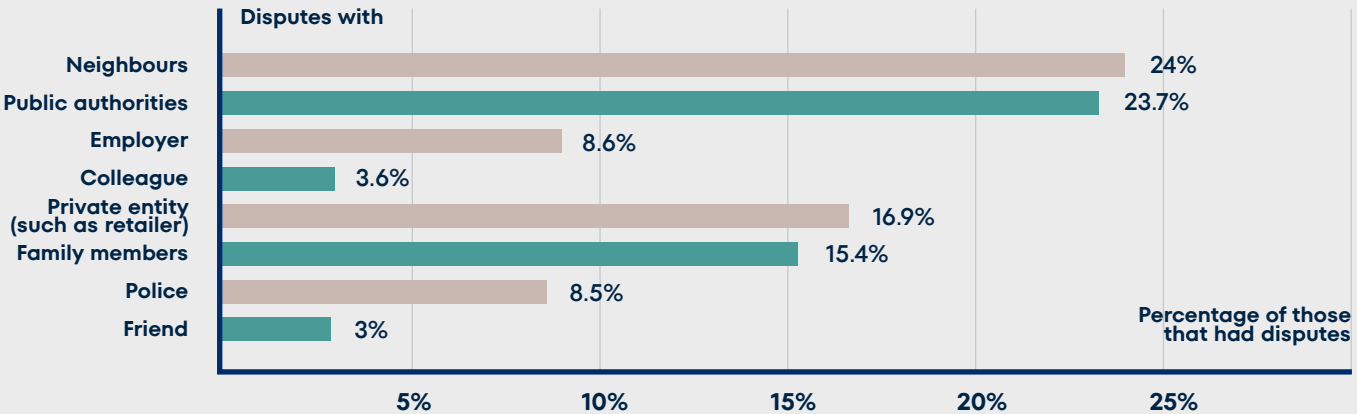
For both men and women, disputes between neighbours were the most prevalent issue, with 17.1% of men and 17.5% of women identifying this as their most significant dispute. While men are twice as likely to be involved in land-related disputes, women are similarly twice as likely as men to engage in disputes related to social welfare, public services, and domestic violence. No significant disparities were observed in the types of disputes experienced across different levels of educational attainment.



The distribution of data by location indicates that residents of rural areas are more likely than those of urban areas to experience disputes related to land (10.4% versus 4.7%), social welfare (14.5% versus 9.6%) and employment (9.2% versus 6.8%). Conversely, the urban population was slightly more exposed to issues such as neighbour disputes (22.9% versus 13.8%) and consumer problems (8.6% versus 5.3%).

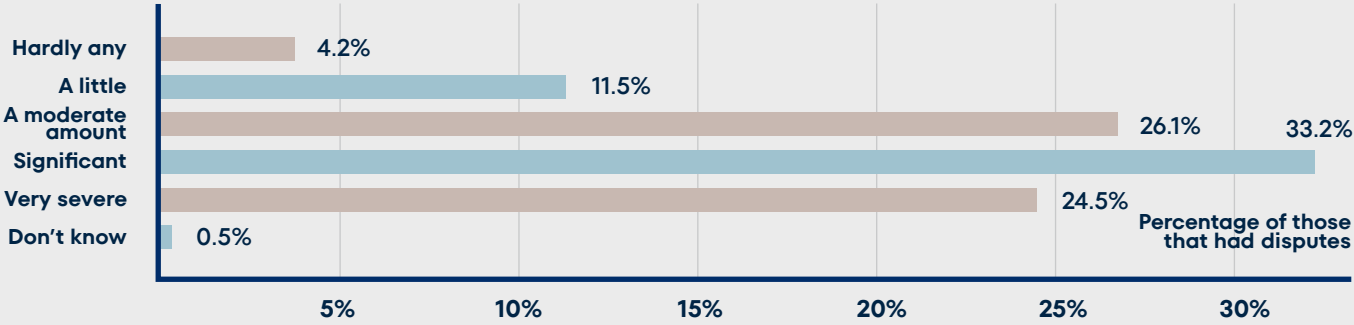
Respondents had disputes with a variety of parties. The most prevalent were neighbours (24%) and public authorities (23.7%). These were followed by private entities (16.9%), family members (15.4%) and police (8.5%).

WHO IS THE OTHER SIDE IN DISPUTES?



The impact of the disputes was substantial. Over a half (57.7%) of those with disputes said the disputes had a "significant" and "very severe" impact, while another 26.1% said the impact was "moderate". Although both genders reported experiencing a strong impact from the dispute process, a higher percentage of women than men described the impact as "significant" or "very severe" (61.2% compared to 53.5%). Additionally, individuals in the lower economic strata were more likely to experience a "very severe" impact from the disputes in which they were involved.

WHAT IMPACT DID THE DISPUTE HAVE ON YOU?

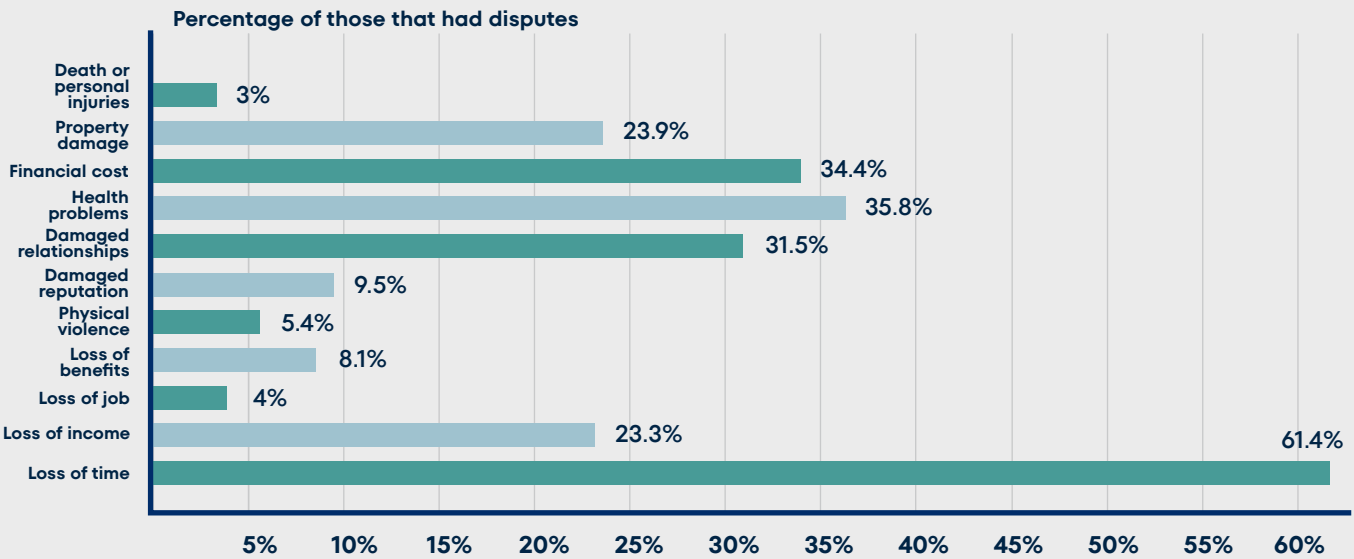


Disputes caused a range of problems for those involved. The most common issue, reported by slightly less than two-thirds of disputants (61.4%), is the loss of time. However, **disputes also lead to more serious consequences: over a third (35.8%) of participants experienced health problems, and 34.2% incurred financial costs.** Additionally, nearly a third (31.5%) reported damaged relationships as a result of their disputes.

Other monetary and non-monetary losses included loss of income (23.3%), property damage (24%), and reputational harm (9.5%). Most alarmingly, 5.4% of disputes escalated to physical violence, and 3% resulted in death or personal injuries.

The results indicate that women are twice as likely as men to be affected by physical violence as a result of a dispute (6.8% of women versus 3.6% of men). Similarly, women are disproportionately affected by job loss (5.1% of women versus 2.7% of men).

DID THE DISPUTE LEAD TO?



KEY FINDINGS ON CITIZENS' DISPUTES

THE RESULTS SHOW:

- ▶ **31.6% of Moldovan citizens have had dispute raising legal issues over the four-year period covered by the survey;**
- ▶ Women (30.7%) and urban residents (28.6%) were slightly less likely to engage in legal disputes than men (32.9%) and rural residents (34%);
- ▶ Those with the highest educational credentials (32.8%) were slightly more likely to experience disputes compared to individuals with lower educational attainment (26.7%);
- ▶ The wealthiest spectrum of the sample was the likeliest to have disputes in the past four years (37.5%);
- ▶ **The most frequent category of disputes involves conflicts between neighbours, affecting 17.3% of the population, followed by disputes related to social welfare and public services, reported by 12.6% of the sample.** Other common disputes include police-related issues (8.9%), employment disputes (8.2%), and land disputes (8.1%);
- ▶ **Domestic violence stands out as the most recurrent form of dispute among the population, with those involved in such disputes reporting an average of 1.9 incidents;**
- ▶ In Moldova, lower socioeconomic status is strongly associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing various types of disputes, including those related to social welfare, public services, domestic violence, housing, and police-related issues. For example, 7.5% of the poorest respondents identified domestic violence as their most significant dispute, compared to none of the wealthiest respondents. Similarly, 23.7% of the poorest respondents reported social welfare and public service disputes as most important, while only 12.1% of the wealthiest did so;
- ▶ Respondents reported having disputes with various parties, with the most common conflicts occurring with neighbours (24%) and public authorities (23.7%). Other notable disputes involved private entities (16.9%), family members (15.4%), and the police (8.5%);
- ▶ **The impact of the disputes was substantial. Over a half (57.7%) of those with disputes said the disputes had a 'significant' and 'very severe' impact, and a further 26.1% felt that disputes had a 'moderate' impact on them;**
- ▶ **The disputes caused a wide variety of problems.** Over a third (35.8%) of individuals experienced health problems, and 34.2% incurred financial costs due to their disputes. Other losses included income loss (23.3%) and property damage (24%), while most concerning, 5.4% of disputes escalated to physical violence, and 3% resulted in death or personal injuries.

2. RESOLVING LEGAL DISPUTES AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

The subsequent section will guide the reader through the various methods employed by respondents in Moldova to address their legal issues. It will elucidate the distinct characteristics of the justice processes experienced by the Moldovan population, detailing the steps they undertake to resolve these legal matters. Additionally, it will provide an overview of the level of satisfaction of various institution users, particularly concerning the institutions they engaged with during the dispute resolution process.

The first part of this section will review the frequency with which respondents sought preliminary advice for their legal issues and identify the sources of that advice.

The second part will explore the outcomes for respondents who directly approached the other party or took independent actions, such as gathering evidence, in their efforts to address their legal issues.

The third and principal part will focus on how respondents sought to resolve their legal issues through third parties, including both formal institutions (such as the police, courts, and lawyers) and their social networks.

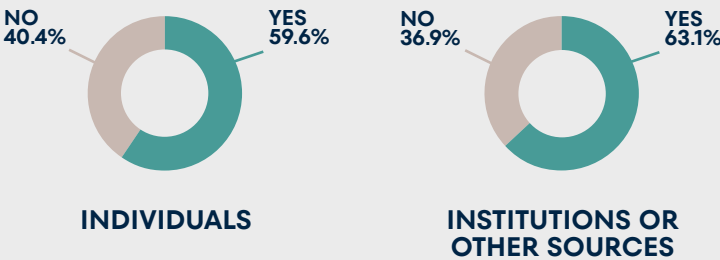
Before delving into the outcomes of respondents' attempts to resolve legal issues, it is crucial to first consider their initial efforts.

A. SEEKING ADVICE

Prior to taking more concrete steps in resolving disputes, individuals sought advice from trusted persons or institutions. By way of clarification, the survey differentiates this seeking of initial advice from attempting to resolve a legal dispute through a person or institution – which is tackled in section 2(c).

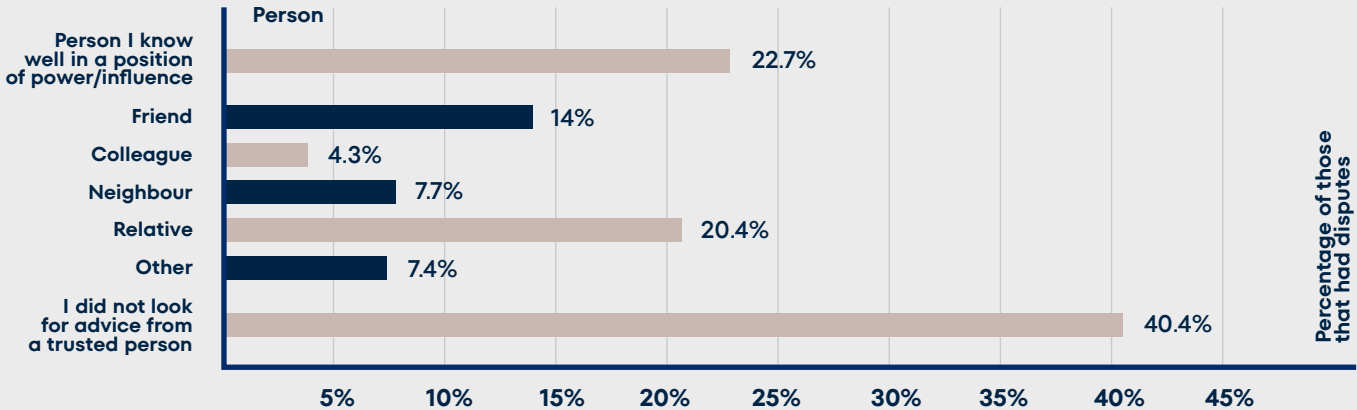
More than half (59.6%) of respondents with a legal issue sought advice from a trusted individual on how to address it, while nearly two-thirds (63.1%) sought guidance from an institution or various other sources. These findings suggest a significant overlap in the sample, indicating that some respondents sought advice from both a trusted person and an institutional or alternative source, while in total 76.1% of respondents reached out to trusted person, and/or institution or other sources for an initial advice.

WHEN THE PROBLEM OCCURRED DID YOU SEEK (INITIAL) ADVICE FROM...?



Of those that sought advice from a trusted individual, nearly a quarter (22.7%) addressed a person they know well in a position of power/influence, while slightly over a fifth of the sample (20.4%) spoke to a relative about their disputes. Others sought out the advice of friends (14%), neighbours (7.7%) and colleagues (4.3%).

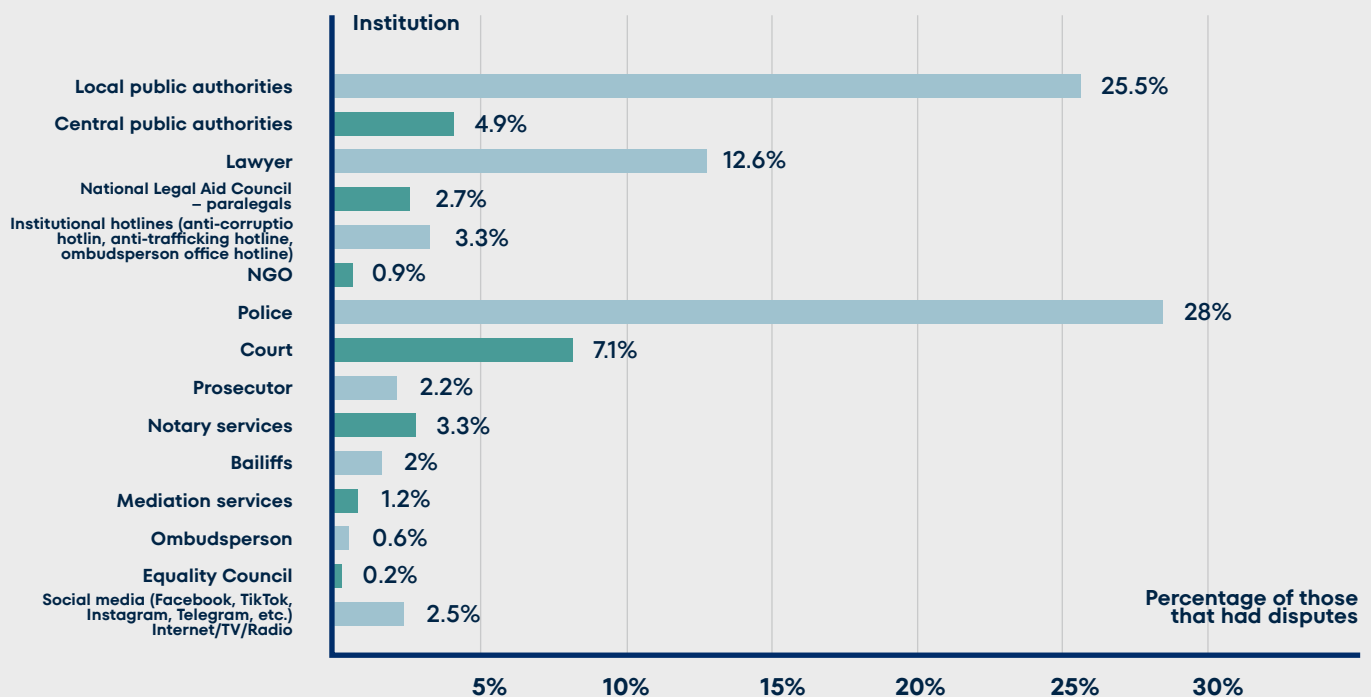
WHEN THE PROBLEM OCCURRED DID YOU SEEK (INITIAL) ADVICE FROM ANY OF THE FOLLOWING TRUSTED PERSONS?



Women are more likely than men to seek initial advice from a trusted person, with 65% of women doing so compared to 53.3% of men.

Those that sought advice from institutions or from other sources mostly relied on police (28%) and local public authorities (25.5%). In addition, 12.6% of respondents sought advice from a lawyer, while 7.7% went to the court to this end. Respondents were far less likely to seek the advice of other institutions, including the National Legal Aid Council (2.7%), NGOs (0.9%), notary (3.3%), and bailiffs (2%).

WHEN THE PROBLEM OCCURRED DID YOU SEEK (INITIAL) ADVICE FROM ANY OF THE FOLLOWING INSTITUTIONS? - YES



If we compare the percentage of those who sought advice from particular persons or institutions to those who found it helpful, we can see which groups of individuals or institutions have been considered particularly helpful by respondents in this initial phase. The results show that certain sources of advice are perceived as more effective than others. For instance, **although 22.7% of respondents sought advice from a person they knew in a position of power or influence, only 10.7% found this advice to be the most helpful**, suggesting a discrepancy between trust in these individuals and the practical utility of their guidance.

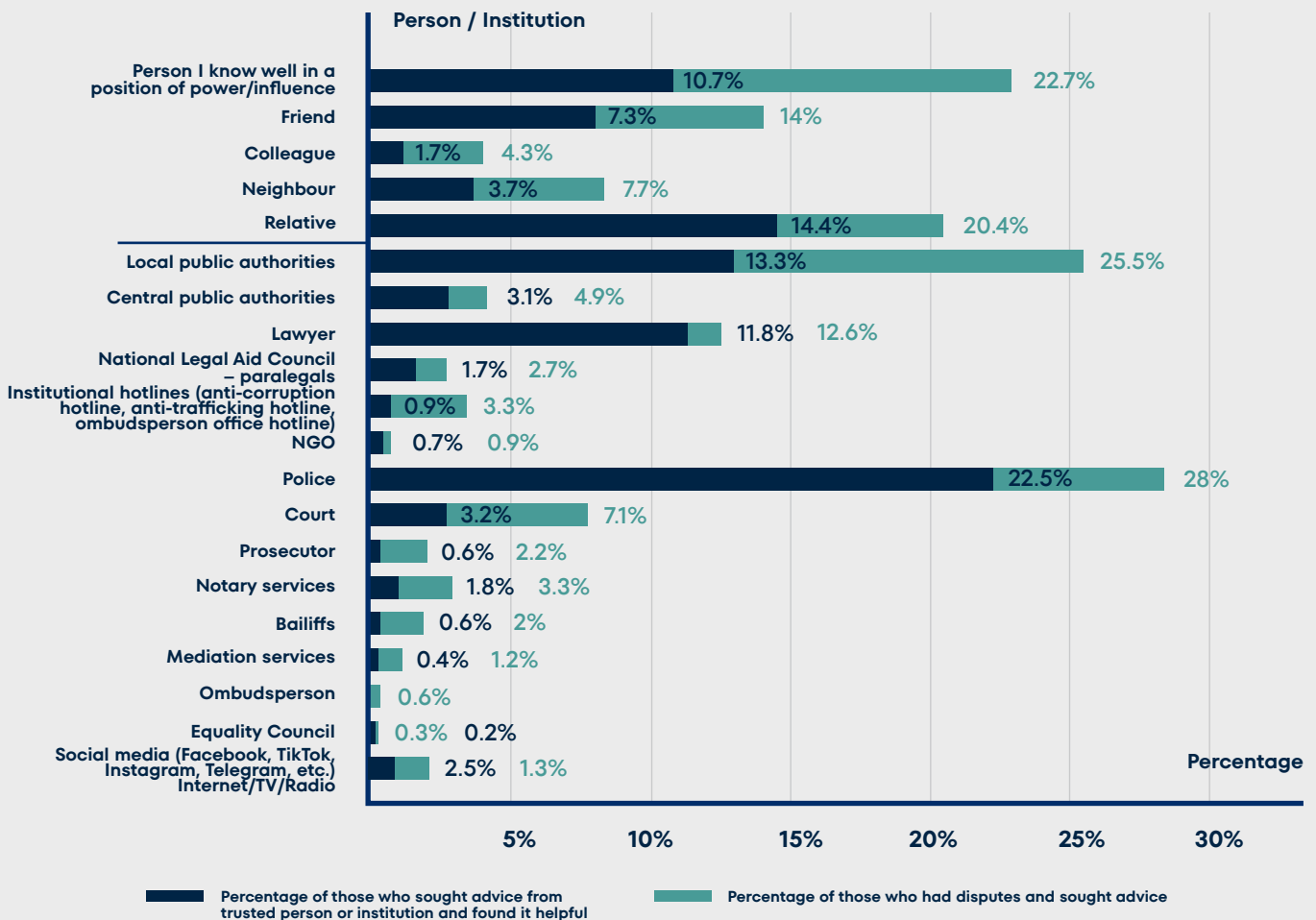
In contrast, **the police emerged as the most helpful institution, with 28% of respondents seeking their advice and a substantial 22.5% reporting it as helpful**. Similarly, lawyers were consulted by 12.6% of respondents, and 11.8% found their advice helpful, indicating a high level of satisfaction with legal professionals.

On the other hand, **while 25.5% of respondents sought advice from local public authorities, only 13.3% found it helpful**. Central public authorities and other institutional sources such as courts, notaries, and bailiffs had even lower rates of helpfulness, with fewer respondents considering their advice beneficial.

Interestingly, while relatives were not the most frequently consulted group (20.4%), they had a relatively high rate of perceived helpfulness, with 14.4% of those who sought their advice finding it useful. This indicates that personal relationships, particularly with family members, may play a significant role in providing valuable support during legal disputes.

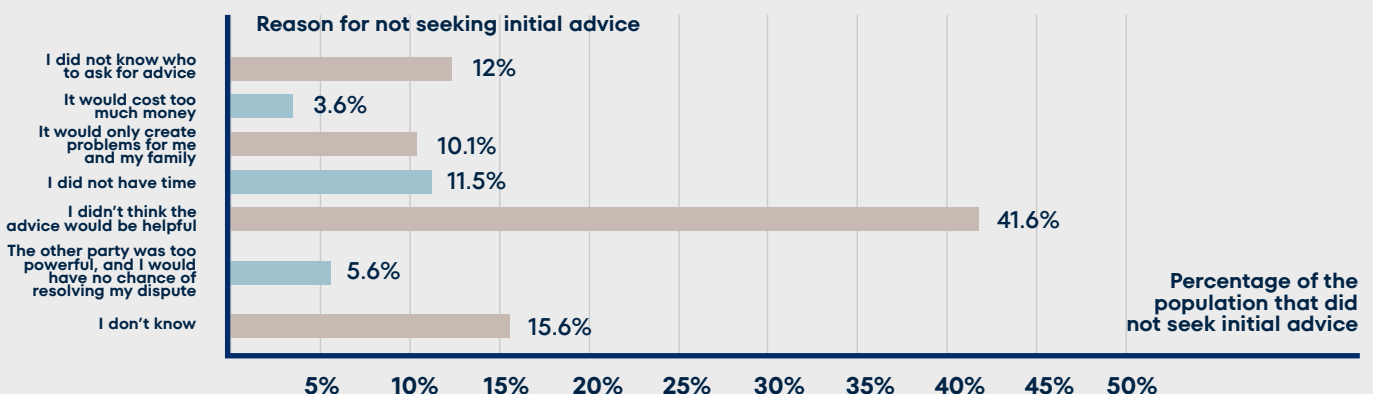
While certain institutions like the police and legal professionals are considered particularly helpful, there is a notable variation in the perceived usefulness of advice from other individuals and institutions. This suggests that the effectiveness of advice may depend not only on the source but also on the nature of the relationship and the specific context of the dispute.

WHICH PERSON, INSTITUTION OR SOURCE PROVIDED YOU WITH THE MOST HELPFUL ADVICE?



Finally, 23.9% of those involved in a dispute did not seek initial advice from a trusted person or institution, citing various reasons for not taking this initial step.

WHAT WERE THE REASONS FOR NOT SEEKING ADVICE?



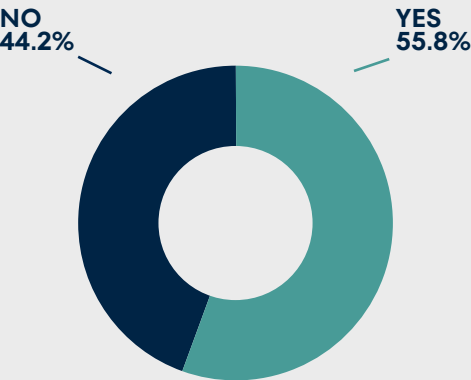
The most prevalent reason, reported by 41.6% of this group, was a belief that the advice would not be helpful. A significant portion, 15.6%, indicated that they simply did not know where to turn for advice, while 12% were uncertain about whom to ask. Time constraints also played a role, with 11.5% of respondents indicating that they did not have the time to seek advice. Additionally, 10.1% expressed concerns that seeking advice might create problems for themselves or their families, while 5.6% felt that the opposing party was too powerful, rendering any attempt at resolution futile. A smaller percentage, 3.6%, did not seek advice due to the anticipated cost involved.

B.

RESOLVING DISPUTES ON THEIR OWN OR WITH THE OTHER PARTY

When a legal dispute arose, 55.8% of those affected chose to approach the other party directly to resolve the problem. This is a significant proportion, reflecting the fact that direct negotiation and communication are frequently the most cost-effective and efficient means of dispute resolution.

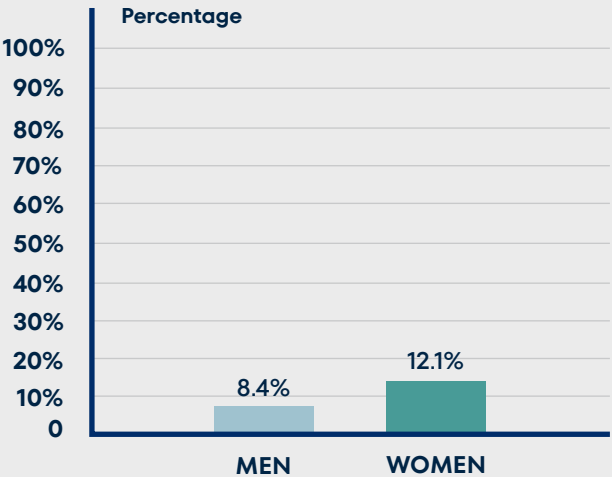
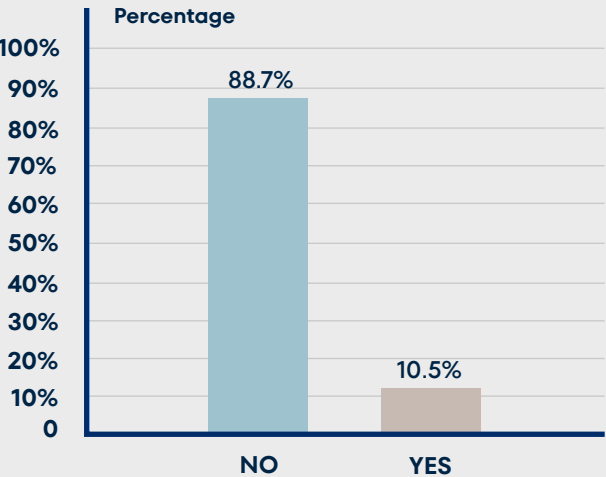
WHEN THE PROBLEM OCCURRED, DID YOU TRY TO APPROACH THE OTHER PARTY TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM?



Those from rural areas (58.5%) and those aged 18-29 (60.5%) were likelier to approach the other party to try to resolve the problem than those living in urban areas (51.8%) and those aged 60+ (52%).

In 10.5% of cases where respondents attempted to resolve the dispute by approaching the other party, **the interaction escalated to the point where at least one party resorted to threats or the use of violence.**

DID EITHER YOU OR THE OTHER PARTY THREATEN TO USE, OR ACTUALLY USED, VIOLENCE DURING YOUR CONTACTS?

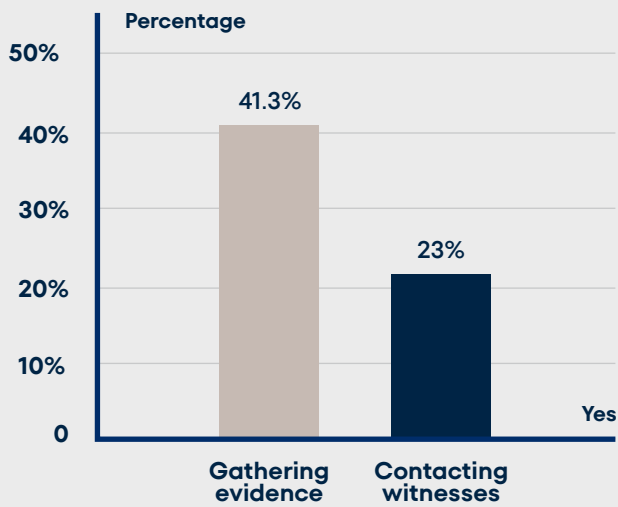


This phenomenon is more prevalent in disputes involving women (12.1%) compared to men (8.4%). While it is commonly assumed that women are more likely to be the recipients of threats rather than the perpetrators, further research is needed to substantiate this hypothesis. Moreover, threats of violence during interactions with the other party are more likely to occur in disputes involving individuals with the lowest levels of educational attainment (33.3%) compared to just 8.2% among those with the highest educational qualifications.

Interestingly, disputes in Chisinau are likelier to result in threats or use of violence than in the rest of the country (13.4% versus 9.8%).

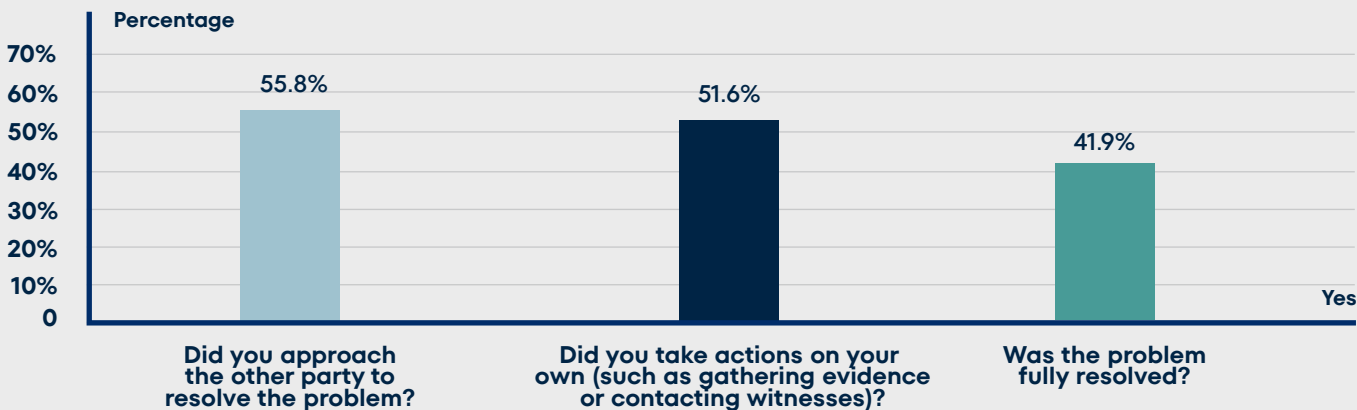
A considerable percentage of disputants, slightly over half of the sample, (51.6%) took other actions on their own, such as either gathering evidence or contacting witnesses or both, to address their legal problems. Individuals with an incomplete or complete primary education were far less likely to gather evidence compared to those who are better educated (15.5% of disputants with completed primary education versus 45% of those with incomplete or complete higher education).

DID YOU TRY TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM BY TAKING ANY ACTIONS ON YOUR OWN (GATHERING EVIDENCE, CONTACTING WITNESSES, OTHER)?



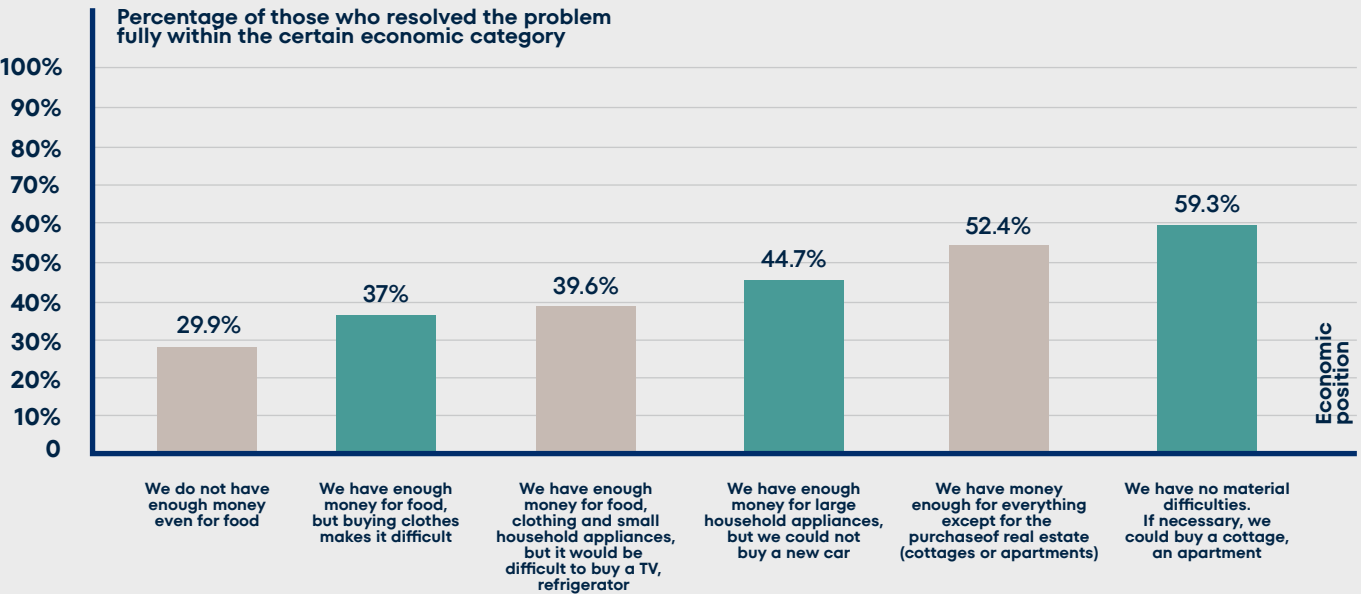
The results also reveal that a significant share of disputes was fully resolved after respondents reached out to the other party or took additional actions—41.9% of respondents reported successfully resolving their disputes following these efforts.

DID YOU INITIALLY APPROACH THE OTHER PARTY TO RESOLVE YOUR DISPUTE? DID YOU TAKE ACTIONS OF YOUR OWN SUCH AS GATHERING EVIDENCE OR CONTACTING WITNESSES? WAS THE PROBLEM FULLY RESOLVED THROUGH YOUR CONTACTS WITH THE OTHER PARTY AND/OR THROUGH THESE OTHER ACTIONS?

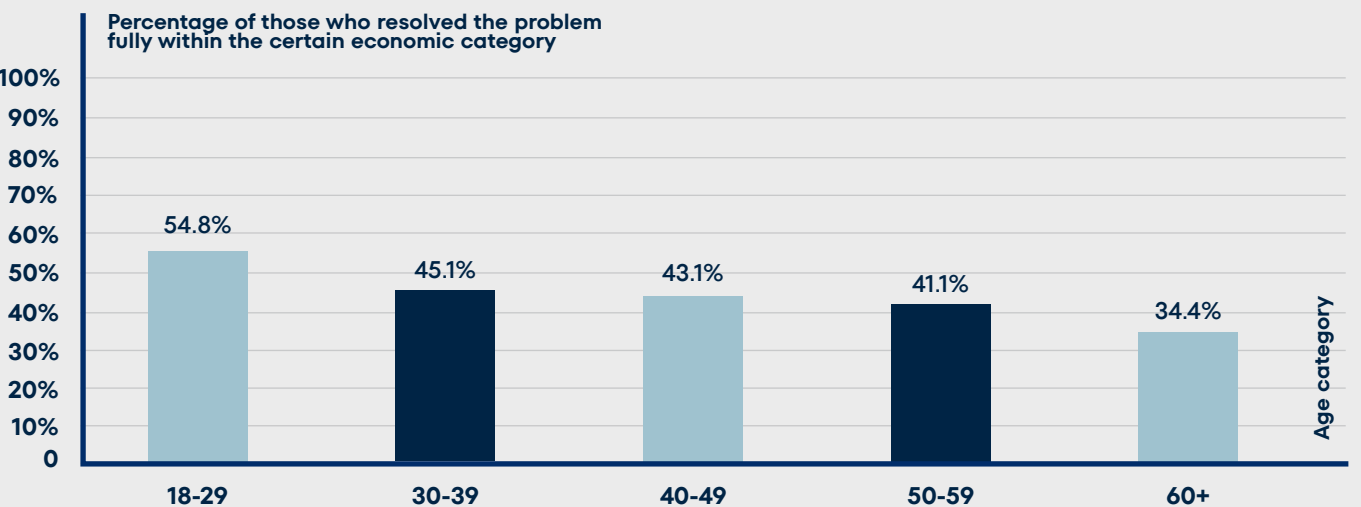


The wealthier and younger a person is, the more likely they are to resolve the dispute by directly contacting the other party and/or independently gathering evidence and contacting witnesses. Notably, no significant differences were observed between individuals of different educational levels or genders in this regard. Additionally, individuals from rural areas were more likely to successfully resolve disputes through these methods compared to residents of urban areas.

WAS YOUR PROBLEM FULLY RESOLVED THROUGH THESE CONTACTS WITH THE OTHER PARTY AND/OR THESE OTHER ACTIONS ON YOUR OWN? - YES



WAS YOUR PROBLEM FULLY RESOLVED THROUGH THESE CONTACTS WITH THE OTHER PARTY AND/OR THESE OTHER ACTIONS ON YOUR OWN? – YES BY AGE CATEGORY



C.

SOLVING DISPUTES THROUGH THIRD PARTIES

The results indicate that more than half of the cases (57.1%) were not resolved through direct negotiations with the other party or through the disputants' own efforts, such as gathering evidence or contacting witnesses. This raises important questions about the subsequent actions taken by disputants and the effectiveness of these initial strategies.

So, as 57.1% of those with legal disputes fail to resolve them through contacts with the other party or by taking actions on their own, where do these people turn to next?

In brief, half of them drop their legal disputes and do not attempt to resolve them any further.



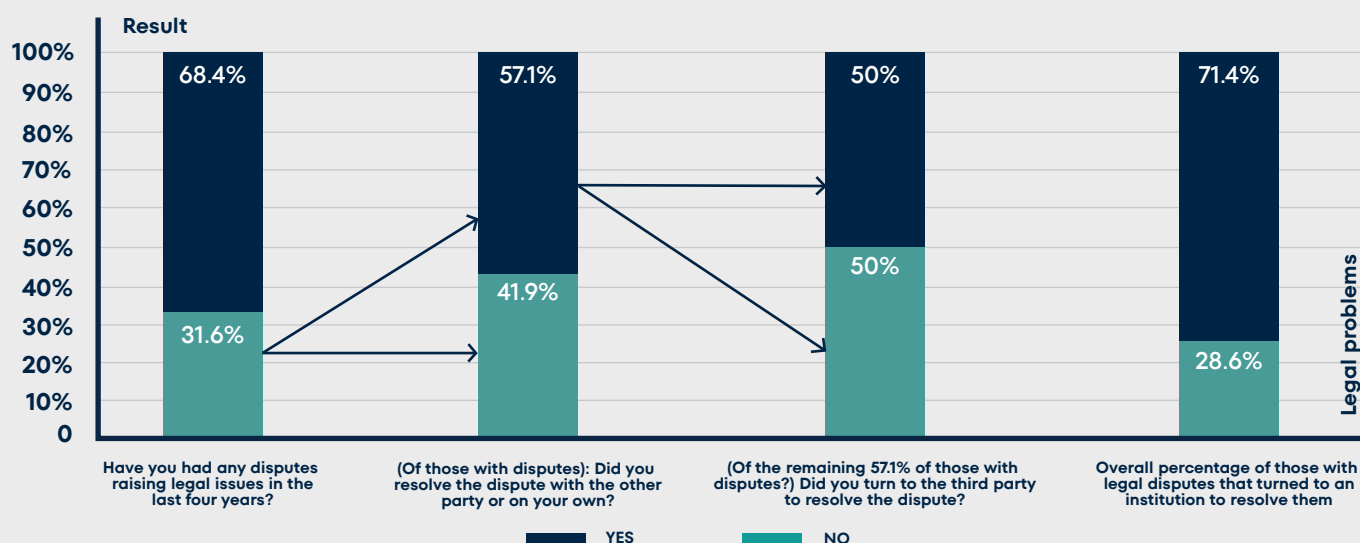
C(I)

FAILURE TO TURN TO A THIRD PARTY TO RESOLVE THE DISPUTE

In other words, **half (50%) of those with disputes that did not resolve them with the other party or on their own⁹ did not try to solve the problem through a third party**, be it a person in their social network or an institution, to attempt to resolve their dispute.

The overall pattern of the **prevalence of legal problems can best be summed up in a graph:**

PREVALENCE OF LEGAL PROBLEMS



9. For the remainder of the sub-section, references to respondents with legal issues should be taken to mean respondents with legal issues who did not resolve them through actions on their own or with the other party – unless explicitly noted.

So, in sum, only **28.6%** of those with legal disputes end up turning to a third party to resolve them.



The wealthier respondents (62.3%) and women (52.6%) were more inclined to turn to third-party to resolve their disputes compared to poorer respondents (46.4%) and men (46.6%).

The parties cited various reasons for not involving a third party to help resolve their dispute.

The most common reason, reported by 22.2% of respondents, was a belief that they would not be successful in resolving the issue. Women and those from the oldest age group were likelier to cite this reason than men and the remaining age groups.

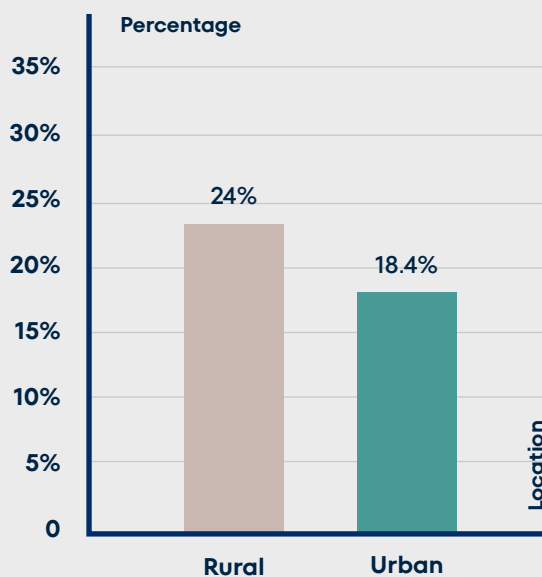
An important sentiment (expressed by a total of 44.6% of disputants who chose not to address a third party) was that justice was inaccessible, whether in terms of time, money, or otherwise. Particularly 12.9% of respondents did not have the time to address a third party, while 12.2% stated it would cost too much money, 8.8% stated it would create problems for them and their family, 8.4% said the other party was too powerful which deterred them from acting, and 2.3% said the long distance prevented them from reaching the third party.

The cost of resolving a dispute was a significant concern for the poorest population groups, with 19.5% of the poorest disputants citing it as the main reason for not seeking third-party intervention, compared to none of the wealthier respondents.

Women (12.2%) were more than twice more likely than men (5.1%) to refrain from seeking third-party assistance in resolving a dispute due to concerns that it might cause problems for them or their families.

Another important reason was ignorance – 21.5% stated they did not know what action to take. This is particularly true of rural population (24% of rural population versus 18.4% of urban population), less educated (incomplete/complete primary education 32.1% versus those with completed college or higher education 19.5%).

WHY DIDN'T YOU TURN TO A THIRD PARTY TO RESOLVE YOUR DISPUTE? BECAUSE I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT ACTION TO TAKE

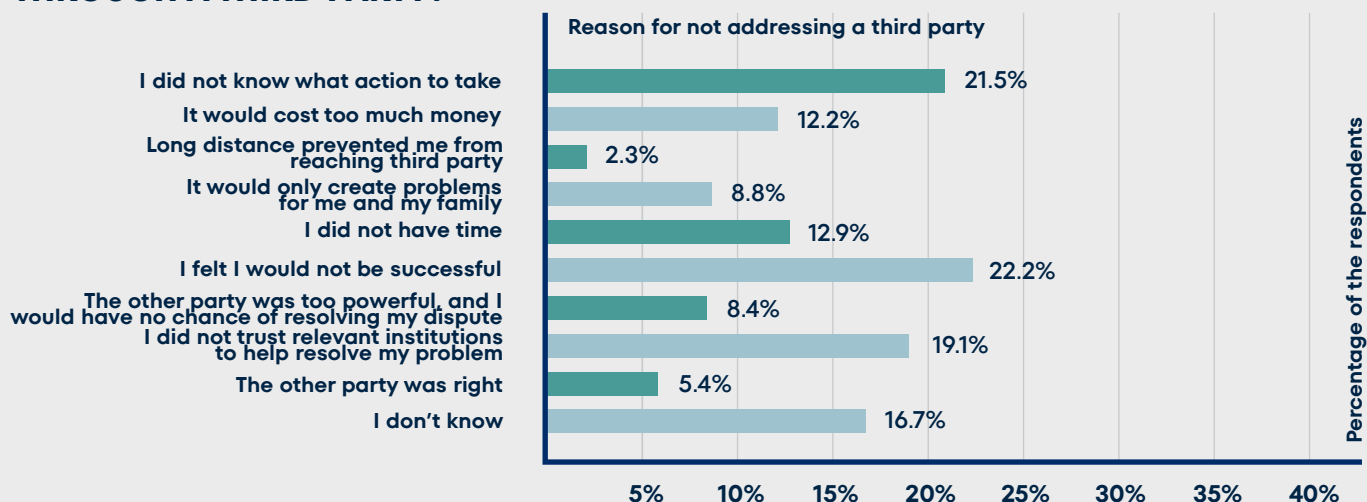


For nearly a fifth of respondents (19.1%), a lack of trust was the primary reason for not seeking third-party assistance in resolving their dispute. Disaggregation of data by demographic components reveals that rural residents (23.5%), and those better-off (22.9%) were more likely to express distrust towards institutions assisting in dispute resolution as a reason for not addressing them, compared to urban residents (13.8%), and poorer individuals (16.7%).

A further 5.4% did not pursue help through a third party institution because they felt that the other party was right.

Finally, 16.7% of the disputants stated that they did not know why they failed to address a third party.

WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON FOR NOT TAKING ANY ACTION THROUGH A THIRD PARTY?



C(II)

THOSE TURNING TO A THIRD PARTY TO RESOLVE A DISPUTE – OVERALL PICTURE

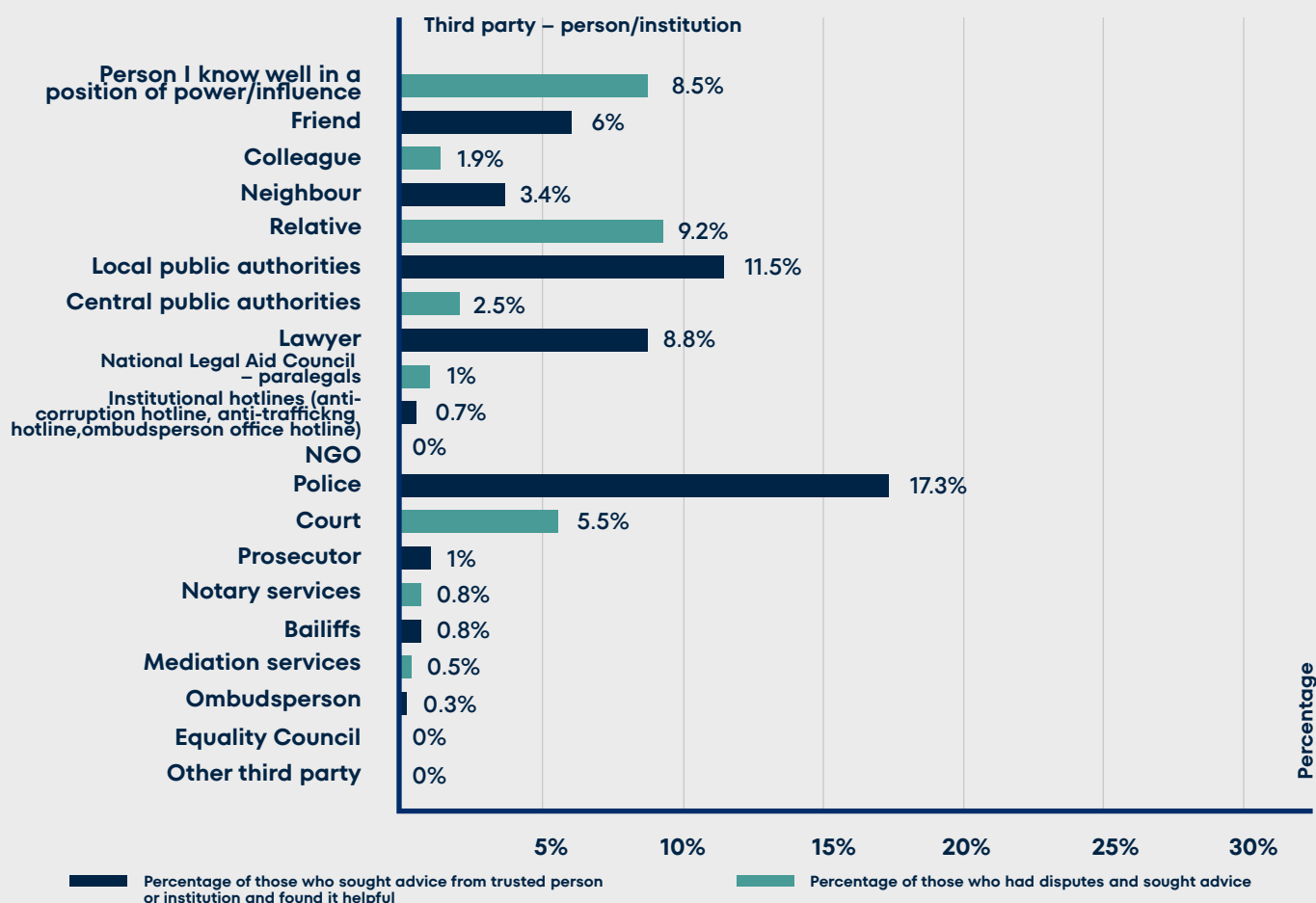
Thus, to reiterate, the findings indicate that 28.6% of all those with legal disputes sought assistance from third parties—whether trusted individuals, such as friends and relatives, or formal institutions—in an effort to resolve their disputes.

The most frequently contacted institutional third parties among those involved in disputes were the police (17.3%), local public authorities (11.5%), lawyers (8.8%), and courts (5.5%). However, only a small proportion of individuals sought help from institutions providing free legal services, such as National Legal Aid Councils (1%), or cost-free mechanisms like institutional hotlines (0.7%), mediation services (0.5%), and the Ombudsperson (0.3%). Notably, none of the respondents utilised services offered by NGOs or by the Equality Council. Additionally, very few respondents turned to notaries or bailiffs as third-party intermediaries, while 2.5% and 1% of participants approached central government bodies and the prosecutor, respectively.

Moreover, the level of educational attainment is closely correlated with the frequency of seeking institutional third-party assistance. For example, 11% of individuals with incomplete or higher education reached out to a lawyer, whereas none of those without formal education did so. Similarly, individuals with higher educational qualifications are more likely to involve the police as a third party in dispute resolution.

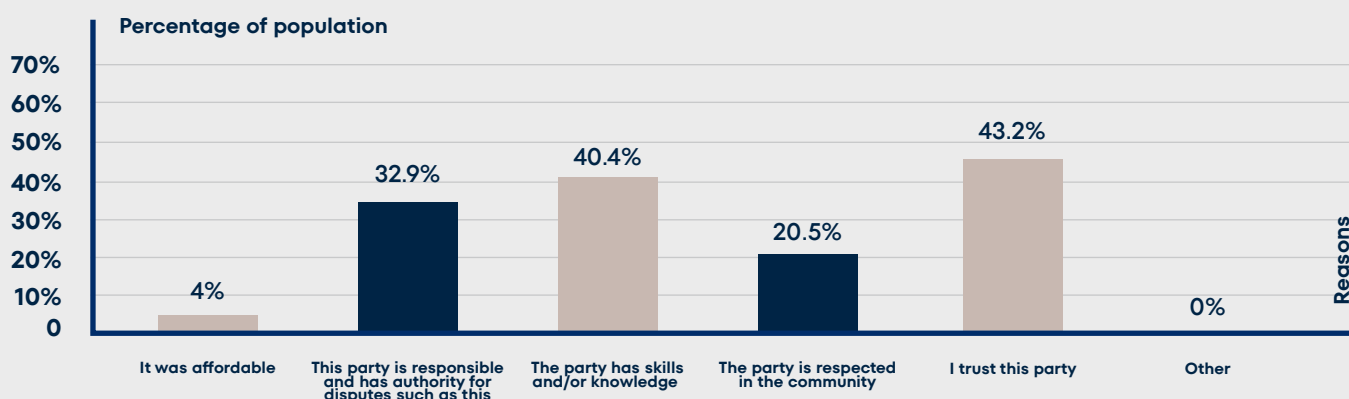
Furthermore, disputants exhibit a modest tendency to turn to individuals within their social networks as third parties in resolving disputes. Notably, 9.2% and 8.5% of respondents turned to a relative and a person in a position of power, respectively, while only 6% reached out to friends, and 3.4% and 1.9% turned to a neighbour and a colleague, respectively.

DID YOU TRY TO RESOLVE YOUR LEGAL DISPUTE THROUGH A THIRD PARTY? YES



Respondents cited various reasons for choosing a particular third party, whether an institution or an individual, with the most common being the trust they placed in that party (43.2%). Another significant factor was the party's level of expertise and knowledge, mentioned by 40.4% of respondents. Additionally, 32.9% of respondents emphasised the party's responsibility and recognised authority in handling specific disputes. Finally, for 20.5% of respondents, the respect the third party held within the community was a key reason for seeking their assistance.

WAS YOUR PROBLEM FULLY RESOLVED THROUGH THESE CONTACTS WITH THE OTHER PARTY AND/OR THESE OTHER ACTIONS ON YOUR OWN? - YES



We will now examine the **experiences of these disputants** in resolving their legal issues through the Moldovan justice system.

When asked if they were **treated with respect**, the respondents' answers varied significantly.

Those that addressed their legal dispute to notaries (88.2%), the **Mediation Council (78.5%)**, and the **Ombudsperson (53.1%)** thought they were treated either very respectfully or respectfully. Moreover, only 2.4% of those addressing notaries and only 7.1% of those addressing the Mediation Council felt they were treated very disrespectfully or disrespectfully.

Meanwhile, **opinions on some institutions were more divided**: thus, while 55.6% thought of those that addressed **Central Public Authorities** said they were treated either very respectfully or respectfully, 33.3% felt they were treated either very disrespectfully or disrespectfully. **Bailiffs** were also mostly judged positively in this regard, with 45.8% feeling they were treated either very respectfully or respectfully, and 21.1% feeling the opposite. Opinions **on the police** were divided: 35.6% said they were treated respectfully, but 26.1% said they were not. **Local public authorities fared slightly worse**, with 37.2% feeling they were treated either very disrespectfully or disrespectfully, and 34.9% thinking they were treated either very respectfully or respectfully. Finally, respondents thought they were not treated with sufficient respect by the court administration: while 18.2% said they were largely treated respectfully, 27.2% said they were treated either very disrespectfully or disrespectfully.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID THIS PERSON OR INSTITUTION TREAT YOU WITH RESPECT?

Person/organisation	Very small	Small	Moderate	Large	Very large
Local public authorities	25.6%	11.6%	27.9%	27.9%	7%
Central public authorities	11.1%	22.2%	11.1%	55.6%	0%
Police	14.1%	12%	38.2%	28.8%	6.8%
Courts	11.9%	6%	43.3%	26.9%	10.4%
Court administration	18.2%	9.1%	54.5%	18.2%	0%
Lawyers	7.3%	3.7%	26.6%	27.5%	33.9%
National Legal Aid Council/paralegals					
Prosecutor	33.3%	0%	33.3%	0%	33.3%
Notary	1.2%	1.2%	9.4%	25.3%	62.9%
Bailiff	12.8%	8.3%	31.2%	33%	12.8%
Mediation services	0%	7.1%	14.3%	21.4%	57.1%
Ombudsperson	16.3%	6.1%	22.4%	14.3%	38.8%

For the most part, no significant differences were recorded between the respect accorded by the institutions subject to consideration to the various groups examined by age, socio-economic status, or gender. However, it was notable that female respondents stated that local public authorities treated them with less respect than men.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID LOCAL PUBLIC AUTHORITIES TREAT YOU WITH RESPECT? BY GENDER

Person/organisation	Very small	Small	Moderate	Large	Very large
Local public authorities	25.6%	11.6%	27.9%	27.9%	7%
Men	14.3%	9.5%	38.1%	38.1%	0%
Women	36.4%	9.1%	22.7%	18.2%	13.6%

Moreover, it was notable that the **police treated poorer citizens with less respect than wealthier ones.**

TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE POLICE TREAT YOU WITH RESPECT? BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Financial situation of your family / Extent of respect	Very small	Small	Moderate	Large	Very large
We do not have enough money even for food	25%	6.3%	31.3%	31.3%	6.3%
We have enough money for food, but buying clothes makes it difficult	25%	15.4%	42.3%	13.5%	3.8%
We have enough money for food, clothing and small household appliances, but it would be difficult to buy a TV, refrigerator	11.4%	15.9%	31.8%	29.5%	11.4%
We have enough money for large household appliances, but we could not buy a new car	5.7%	8.6%	54.3%	25.7%	5.7%
We have money enough for everything except for the purchase of real estate (cottages or apartments).	8%	4%	20%	60%	8%
We have no material difficulties. If necessary, we could buy a cottage, an apartment	0%	25%	37.5%	25%	12.5%

In addition to respect, respondents were **asked about the fairness of** the institutions they turned to for help.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID THIS PERSON OR INSTITUTION TREAT YOU FAIRLY?

Person/organisation	Very small	Small	Moderate	Large	Very large
Local public authorities	26.2%	19%	26.2%	23.8%	4.8%
Central public authorities	11.1%	66.7%	0%	22.9%	0%
Police	19.9%	16.8%	27.2%	27.7%	7.3%
Courts	20.9%	19.4%	23.9%	23.9%	10.4%
Court administration	18.2%	18.2%	54.5%	9.1%	0%
Lawyers	12.2%	9.8%	31.7%	39%	7.3%
National Legal Aid Council/paralegals					
Prosecutor	0%	33.3%	33.3%	0%	33.3%
Notary	1.8%	2.9%	6.5%	15.9%	72.4%
Bailiff	16.5%	11.9%	17.4%	33.9%	17.4%
Mediation services	7.1%	7.1%	14.3%	14.3%	57.1%
Ombudsperson	18.4%	4.1%	16.3%	22.4%	32.7%

Once again, those that addressed their legal dispute to notaries (**88.3%**), the **Mediation Council (71.4%)**, lawyers (**70.7%**) and the **Ombudsperson (55.1%)** thought they were **treated either very fairly or fairly**.

However, **opinions on other institutions were less favourable**: for example, although 50% of those who addressed **LOCAL PUBLIC AUTHORITIES** said they were treated either very fairly or fairly, 45.2% felt they were treated either very unfairly or unfairly. Finally, although the respondents mostly thought that the Central Public Authorities treated them respectfully, the respondents also believed they were treated unfairly (77.8%). Once again, the respondents had mixed opinions about the court administration, with 36.4% saying they were treated either very unfairly or unfairly, and only 9.1% stating they were treated fairly.

Respondents **were also queried on how clearly institutions explained their procedures**. When asked about the extent to which various institutions explained how their processes work and made sure the respondents understood them, **respondents were most effusive about notaries** (88.9% said notaries explained their procedures to a very large or large extent), **mediators** (78.6%), **lawyers** (64.2%) and **bailiffs** (61.5%).

The police and courts were also graded positively on this question: 37.7% of respondents thought the police explained their procedures (versus 29.3% who did not), while 47.7% of court users thought the courts explained their procedures (versus 31.3% who did not). Court administration officials, on the other hand, scored particularly badly, with 63.7% of respondents stating they had not explained procedures, and only 18.2% saying they had.

On the other hand, **respondents were less complimentary towards prosecutors** (66.7% said prosecutors explained their procedures to a very small or small extent) and **local authorities** (42.9%).

TO WHAT EXTENT DID THIS PERSON OR INSTITUTION EXPLAIN THEIR PROCEDURES AND MAKE SURE YOU UNDERSTOOD THEM?

Person/organisation	Very small	Small	Moderate	Large	Very large
Local public authorities	26.2%	16.7%	28.6%	26.2%	2.4%
Central public authorities	11.1%	33.3%	11.1%	44.4%	0%
Police	16.2%	13.1%	32.5%	31.4%	6.3%
Courts	14.9%	16.4%	20.9%	32.8%	14.9%
Court administration	18.2%	45.5%	18.2%	9.1%	9.1%
Lawyers	5.5%	6.4%	22.9%	33%	31.2%
National Legal Aid Council/paralegals					
Prosecutor	0%	66.7%	0%	33.3%	0%
Notary	2.9%	3.5%	4.7%	17.1%	71.8%
Bailiff	12.8%	9.2%	15.6%	41.3%	20.2%
Mediation services	7.1%	7.1%	7.1%	35.7%	42.9%
Ombudsperson	20.4%	2%	14.3%	26.5%	32.7%

Women were slightly less likely to state that institutions explained their procedures well; this difference was most pronounced with their experiences with bailiffs (53.1% of women stated the bailiffs explained their procedures well or very well, compared to 68.4% of men), and police (34.1% of women and 44.7% of men, respectively). However, aside from these institutions, the difference between the genders in this respect was not particularly noticeable.

Respondents were also asked about **ease of access to institutions**. The results show that respondents had significantly different experiences in this regard.

TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THIS PERSON OR INSTITUTION CLOSE ENOUGH FOR YOU TO HAVE ACCESSED THEM EASILY?

Person/organisation	Large+Very large
Local public authorities	36.3%
Central public authorities	44.4%
Police	45.5%
Courts	40.3%
Lowyers	79.8
National Legal Aid Council/paralegals	
Prosecutor	33.3%
Notary	90%
Bailiff	51.4%
Mediation service	78.6%
Ombudsperson	89.8%

Somewhat surprisingly, **the respondents' residence is not a determinant of their ease of access**. As can be seen from the table below, **rural residents did not have more difficulty in accessing institutions than urban ones**. Although this may be due to methodological limitations¹⁰, it is nonetheless an encouraging sign on the coverage and accessibility of Moldovan institutions.

TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THIS PERSON OR INSTITUTION EASILY ACCESSIBLE TO YOU? BY RESIDENCE

Large extent + very large extent	Urban	Rural
Bailiffs	51.8%	50%
Notaries	89.9%	90.5%
Police	46.3%	44.4%
Courts	30.6%	51.6%
Ombudsperson	88.6%	92.9%
National Legal Aid Council	81.2%	77.5%
Mediator	83.3%	50%
Local public authorities	20%	41.2%

10. As mentioned above in the section on Methodology, booster samples were used to increase the number of users of institutions, which, in turn, means that the sample may not be fully reflective of those respondents that would have addressed an institution but failed to do so due to difficulties in accessing them.

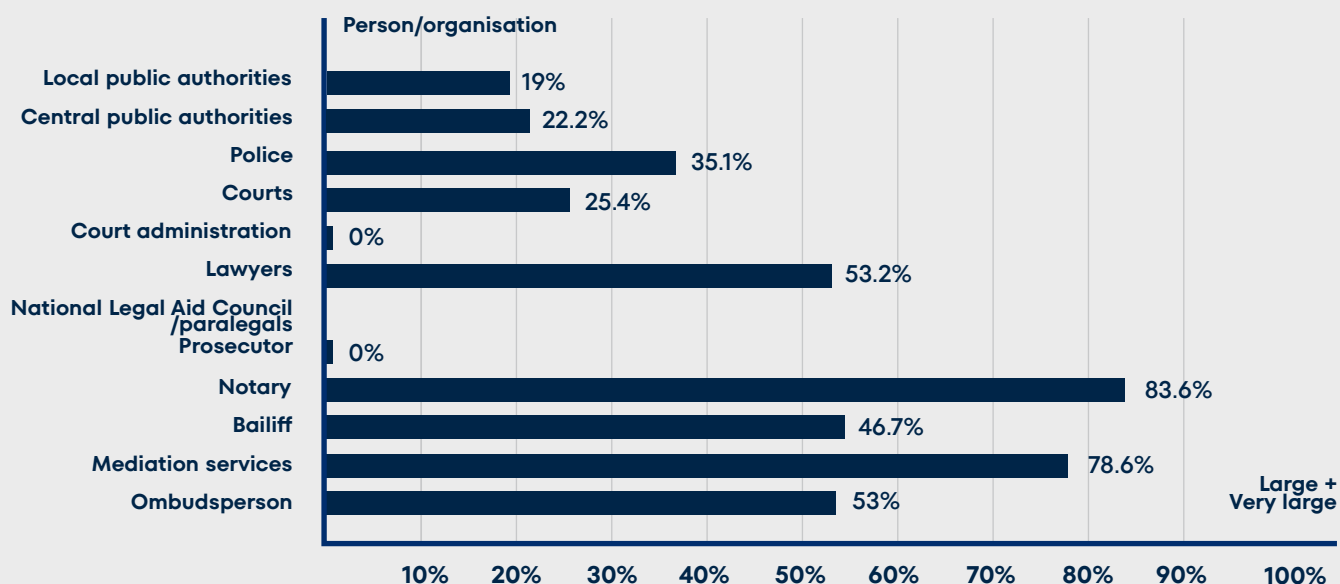
Respondents were also asked about how easy it was to deal with Moldovan institutions resolving their disputes. The answers varied significantly: notaries (87.1% said their dealings with notaries were, to a large or very large extent, without stress) and mediators (78.6%) scored the highest; they were followed by bailiffs (53.2%), Ombudsperson (53%) and lawyers (52.3%). Finally, institutions including **local public authorities (39.6%), police (38.8%), the courts (35.8%)** and – most of all – **court administrations (9.1%)** were seen by respondents as the most stressful to deal with.

TO WHAT EXTENT WERE YOUR DEALINGS WITH THIS INSTITUTION EASY OR WITHOUT STRESS?

Person/organisation	Large+Very large
Local public authorities	39.6%
Central public authorities	44.4%
Police	38.8%
Courts	35.8%
Court administration	9.1%
Lawyers	52.3%
National Legal Aid Council/paralegals	
Prosecutor	0%
Notary	87.1%
Bailiff	53.2%
Mediation service	78.6%
Ombudsperson	53%

Moldovan institutions are seen in **starkly different terms when it comes to their speed and efficiency in dealing with disputes**. Once again, notaries and mediators are perceived most favourably: 83.6% of respondents said notaries were efficient in dealing with their disputes, and 78.6% thought so of mediators. Lawyers, the Ombudsperson (53%), and bailiffs (46.7%) are thought of more equivocally in this regard, while police (35.1%), courts (25.4%), central public authorities (22.2%) and local public authorities (19%) were overwhelmingly seen as inefficient and slow. Finally, there were no respondents (0%) who stated the court administration was speedy and efficient in dealing with their problems.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THIS INSTITUTION BEEN EFFICIENT/SPEEDY IN DEALING WITH YOUR PROBLEM?

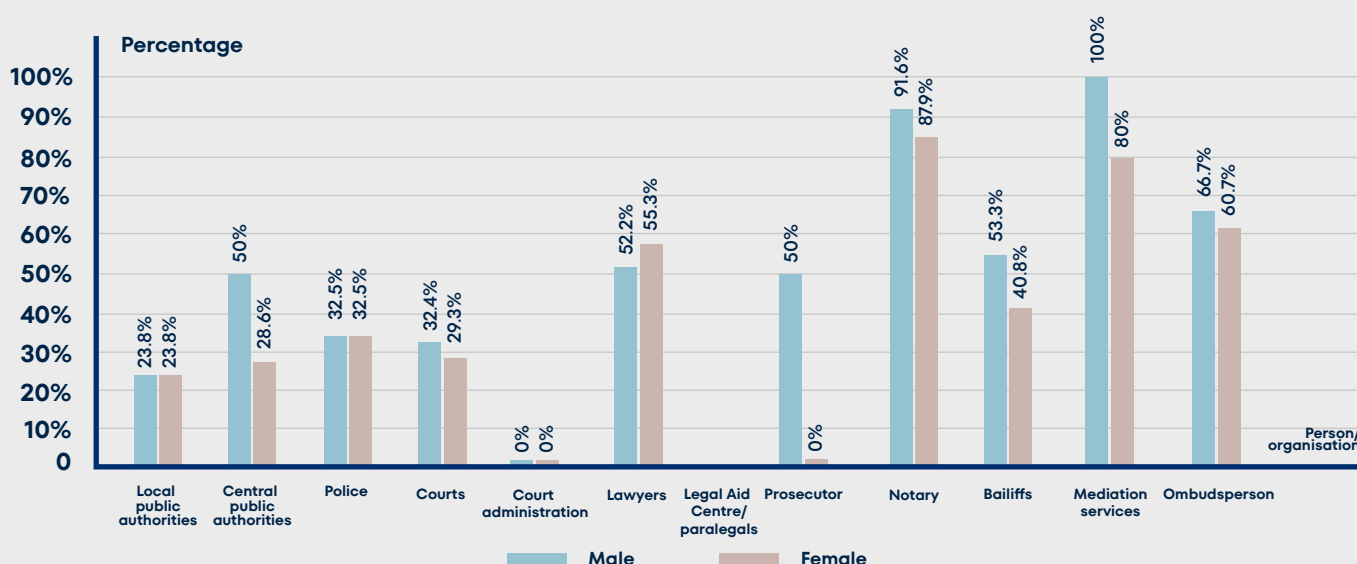
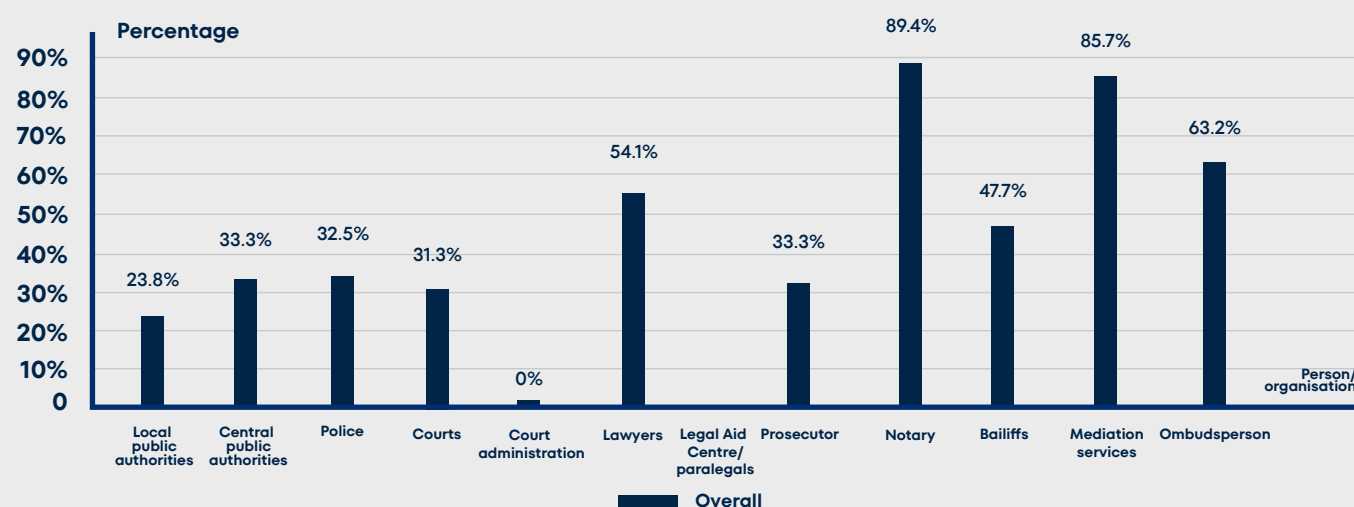


Respondents were further asked about **the affordability of services rendered by Moldovan institutions**. While notaries (67.1%) and mediators (71.4%) were seen as affordable or very affordable, that was less true of other institutions, including police (34%), bailiffs (31.2%), the courts (20.9%) and local public authorities (18.6%). Interestingly, no significant differences were noted between various socio-economic groups in terms of affordability.

Respondents were also quizzed about the **extent to which institutions showed prejudice or bias in resolving their legal disputes**. Once again, notaries and mediators were thought of most favourably: 89.4% of respondents said that notaries acted (to a large or very large extent) without prejudice or bias, while the same was true of 85.7% of those respondents who used the services of mediators. The Ombudsperson was also regarded favourably, with 63.2% of respondents stating that they acted without prejudice or without bias.

On the other hand, concerning **key institutions were thought of as prejudiced or biased**. This is particularly true of local public authorities (only 23.8% of respondents believed they were acting without prejudice or bias), courts (31.3%) and police (32.5%), and – most obviously – court administrations, who scored 0% on this front.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID THIS PERSON OR INSTITUTION ACT WITHOUT BIAS? (LARGE + VERY LARGE EXTENT)



It is very noticeable from the data that **female respondents across almost all the institutions are likelier to believe these institutions are prejudiced or biased**. Thus, for instance, while 53.3% of men believe bailiffs acted without prejudice or bias, the same is true for only 40.8% of women.

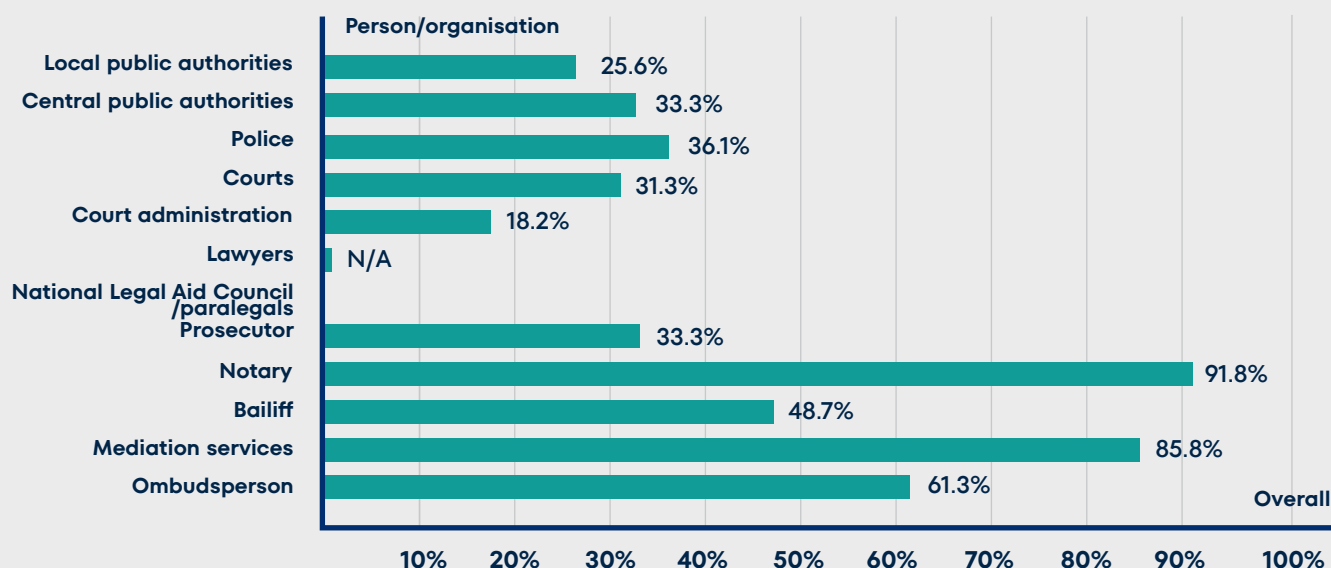
TO WHAT EXTENT DID THIS PERSON OR INSTITUTION ACT WITHOUT BIAS? (LARGE + VERY LARGE EXTENT)

Financial situation of a family	We do not have enough money even for food	We have enough money for food, but buying clothes makes it difficult	We have enough for everything except for the purchase of real estate (cottages or apartments).	We have no material difficulties. If necessary, we could buy a cottage, an apartment
Local public authorities	16.7%	23.1%	50%	N/A
Central public authorities	-	-	N/A	N/A
Police	25.1%	25%	48%	62.5%
Courts	25%	14.3%	25%	100%
Lawyers	50%	44.5%	82.4%	66.7%
National Legal Aid Council/ paralegals				
Prosecutor			N/A	N/A
Notary	100%	91.3%	96.5%	90%
Bailiff	25%	41.6%	58.8%	60%
Mediation services	100%	0%	100%	100%
Ombudsperson	66.7%	66.7%	66.7%	66.7%

As well as women, **poorer respondents are likelier to believe that institutions are prejudiced or biased than richer ones**. Thus, while only 25.1% of the poorest respondents believe the police is not prejudiced or biased, that's true of 62.5% of the richest; similarly while 25% of the poorest interviewees stated bailiffs are not prejudiced or biased, that's true of 60% of those from the ranks of the richest.

In addition to examining perceptions about the institutions' prejudice or bias, **the survey also examined respondents' perceptions about the likeliness of institutions to act under external influence** (NB – this question is intended to examine the pervasiveness of external influence, whereas the previous attempted to determine perceptions of institutions' structural prejudice or bias). Once again, notaries (91.8%) and mediators (85.8%) are thought of most favourably, while the local public authorities (25.6%), courts (31.3%), police (36.1%) and the court administration (18.2%) were most negatively viewed by the respondents.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID THIS PERSON OR INSTITUTION ACT WITHOUT EXTERNAL INFLUENCE? (LARGE + VERY LARGE EXTENT)

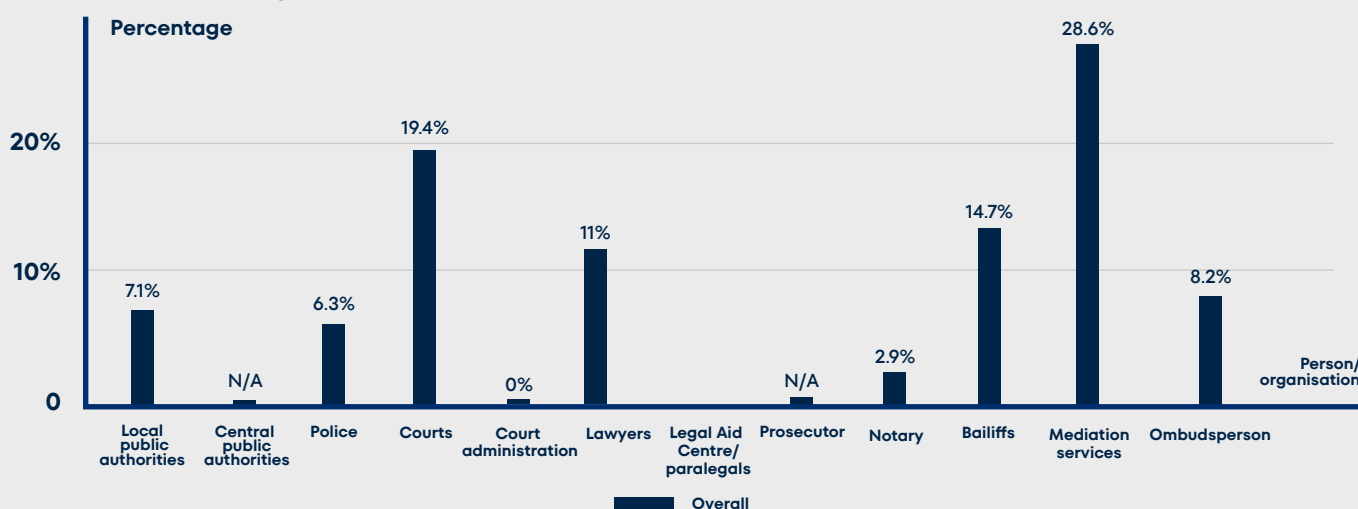


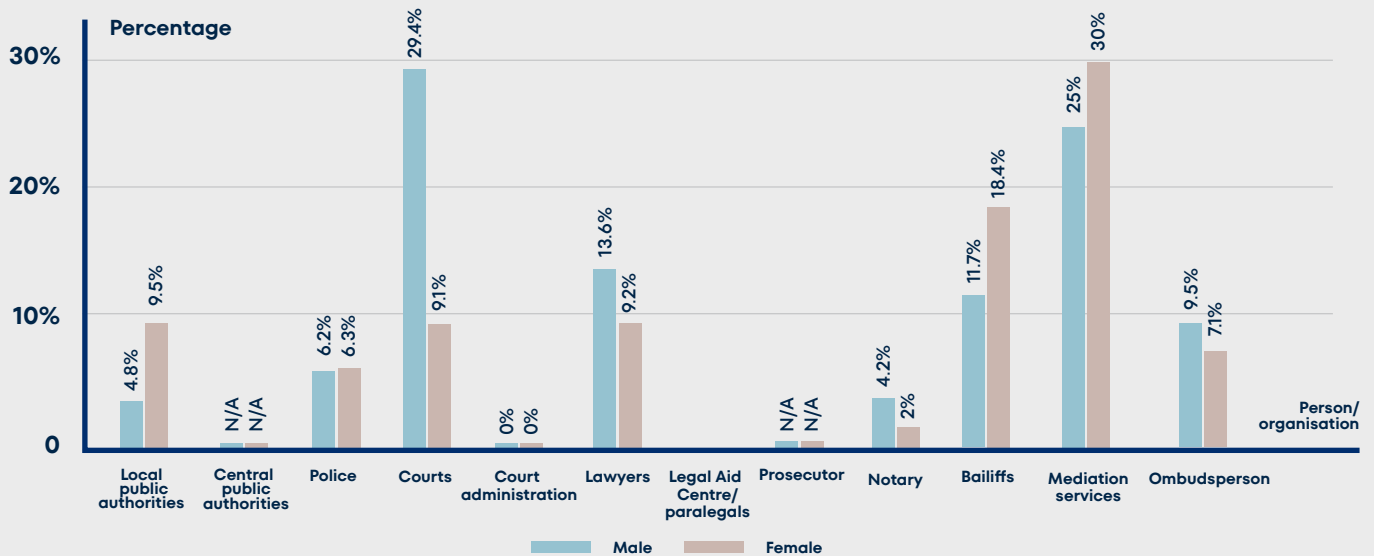
The survey sought to probe further into the integrity of dispute resolution processes. Namely, respondents were asked **whether the respective persons or institutions had ever suggested to them that resorting to informal means**, such as additional payments, gifts or pulling strings, would help them solve their legal disputes.

The results show **a worrying level of tolerance of informality, verging on corruption, among Moldovan institutions.**

Thus, 19.4% of court users, including 29.4% of men, were suggested by judges or court staff– who are supposed to function within the confines of legal procedure – that informal means such as additional payments could help resolve their disputes. Further, 14.7% of users of bailiffs' services were told the same by bailiffs, as were 7.1% of those using the services of local authorities and 6.3% of those that addressed the police to help resolve their dispute (NB: 28.4% of those using mediation services were also told this; however, it is possible that this was done by mediators with a view to improving or restoring relationships with the other party, a common goal of the mediation of disputes). These findings held across various socio-economic and educational groups as well.

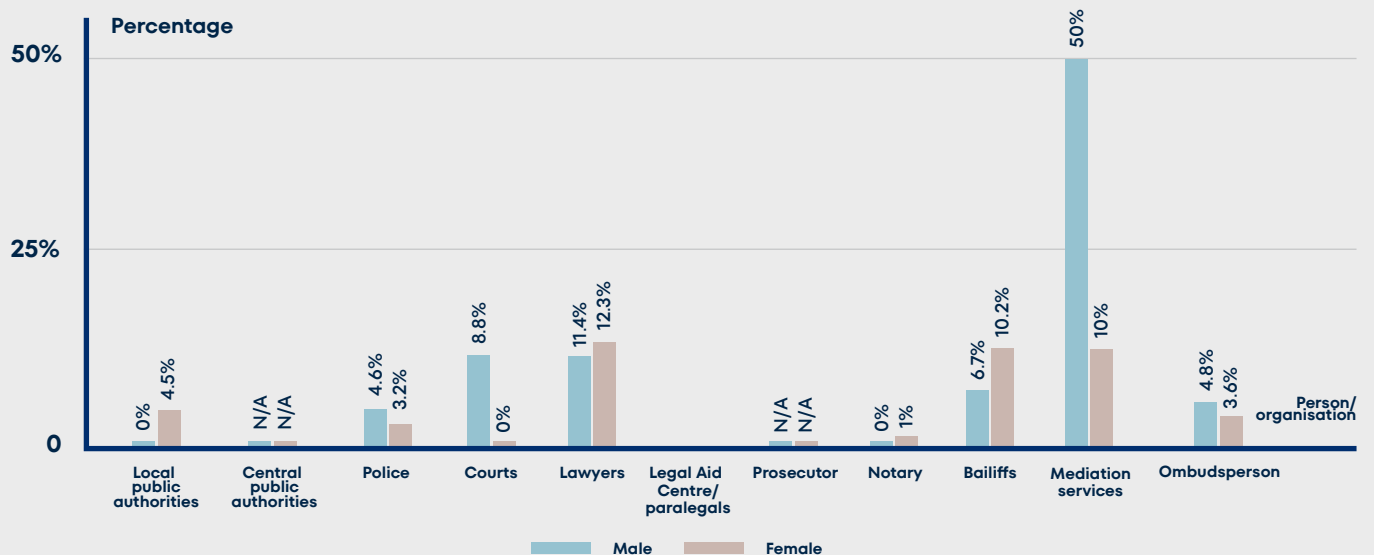
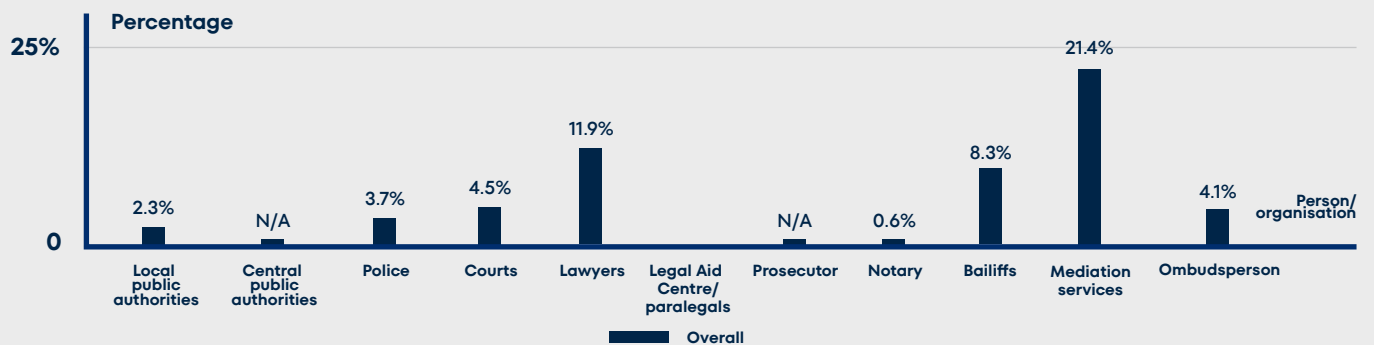
HAS IT EVER BEEN SUGGESTED TO YOU (BY A PERSON OR INSTITUTION REPRESENTATIVE) THAT RESORTING TO INFORMAL MEANS, SUCH AS ADDITIONAL PAYMENTS, OFFERING A GIFT, PULLING STRINGS, WOULD RESULT IN HAVING YOUR CASE ADJUDICATED IN YOUR FAVOUR?





Unfortunately, **respondents did occasionally act upon these suggestions and resort to informal means to resolve problems in their favour.** Thus, 4.5% of court users, 3.7% of police users, 8.3% of those that went to bailiffs, 4.1% of Ombudsperson users, and 11.9% of those that addressed to lawyers made additional payments, offered a gift or pulled strings to resolve the case in their favour. This phenomenon is not confined to a particular gender, socio-economic group or region.

DID YOU EVER RESORT TO INFORMAL MEANS, SUCH AS ADDITIONAL PAYMENTS, OFFERING A GIFT, PULLING STRINGS, WOULD RESULT IN HAVING YOUR CASE ADJUDICATED IN YOUR FAVOUR?



OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS OF USING THIRD PARTIES TO RESOLVE DISPUTES

This sub-section will focus on the outcomes of dispute resolution processes, as well as on some impacts that were not discussed in the previous sub-sections.

Just over three fifths (60.7%) of all disputants that addressed any third parties spent nothing on attempting to resolve disputes.



HOW MUCH MONEY DID YOU SPEND IN TOTAL ON ATTEMPTING TO RESOLVE THIS DISPUTE? (RESPONDENTS WHO ADDRESSED THIRD PARTIES)

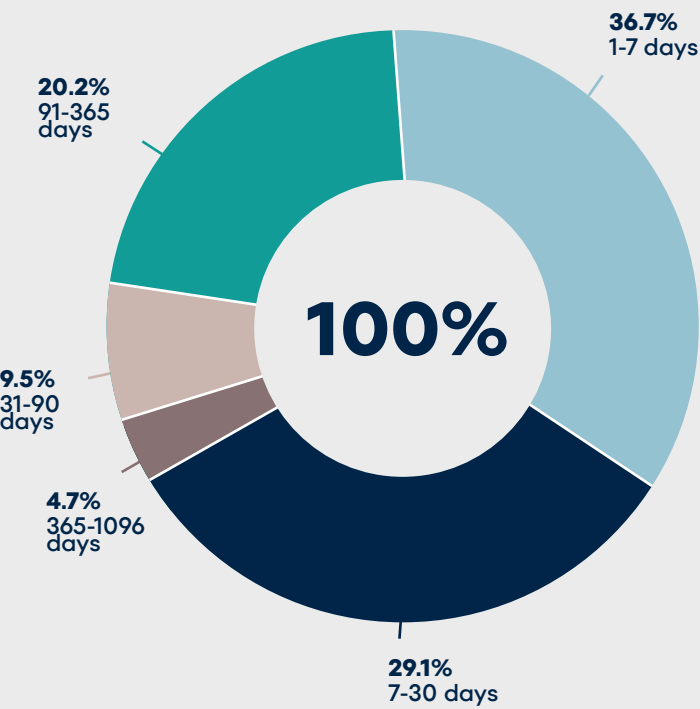
Total, MDL (100%)



Respondents spent similar amounts addressing their social networks (friends and family) and institutions. Namely, while 68.6% spent nothing addressing their friends and family; that was true of 54.1% of those that addressed institutions.

The survey also examined the time spent by respondents in addressing third parties. Just over a third (36.7%) spent a week or less attempting to resolve their disputes through third parties. Just over a quarter (29.1%) spent between a week and a month doing so, a further 9.5% took between a month and three months, and another 20.2% took between three months and a year. Finally, 4.7% took over a year (with the longest recorded dispute lasting just under three years).

HOW MUCH TIME DID YOU SPEND IN TOTAL ON RESOLVING THIS DISPUTE? (IN DAYS)



Key institutions (courts, police, local authorities) took similar amounts of time to resolve the disputes.

HOW MUCH TIME DID YOU SPEND IN TOTAL ON RESOLVING THIS DISPUTE? (IN DAYS)

Institution	1-7 days	7-30 days	31-90 days	91-365 days	365-1096 days
Local authorities	36.7%	27.3%	9.1%	18.2%	9.1%
Court	22.2%	42.1%	13.2%	11%	11%
Police	32.3%	30.4%	12.1%	21.1%	3%

Less than half of all Moldovan citizens who turned to institutions eventually tackled their problems through those same institutions. By far the biggest group (37.5%) gave up in trying to resolve their problems; a 9.3% either settled their problems through a trusted third party or through mediation (formal or informal), another 8.9% talked to the other party directly and reached a solution, and for a further 5.2% the problem 'sorted itself out'.

Meanwhile, **just 39% in total had institutions (courts, police, prosecutors, legal aid offices, municipalities) help resolve their problem.**

This shows that **comparatively few persons use institutions to resolve their legal disputes;** instead, many either give up, or they resolve issues either directly or through a third party.

Unsurprisingly, the poorer a disputant is, the less likely they are to address institutions. Thus, the poorest respondents ultimately used the courts, lawyers, and other institutions significantly less than on average; conversely, they had to give up their disputes and had to find a way to directly solve disputes through negotiations or through other means more than the average citizen.

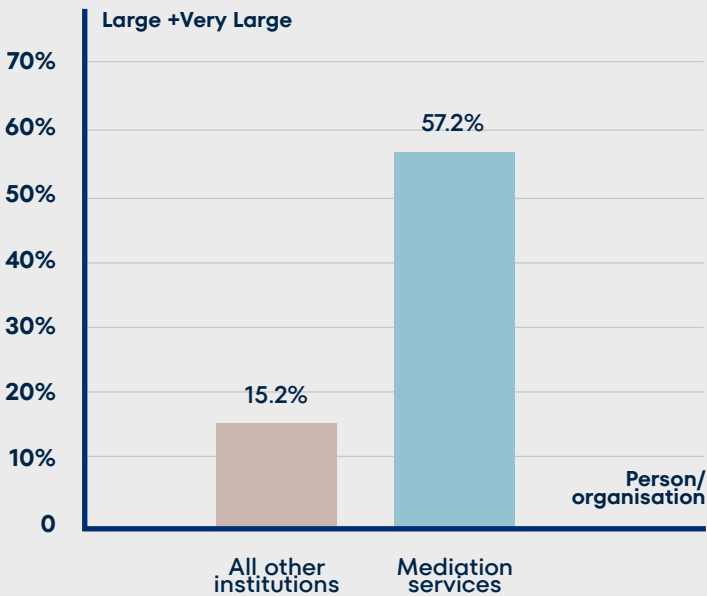
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR PROBLEM?

Person/organisation	We do not have money even for food	Overall
Court-related action (e.g. judgment in a court case, compensation order, court-initiated settlement, etc.)	4.5%	14.6%
Police action (e.g. interviewed the other party, prevented a crime, etc.)	9.8%	16.1%
Prosecutorial action (e.g. declined to prosecute, etc.)	4.8%	2.6%
Legal aid office action (e.g. wrote a submission, etc.)	0%	1%
Local administrative body action (e.g. municipality issued a license, etc.)	0%	2.1%
Lawyer's action (e.g. submission, provided verbal advice, etc.)	0%	2.6%
Problem sorted itself out	14.3%	5.2%
I talked to the other party directly, and we reached a solution	14.3%	8.9%
Settled by a trusted third party	4.8%	5.7%
Mediation	4.8%	3.6%
I gave up	42.9%	37.5%

A distinct **advantage in resolving disputes through mediation is that it helps restore relationships with the other party.** Thus, while only 15.2% of disputants before all the other institutions said the result (largely or very largely) helped restore the relationship with the other party in the dispute, the same was true of 57.2% of those who underwent mediation. Although restoring relationships is not the stated aim of adversarial mechanisms such as the court system, this is a clear advantage of using mediation that should not be overlooked by policymakers.

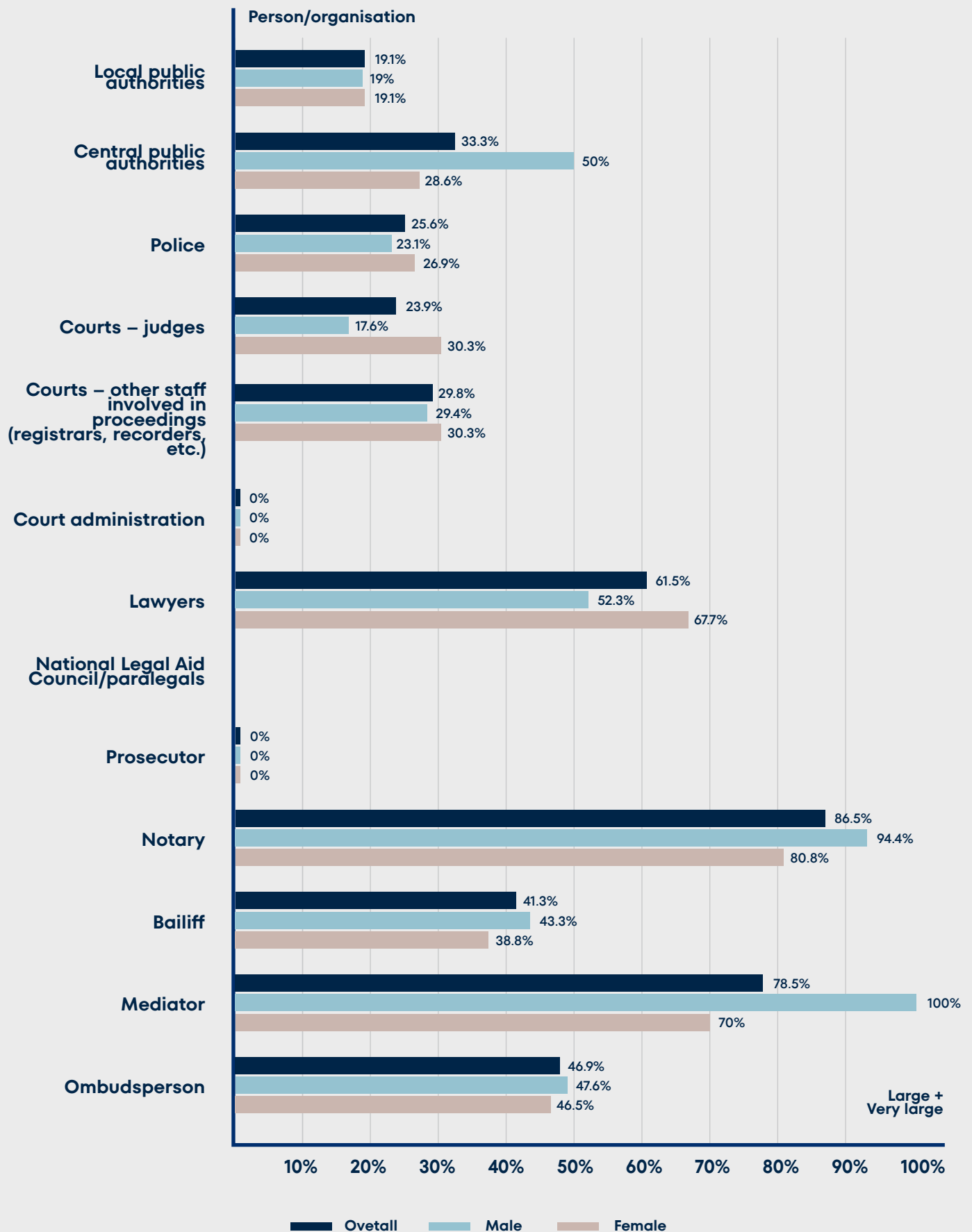


TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE RESULT RESTORE THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OTHER PARTY (LARGE + VERY LARGE)



The respondents were **finally asked to rate their satisfaction with the work of the institutions they addressed to resolve their disputes.** In keeping with other results on dispute resolution, **notaries (86.5%) and mediators (78.5%) were evaluated very favourably, with their work being satisfactory.** They were followed by lawyers (61.5%), the Ombudsperson’s office (46.9%) and bailiffs (41.3%). Unfortunately, **key institutions in the system, including police (25.6%), local public authorities (19.1%), court judges (23.9%), and court administration (0%) were graded very poorly.**

TO WHAT EXTENT WERE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE QUALITY OF THIS INSTITUTION'S WORK? (LARGE + VERY LARGE)



KEY FINDINGS ON DISPUTE RESOLUTION

A. SEEKING ADVICE

- Of those that sought initial advice from a trusted individual, institution, or other sources more than half (59.6%) consulted a trusted person, while 63.1% sought guidance from institutions or various other sources;
- Of those that sought advice from a trusted individual, **22.7% addressed a person they know well in a position of power, and 20.4% spoke to a relative about their disputes;**
- Among those who sought advice from institutions or other sources, **the plurality relied on police (28%) and on local public authorities (25.5%).** Additionally, 12.6% of respondents sought guidance from a lawyer, while 7.7% turned to the court for advice;
- **Advice provided by institutions was generally perceived as more helpful by respondents than advice obtained through social networks.** Among the institutions, the police and lawyers ranked highly in terms of efficiency and user satisfaction. In contrast, local public authorities only moderately met the expectations of those seeking their assistance.

B. RESOLVING DISPUTES ON THEIR OWN OR WITH THE OTHER PARTY

- **55.8% of those with disputes approached the other party to try and resolve them;**
- **51.6% of respondents took other actions on their own,** such as either gathering evidence or contacting witnesses or both, to address their legal problems;
- **A significant portion of disputes was fully resolved after respondents either engaged directly with the other party or took additional actions.** Specifically, 41.9% of those who attempted these methods reported successfully resolving their disputes.

C. SOLVING DISPUTES THROUGH THIRD PARTIES

- Of those who did not resolve disputes with the other party or on their own, **half (50%) addressed a third party to resolve the dispute. The other half did not address anyone and chose to let their disputes go unresolved;**
- That means, in sum, that **only 28.6% of all those Moldovan citizens with legal disputes end up turning to a third party to resolve their disputes;**

- **The wealthier respondents (62.3%) and women (52.6%) were more inclined to turn to third-party to resolve their disputes** compared to poorer respondents (46.4%) and men (46.6%);
- **Respondents refused to turn to a third party for the following principal reasons: 22.2% said taking their dispute elsewhere would be futile; 44.6% said that justice was inaccessible** whether in terms of time, money, or otherwise; and **21.5% stated they did not know what action to take;**
- **Respondents who sought third-party assistance were more likely to turn to institutions rather than to their social networks.** Among the most frequently chosen institutions were the police (17.3%), local public authorities (11.5%), and lawyers (8.8%). However, other institutions, such as National Legal Aid Councils, institutional hotlines, notaries, bailiffs, NGOs, mediation services, the Ombudsperson, and the Equality Council, were rarely or never contacted by the disputants;
- **Respondents provided various reasons for selecting a particular third party, whether an institution or an individual, with the most common being the trust they had in that party (43.2%). Another important factor was the third party's expertise and knowledge, cited by 40.4% of respondents;**
- **Respondents' experiences with various institutions varied significantly:**
 - **Respondents were very positive about the work of notaries and mediators;** they were thought to treat the respondents most respectfully (notaries (88.2%), the Mediation Council (78.5%)) and fairly (notaries (88.3%), the Mediation Council (71.4%)). Moreover, the respondents thought those institutions explained their procedures most clearly (88.9% said notaries explained their procedures to a very large or large extent), while 78.6% said the same about mediators), that they were easiest to deal with and fastest (83.6% of respondents said notaries were efficient in dealing with their disputes, and 78.6% thought so of mediators), least likely to act under external influence or with prejudice or bias (89.4% of respondents said that notaries acted without prejudice or bias, and 85.7% for mediators). Overall respondents were most satisfied about the quality of the work of notaries (86.5%) and mediators (78.5%);
 - **However, respondents' experiences with the justice sector core institutions were far more mixed.** Perhaps most indicatively, when asked to rate their satisfaction with the quality of the work of these institutions, respondents graded the police (25.6%), local public authorities (19.1%) and judges (23.9%). Moreover, only 39.6% of respondents dealing with local public authorities, 38.8% of those dealing with the police, and 35.8% of those dealing with courts found their experiences easy and without stress. In addition, the police (35.1%), courts (25.4%), central public authorities (22.2%) and local public authorities (19%) were overwhelmingly seen as inefficient and slow. Finally, there were no respondents (0%) that stated the court administration was speedy and efficient in dealing with their problems;

- **Court administrations generally scored very poorly;** only 9.1% of those dealing with court administrations found their experiences easy and without stress; another example is that 36.4% of respondents stated they were treated either very unfairly or unfairly by court administrations, with only 9.1% stating they were treated fairly. Most stunningly, there were no respondents (0%) that stated the court administration was speedy and efficient in dealing with their problems and similarly 0% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of the work of the court administration;
- **There is a worrying level of tolerance of informality, verging on corruption, among Moldovan institutions:** 19.4% of court users, including 29.4% of men, report that it was suggested by judges or court staff that informal means such as additional payments could help resolve their disputes. **Respondents occasionally acted upon these suggestions and resort to informal means to resolve problems in their favour.** Thus, 4.5% of court users, 3.7% of police users, 8.3% of those who went to bailiffs, 4.1% of Ombudsperson users, and 11.9% of those who addressed to lawyers made additional payments, offered a gift or pulled strings to resolve the case in their favour. This phenomenon is not confined to a particular gender, socio-economic group or region;
- **Female and poorer respondents across almost all the institutions are likelier to believe these institutions are prejudiced or biased.** Thus, for instance, while 53.3% of men believe bailiffs acted without prejudice or bias, the same is true for only 40.8% of women. Also, while only 25.1% of the poorest respondents believe the police is not prejudiced or biased, that is true of 62.5% of the richest;
- **Less than half of all Moldovan citizens that turned to institutions eventually tackled their problems through those same institutions.** By far the biggest group (37.5%) gave up in trying to resolve their problems. Meanwhile, **just 39% in total had institutions (courts, police, prosecutors, legal aid offices, municipalities) help resolve their problem;**
- In all, **comparatively few persons use institutions to resolve their legal disputes;** instead, many either give up, or resolve issues either directly or through a third party. **Unsurprisingly, the poorer a disputant is, the less likely they are to use institutions.**

3. LEVEL AND CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUST IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

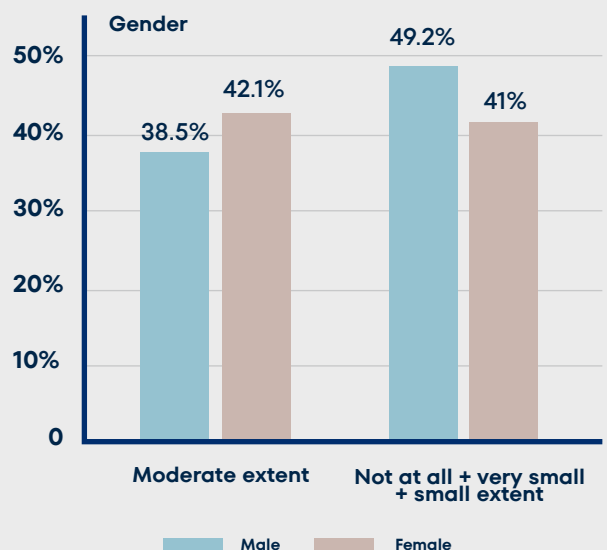
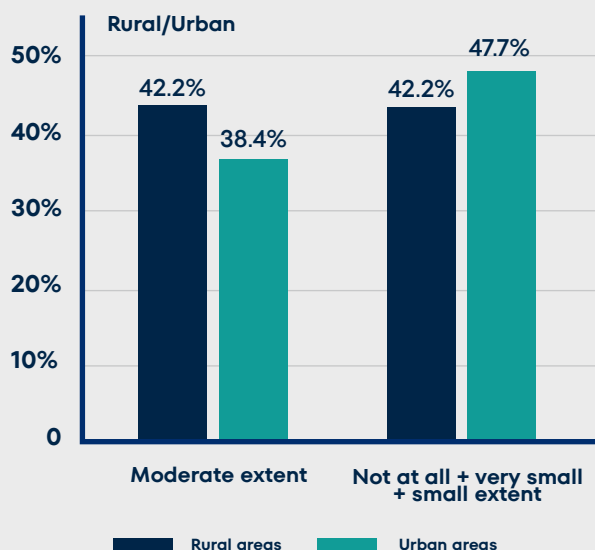
Trust in the justice system is a crucial prerequisite for ensuring effective access to justice and fostering a people-centred approach. **The findings reveal that a significant share of respondents (44.6%) exhibit little or no trust in the Moldovan justice system, with 18.3% expressing complete distrust, 11.9% indicating very little trust, and 14.4% reporting only a small degree of trust. A moderate level of trust is held by 40.5% of citizens, while only 11.2% of respondents reported trusting the justice system to a large or very large extent.**

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU TRUST THE JUSTICE SYSTEM? LEVEL OF TRUST PERCENTAGE



Respondents with a moderate level of trust in the justice system were predominantly from rural areas (42.2%), while urban population demonstrated a higher degree of distrust, with nearly a fifth of city residents (19.9%) stating they had no trust in the justice system at all. Trust in the justice system also declines with age: 22.6% of individuals in the oldest age group reported having no trust at all, compared to only 8% of respondents aged 18 to 29.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU TRUST THE JUSTICE SYSTEM?

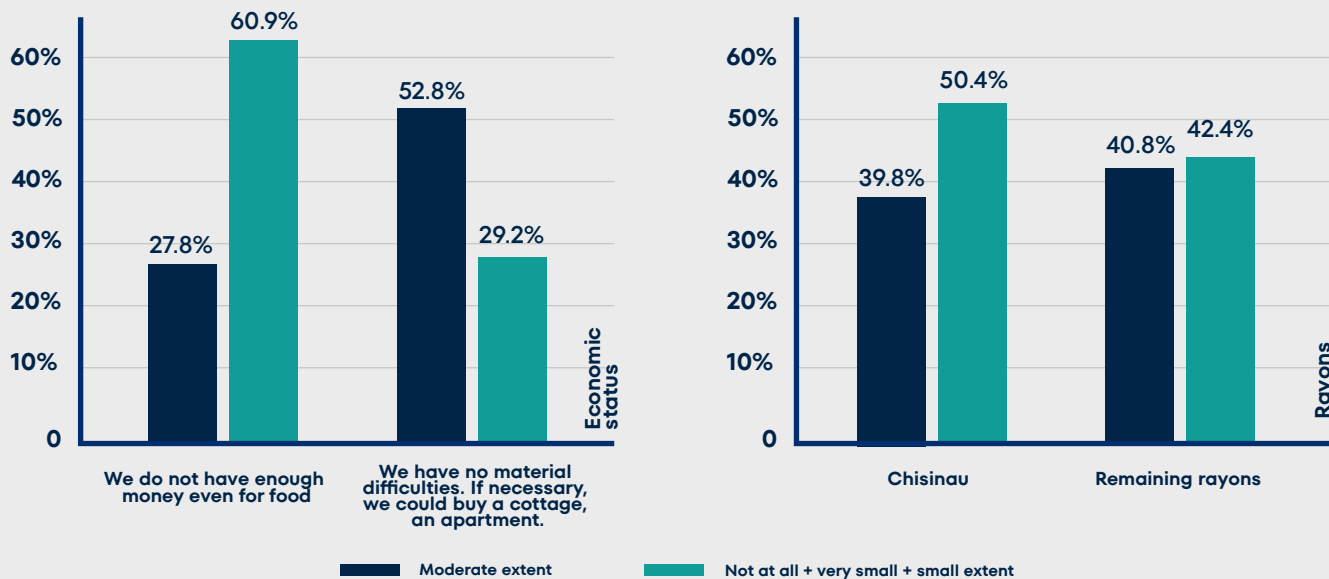


Men exhibited a higher degree of distrust in the justice system compared to women. Specifically, 38.5% of men reported a moderate level of trust in the justice system, compared to 42.1% of women. More notably, nearly half of the male respondents (49.2%) and 41% of the female respondents said that they had little or no trust in the justice system.

Disaggregation of data by the economic position of the respondents reveals that 52.8% of wealthiest individuals (those without material difficulties) said they moderately trusted in the justice system, whereas only 27.8% of those struggling to afford basic necessities shared this view. **The latter group also demonstrated the lowest levels of trust, with nearly 40% of the poorest respondents expressing complete distrust in the justice system, a sentiment shared by only 12.4% of the wealthiest individuals.** In addition, no significant differences were observed in trust levels based on respondents' educational attainment.

The regional distribution of data reveals that 50.4% of respondents from Chisinau have little or no trust in the justice system, with 22.5% expressing no trust at all. In comparison, 16.8% of respondents from other regions reported having no trust in the justice system. In addition, no significant disparities emerged based on the respondents' education level.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU TRUST THE JUSTICE SYSTEM?



The primary reason respondents are moderately or less likely to trust the justice system is their belief that the law is not enforced in practice, with 58% of respondents indicating this as a concern. Corruption was the second most cited reason with more than half (51.2%) identifying it as a key factor in their low trust. Additionally, 31.6% of respondents pointed to **institutional inefficiency**, while **13.6% cited the lack of affordability** as a significant barrier to trusting the justice system.

Men were likelier than women to attribute their distrust to the belief that the law is not enforced in practice and that the system is corrupt. On the other hand, women were more inclined to cite the system's lack of affordability as a key concern. Similar patterns emerged

when comparing rural and urban populations, with rural residents more likely to attribute their distrust to poor law enforcement, corruption, and institutional inefficiency. Notably, no significant differences were observed between respondents of different age groups, educational levels, or economic statuses regarding the main reasons for distrusting the justice system.

REASONS FOR (NOT) TRUSTING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM.

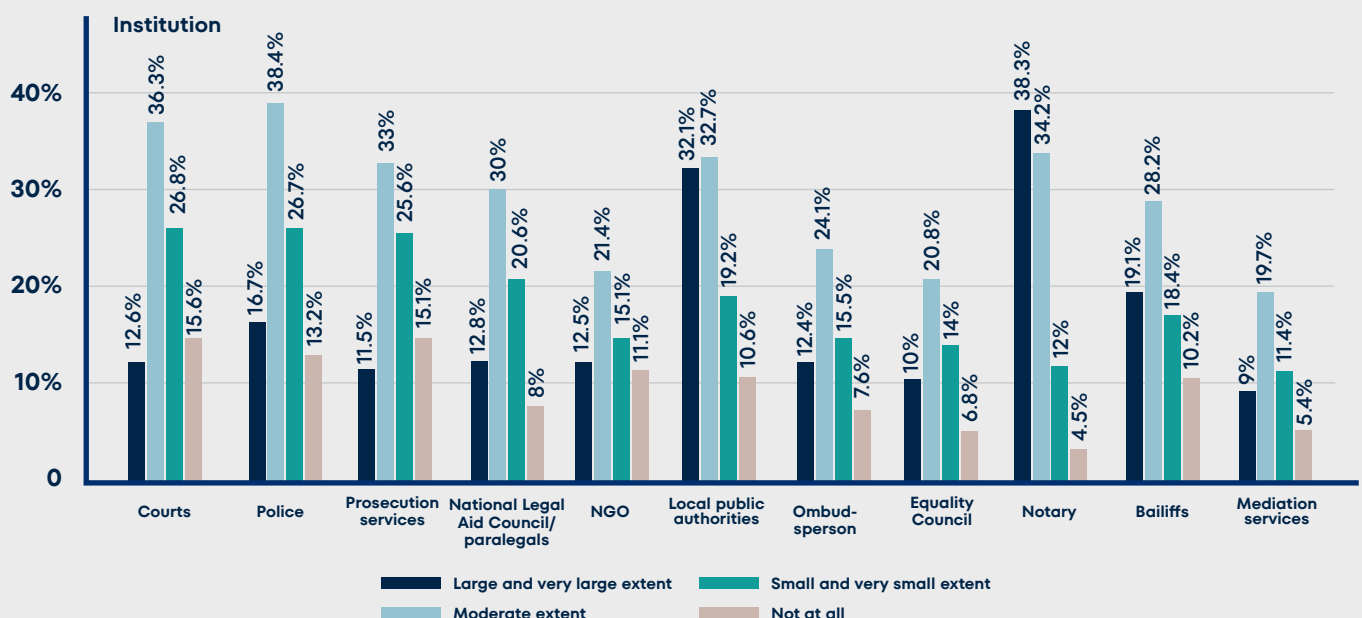


MANIFESTATION OF TRUST IN RELATION TO PARTICULAR INSTITUTIONS

The institutions with the lowest levels of trust among respondents are the courts, prosecution, and police, with 42.2%, 40.7%, and 39.9% of individuals expressing low or no trust in these institutions, respectively. In contrast, **notary services and local public authorities garnered the highest levels of trust**, with 38.3% and 32.1% of respondents stating they trust these institutions to a large or very large extent.

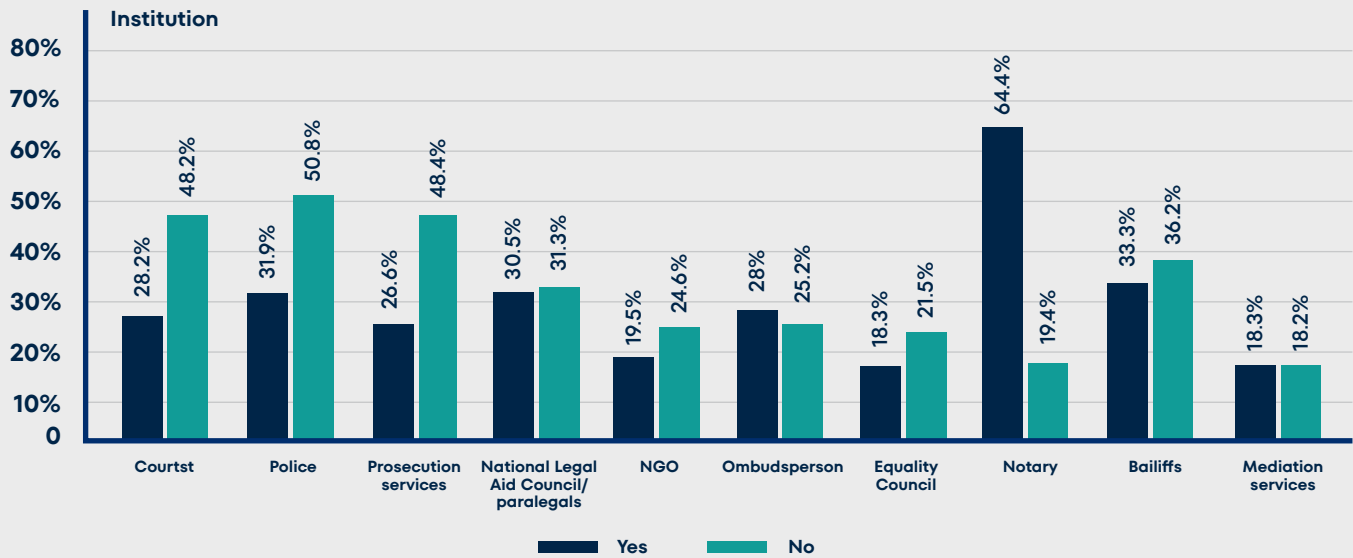
Significantly, those economically worse off expressed the least trust in courts and the police, but also in other institutions such as the National Legal Aid Council/paralegals, NGOs, local public authorities, Ombudsperson. In addition, courts, prosecution, the police and the local public authorities were selected by residents of Chisinau as the least trusted institutions, with 47.9%, 47.4%, 43.8% and 43.3% of respondents expressing low levels of trust or complete distrust in these institutions. In contrast, significant number of respondents from Chisinau (41%) said they trust notaries to a large or very large extent.

THE LEVEL OF TRUST IN RELEVANT INSTITUTIONS

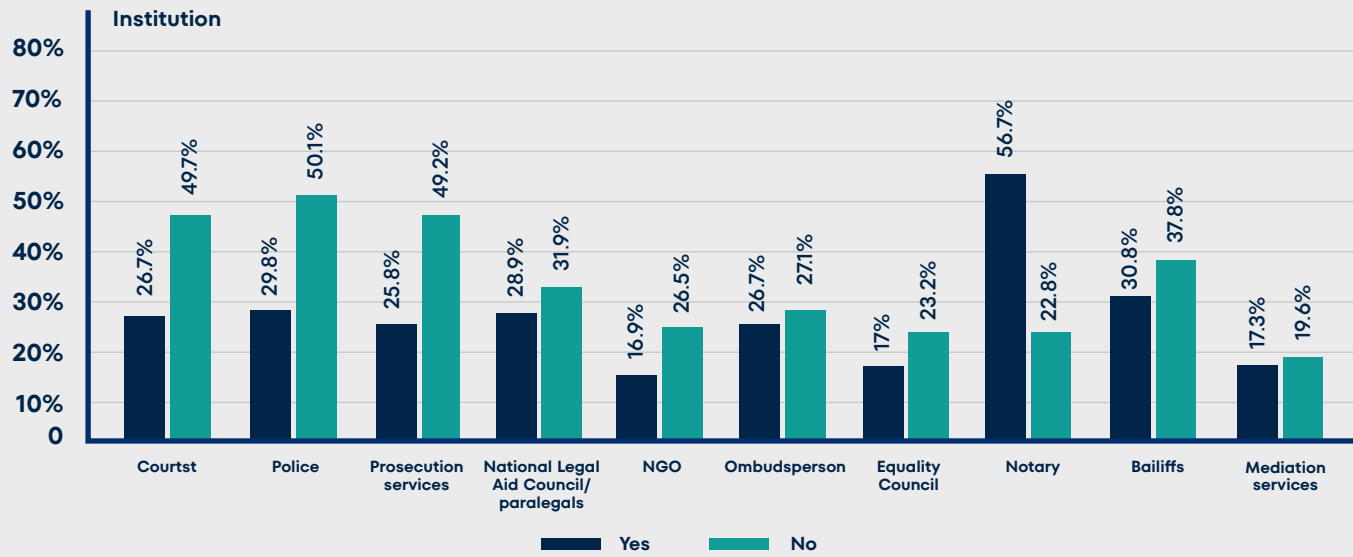


Nearly half of the respondents indicated that the courts, police, and prosecution fail to make fair decisions free from prejudice and bias and external influence. Specifically, 48.2% and 49.7% of participants believe that court decisions are not made impartially (without prejudice and bias and outside influence), while 50.8% and 50.1% expressed similar concerns about the police. Likewise, 48.4% and 49.2% of respondents felt that the prosecution's decisions are influenced by prejudice and bias, and external pressure. Additionally, a third of the sample expressed doubts about the impartiality of National Legal Aid Council/paralegals and bailiffs in their decision-making processes. In contrast, notaries were highly regarded for their ethical conduct, with 64.4% of respondents affirming that notaries make fair, unbiased decisions, and 56.7% stating that their decisions are free from external influence. These findings align closely with previous results concerning levels of trust in these institutions.

DO THEY MAKE FAIR DECISIONS WITHOUT PREJUDICE AND BIAS?



DO THEY MAKE FAIR DECISIONS WITHOUT OUTSIDE INFLUENCE?



In addition, the supplementary surveys on institutional user experiences focused, amongst other aspects, on institutional impartiality and ethical conduct, offering an additional layer for assessing trust in the justice system. **The comparison between the results of the**

general population survey and the supplementary surveys suggests that those who have used institutional services are more likely to believe that these institutions act without prejudice, bias, or external influence, compared to the broader population, which includes both institutional users and non-users. For instance, while 38.8% of the court users interviewed said that the judge and the court staff acted without prejudice and bias to the small and very small extent, 48.2% of the general population surveyed did not believe that the court makes fair decisions without prejudice and bias. Likewise, while nearly a half of the sample representing general population said that courts do not make fair decisions without external influence, a third of the court users (32.8%) indicated that the judge and the court staff acted without external influence to a very small or small extent.

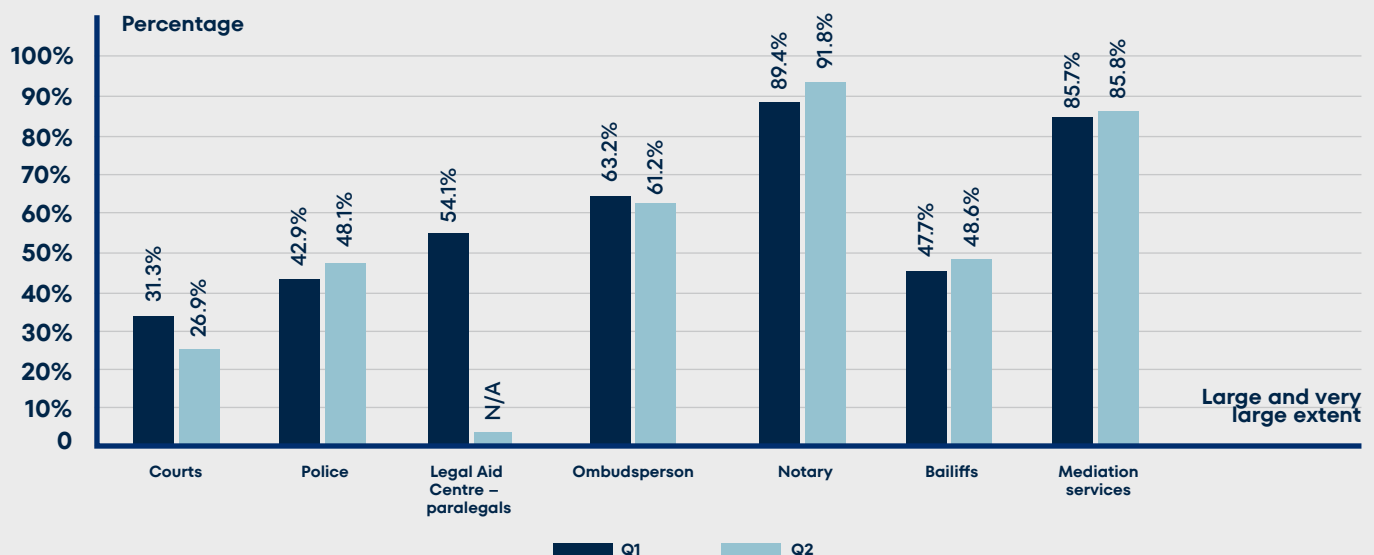
In the same vein, while approximately half of the general population sample believes that the police do not make fair decision without prejudice and bias including outside influence, this was confirmed by only 26% and 27.3% of those that interacted with the police.

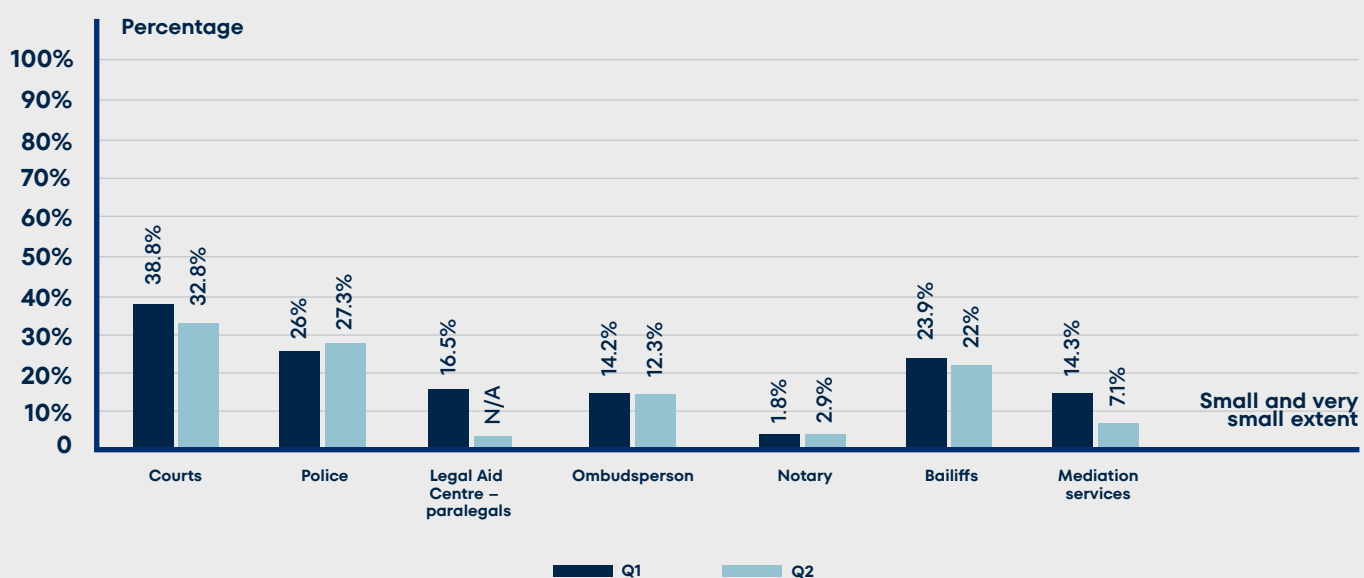
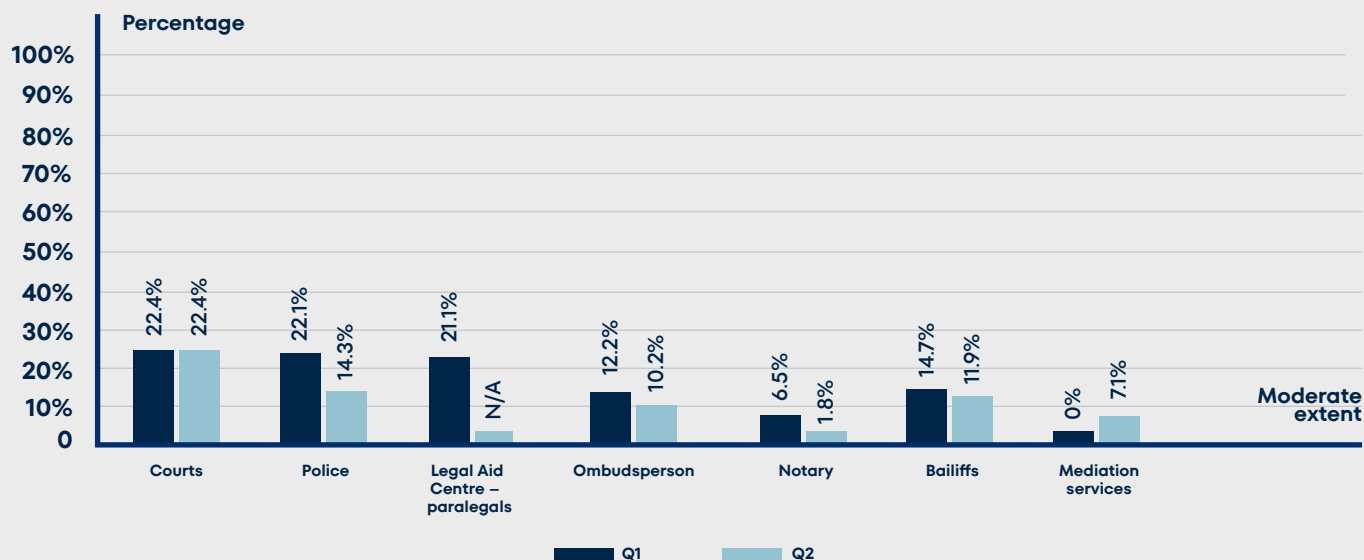
The gap in the level of trust between institutional users and the general population becomes even more pronounced when examining perceptions of, and experiences with, bailiffs, National Legal Aid Council/paralegals, mediation services, the Ombudsperson, and the Equality Council. **Individuals who have used the services of these institutions were significantly more likely to view them as impartial and aligned with ethical standards, compared to those in the general population.** Finally, the positive experiences of those using notary services were even more pronounced compared to the general population survey. Among notary service users, 89.4% believed that notaries act without prejudice or bias, and 91.8% reported that notaries operate free from outside influence.

INSTITUTIONAL USERS SURVEY RESULTS:

Q1. TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE JUDGE AND THE COURT STAFF ACT WITHOUT PREJUDICE OR BIAS?

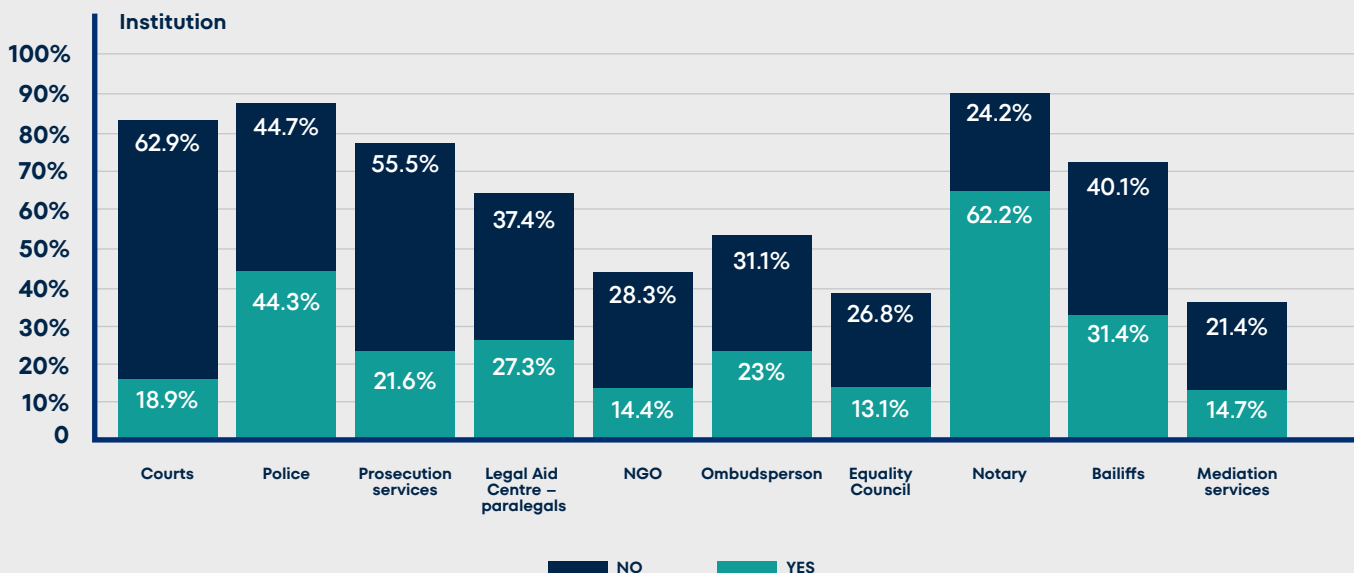
Q2. TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE JUDGE AND THE COURT STAFF ACT WITHOUT EXTERNAL INFLUENCE?





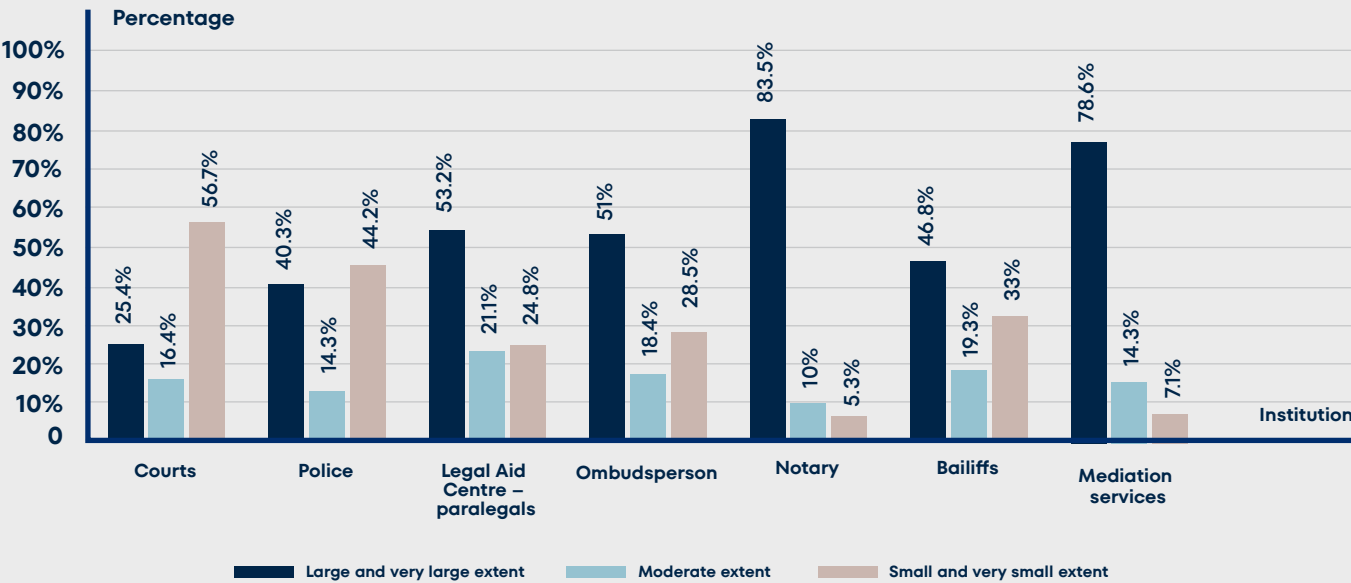
Another important dimension in assessing trust in the justice system is institutional efficiency.

DO THEY ACT QUICKLY?



For instance, while 62.9% of the general population believed that courts do not act promptly, 56.7% of court users reported that courts were efficient to a very small or small extent. The disparity is even more pronounced in the assessment of notaries' efficiency: 24.2% of the general population felt that notaries do not act quickly, compared to only 5.3% of notary service users who rated their efficiency as very small or small. However, an exception to this trend could be found in the evaluation of the police's efficiency, where both the general population and institutional users provided similar assessments, showing no significant differences.

**INSTITUTIONAL USERS SURVEY RESULTS:
TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THE INSTITUTION EFFICIENT/SPEEDY IN DEALING WITH
YOUR PROBLEM?**



KEY FINDINGS ON TRUST IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

- A significant portion of respondents (44.6%) expressed little or no trust in the justice system, with 18.3% reporting a complete lack of trust, while 40.5% indicated a moderate level of trust;
- Only 11.2% of respondents confirmed they trust in the justice system to a large or very large extent;
- Men, urban population and those aged 60 and over were likelier to distrust the justice system compared to those from rural areas, women and younger population;
- Those economically worse-off expressed the least trust in the justice system as compared to those from other economic brackets, with **nearly 40% expressing complete distrust in the justice system, a sentiment shared by only 12.4% of the wealthiest individuals**;
- The regional distribution of data reveals that 50.4% of respondents from Chisinau have little or no trust in the justice system, with 22.5% expressing no trust at all. In comparison, 16.8% of respondents from other regions reported having no trust in the justice system;
- The leading reasons for **mistrust in the justice system** were the lack of law enforcement (58%) and corruption (51.2%);
- Men, those from Chisinau and rural residents were likelier to attribute their distrust to the belief that the law is not enforced in practice and that the system is corrupt;
- **The least trusted institutions were the courts, prosecution, and the police**, with 42.2%, 40.7%, and 39.9% of individuals expressing low or no trust in these institutions, respectively. Nearly half of the respondents indicated that the courts, police, and prosecution fail to make fair decisions free from prejudice and bias and external influence;
- **Notary services and local public authorities garnered the highest levels of trust**, with 38.3% and 32.1% of respondents stating they trust these institutions to a large or very large extent. Notaries were highly regarded for their ethical conduct, with 64.4% of respondents affirming that notaries make fair, unbiased decisions, and 56.7% stating that their decisions are free from external influence;
- **Those who have resorted to justice institutions are more likely to believe that these institutions act without prejudice, bias, or external influence, compared to the broader population, which includes both institutional users and non-users.** For instance, while 38.8% of the interviewed court users said that the judge and the court staff acted without prejudice and bias to the small and very small extent, 48.2% of the surveyed general population did not believe that the court made fair decisions without prejudice and bias. Additionally, while approximately half of the general population sample believed that the police would not make fair decision without prejudice and bias including outside influence, this was confirmed by only 26% and 27.3% of those that interacted with the police.

4. KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAW

An understanding of one's legal rights is a fundamental aspect of ensuring access to justice and developing people-centred approach to justice. Although citizens are not expected to possess an in-depth knowledge of the law, a basic awareness of essential legal principles, commonly applicable provisions, and key tenets is crucial for effective engagement with the justice system. To assess the level of legal literacy among the Moldovan citizens, a survey was conducted to gauge their knowledge of the law and awareness of specific legal provisions.

The **survey results revealed varying levels of legal knowledge and awareness among respondents**. While the majority of Moldovan citizens demonstrated a strong understanding of certain legal rights, particularly regarding police powers to enforce detention and conduct home searches, other areas showed more gaps. For example, knowledge about the right of women to seek divorce and the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular education was only moderately understood. In contrast, there was a broad awareness of the right of women to equal pay for equal work, reflecting stronger familiarity with this aspect of gender equality and legal provisions in that regard. Furthermore, just under two-thirds of respondents were aware of the right to state-appointed legal counsel for individuals accused of a crime, highlighting a mix of well-understood and less familiar legal provisions across the population.

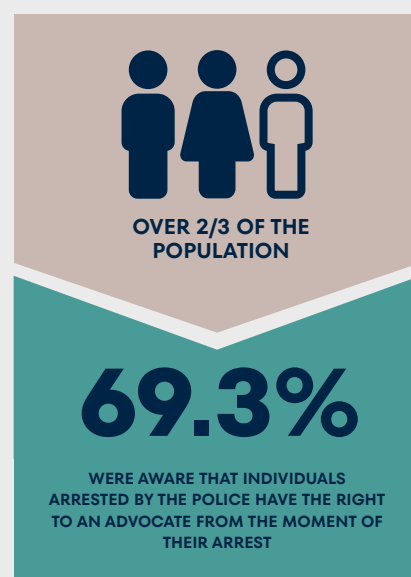
WHICH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS MOST IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW AS YOU UNDERSTAND IT? POWERS OF POLICE TO DETAIN.



11. The right to an advocate from the moment of actual arrest is guaranteed under the Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Moldova. Article 64 establishes the general right to defense, including legal assistance. Article 167 mandates that the authorities ensure immediate access to an advocate following arrest. Additionally, Article 69 outlines the procedural rights of detained persons, explicitly including the right to consult with an advocate from the moment of detention or arrest.

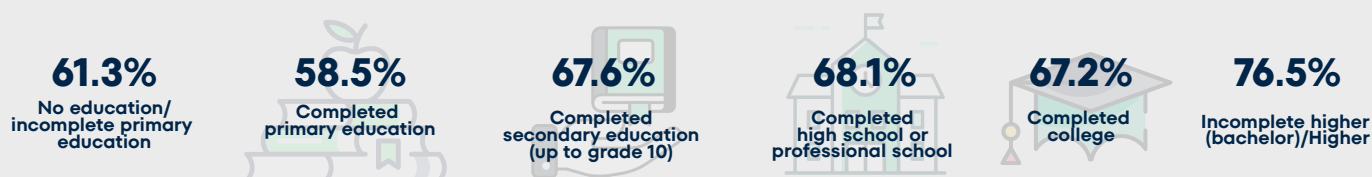
Statements	Percentage of the population
Agree with neither (A) nor (B)	1.4%
Agree with both (A) and (B)	10.2%

The results indicate that over two-thirds (69.3%) of the population were aware that individuals arrested by the police have the right to an advocate from the moment of their arrest. This knowledge was slightly more prevalent among the urban population (71.6%) compared to those in rural areas (67.5%), with no significant difference between men and women. Regional disparities in legal knowledge were evident, with respondents from Drochia demonstrating the highest awareness (89.3%), while only 34.1% of those from Ocnita rayon answered correctly. In Chisinau, 70.9% of residents demonstrated an understanding of their rights concerning police powers to detain individuals.

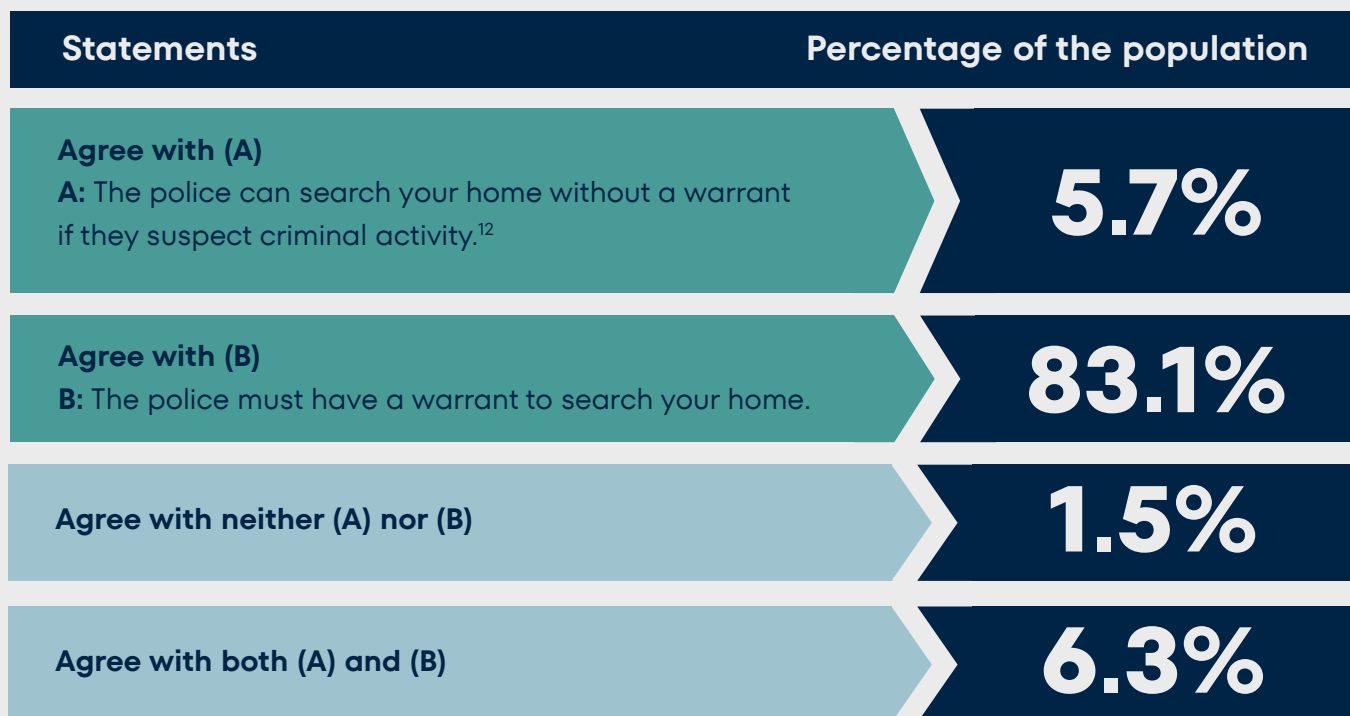


The survey results demonstrate a clear correlation between formal education and knowledge of legal provisions. Respondents who completed only primary school exhibited the lowest level of awareness, with 58.5% correctly identifying the right to legal counsel from the moment of arrest. In contrast, individuals with the highest levels of education displayed the greatest understanding of this legal right, with 76.5% answering correctly.

WHICH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS MOST IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW AS YOU UNDERSTAND IT? THOSE ARRESTED BY THE POLICE HAVE THE RIGHT TO AN ADVOCATE FROM THE MOMENT OF ACTUAL ARREST – AGREE.



WHICH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS MOST IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW AS YOU UNDERSTAND IT? POWERS OF THE POLICE TO SEARCH SOMEONE'S HOME.



Further analysis of the data regarding the police powers and legal rights revealed that **83.1% of respondents were aware that the police must have a warrant to search someone's home**. Interestingly, respondents from rural areas demonstrated a higher level of awareness of this legal provision compared to their urban counterparts. In addition, no significant disparities were observed across other demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, or education level.

However, when asked about women's right to obtain a divorce, the results revealed concerning patterns. **Only slightly over half of the respondents (56%) correctly answered that a woman can obtain a divorce without her husband's approval**. Alarmingly, one-fifth of the sample (20%) incorrectly believed that a woman must have her husband's permission to file for divorce. These findings highlight a significant gap in understanding gender rights, suggesting the need for greater public education and awareness on this fundamental legal provision.

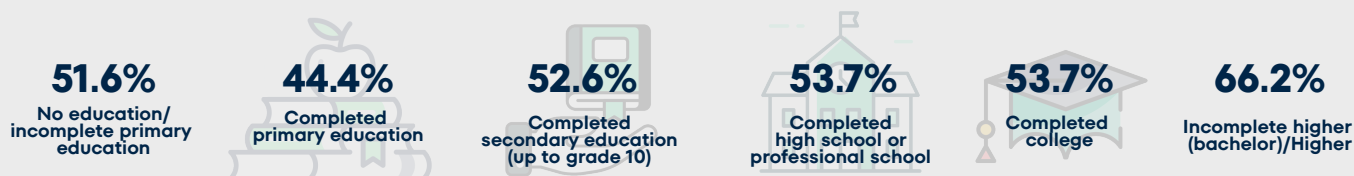
12. The police's ability to search a home without a warrant under suspicion of criminal activity is regulated by the Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Moldova. Article 125 outlines the general rules for conducting searches and seizures, emphasising the necessity of a warrant. However, Article 127(3) provides exceptions, allowing a warrantless search in urgent cases where there is an immediate need to prevent a crime, protect life, or secure evidence that might otherwise be destroyed or concealed.

WHICH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS MOST IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW AS YOU UNDERSTAND IT? A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO GET THE DIVORCE:



Significantly, women outnumbered men in correctly answering the question, with 59% of women demonstrating awareness of their legal right to obtain a divorce without their husband's approval. Additionally, residents of urban areas (58%) and those with the highest economic status (69.3%) were more likely to be aware of this legal provision compared to rural residents and those from lower economic brackets.

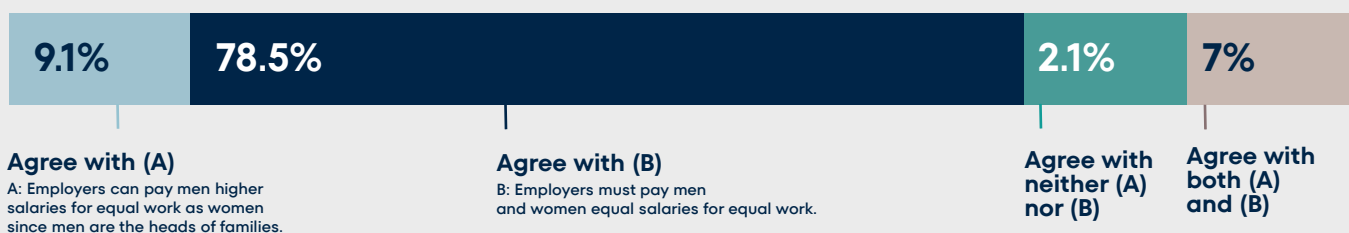
A WOMAN CAN OBTAIN A DIVORCE WITHOUT HER HUSBAND'S APPROVAL – AGREE.



Once again, education proved to be a key determinant of legal literacy, with those possessing the highest levels of educational attainment being the most likely to be aware of the right to divorce without the husband's approval. This **underscores the significant role that formal education plays in shaping individuals' understanding of legal rights, particularly in relation to gender equality and personal freedoms.**

When asked whether employers have the right to **pay men and women equally for the equal work**, the great majority of the populace (**78.5%**) correctly identified that the law provides for equal pay for the same work for men and women.¹⁴

WHICH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS MOST IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW AS YOU UNDERSTAND IT? THE RIGHT TO EQUAL SALARIES FOR EQUAL WORK.



13. The principle of equality in marriage and the ability of a woman to initiate divorce without her husband's approval are established under the Family Code of the Republic of Moldova. Article 36 guarantees equality of rights and obligations between spouses. Article 38 outlines the grounds and procedure for initiating divorce, allowing either spouse to file for divorce unilaterally, without requiring the consent of the other party.

14. The right to equal pay for equal work for men and women is enshrined in the Labour Code of the Republic of Moldova. Article 8 prohibits discrimination based on gender in employment, including remuneration. Additionally, Article 128 explicitly requires equal remuneration for work of equal value, ensuring that men and women receive the same pay for the same work.

Both men and women demonstrated a strong understanding of the right to equal pay for equal work, with female respondents being slightly more informed (79.6%) than male respondents (77%). A clear correlation was again observed with the respondents' level of formal education. Nearly 80% of individuals with a high school diploma, professional school qualifications, or higher education were aware of this legal provision. While those with no formal education were the least informed, their awareness was still notably high at 74.2%.

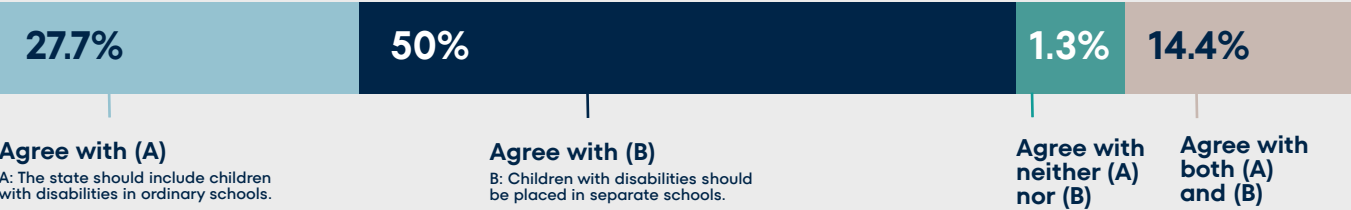
When asked about the right to legal representation for those accused of a crime, nearly two-thirds of respondents (62.8%) were aware that the state must provide a lawyer if the accused cannot afford one.¹⁵ Awareness of this right was higher among men (65%), urban residents (64.8%), those with the highest levels of education (72.2%), and the wealthiest respondents (73.9%). In contrast, female respondents (61.1%), rural residents (61.2%), those with lower educational attainment, and less affluent individuals were less likely to be aware of this legal provision.

WHICH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS MOST IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW AS YOU UNDERSTAND IT? THE RIGHT TO A STATE LAWYER FOR THOSE ACCUSED OF A CRIME.



Finally, the results show that the knowledge of the population about the inclusion of disabled children in the education is alarmingly low. When asked whether children with disabilities should be included in regular or separate schools according to the law, **only 27.7% of respondents correctly identified that the law provides for the possibility of inclusion of this group of children in regular schools**, while a half of respondents believed that the law mandated that they should be placed in separate schools.

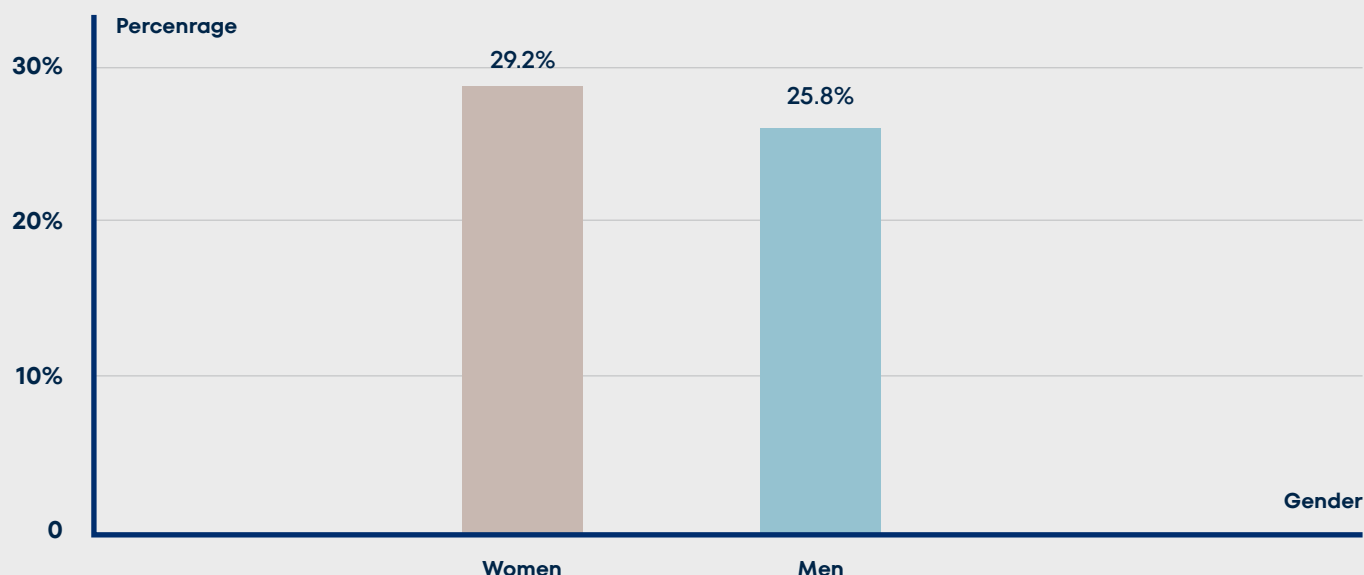
WHICH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS MOST IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW AS YOU UNDERSTAND IT? RIGHTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.



15. The right to legal representation for those accused of a crime, including the provision of a state-appointed lawyer if the accused cannot afford one, is established under the Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Moldova. Article 66 ensures the right to defense, including free legal assistance in cases where the accused lacks sufficient means to pay for a lawyer. Additionally, Article 70 outlines the rights of the accused, specifically guaranteeing access to legal representation provided by the state when necessary.

Women were slightly more aware than men of this provision, although both have quite low levels of awareness of the rights of children with disabilities to be included in schools on an equal footing with the remaining children. The distribution of data by rayons indicates significant regional variation in awareness of the rights of children with disabilities to be included in regular schools. Respondents from Briceni rayon were the least likely to know this legal provision, with only 4.6% answering correctly. In contrast, Soldanesti rayon demonstrated the highest level of awareness, with 57.6% of the population correctly identifying the right to inclusion in mainstream education. Additionally, 31.4% of Chisinau residents were informed of this regulation. These disparities suggest uneven dissemination of information regarding inclusive education laws across different regions.

THE STATE SHOULD INCLUDE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN ORDINARY SCHOOLS – AGREE.



The level of education was strongly indicative in choosing the correct answer. While 34.2% of those with higher education correctly identified that the law permitted the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools, only 12.9% of those with no formal education and 19.3% of those with completed primary education did so. Such widespread misunderstanding represented by all categories of population could potentially hinder the efforts to ensure equal educational opportunities for children with disabilities in Moldova.

KEY FINDINGS ON KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAW

THE SURVEY RESULTS REVEAL SEVERAL KEY INSIGHTS INTO MOLDOVAN CITIZENS' KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAW:

- ▶ **Moldovan citizens demonstrated variable levels of legal awareness, with three distinct patterns emerging:** 1) very low levels of awareness regarding the rights of children with disabilities to be included in regular education; 2) **moderate understanding of women's rights to divorce**; 3) **high levels of understanding of women's rights to equal pay**, the legal rights of individuals in police detention and home searches, and the right to state-appointed legal counsel for those accused of a crime;
- ▶ **Only 27.7% of respondents** correctly identified that the law permitted the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools, while half of the population mistakenly believed that the law required such children to be placed in separate schools;
- ▶ **Just over half of the respondents (56%) were aware that women had the legal right to obtain a divorce without their husband's approval**, whereas 20% incorrectly believed that a husband's permission is necessary for a divorce;
- ▶ In contrast, **a strong majority (78.5%) of the population understood that women were entitled to equal pay for equal work** compared to men;
- ▶ **A significant proportion of respondents demonstrated a high level of understanding regarding police powers and citizens' legal rights.** Specifically, 69.3% of respondents were aware of the right to legal representation from the moment of arrest, and 83.1% knew that the police must obtain a warrant to search someone's home;
- ▶ **The level of education and economic status emerged as the strongest predictors of legal literacy.** However, regional and gender differences also played a role, albeit to a lesser extent. These factors, while influential, do not consistently predict the level of legal knowledge, indicating that other variables may contribute to legal literacy.

5. ACCES TO JUSTICE OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

This chapter analyses data collected through qualitative research methods—specifically, focus groups conducted with representatives of vulnerable population groups—to explore their knowledge of justice and experiences in accessing justice. The principal aim of this approach was to gather data that could provide multifaceted insight into the barriers vulnerable groups face in resolving disputes and utilising the justice system in Moldova. As noted in the introductory section, quantitative surveys were insufficient to understand the experiences of certain groups who may be reluctant to discuss their situations with anonymous enumerators or who may be difficult to reach. To address this limitation, ten focus groups were conducted with representatives of the LGBTIQ+ population, ethnic minorities, the Roma community, refugees and internally displaced persons, residents of rural areas, residents of security zones, religious minorities, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV, and victims of domestic violence. The following sections will discuss these communities' experiences in accessing justice.

LGBTIQ+ POPULATION

LGBTIQ+ individuals in Moldova face profound challenges in accessing justice due to entrenched societal prejudices and systemic discrimination within the legal system as well as a moderate knowledge of their rights under the law and understanding of legal processes. These barriers create an environment in which LGBTIQ+ individuals lack trust in justice institutions and are often reluctant to seek legal assistance, fearing further victimisation or discrimination.

The focus group discussions have revealed that many LGBTIQ+ individuals possess a moderate understanding of their legal rights and how the justice system operates. This knowledge gap is exacerbated by the complex legal language and the perceived inaccessibility of legal resources. One participant explained: “When the officer starts speaking in legal terms, referring to specific articles, I get lost and always need support”.¹⁶ The reliance of LGBTIQ+ persons on organisations like GenderDoc-M, which provide legal guidance, indicates that the justice system is not providing adequate information in a form accessible to marginalised groups.

Another participant echoed this sentiment, stating: “I know quite well how to interact with justice authorities, but I still rely heavily on experts and support organisations for specific LGBTIQ+ rights”.¹⁷

16. Focus group with LGBTIQ+ population, held online on 7 June 2024, Chisinau.

17. Ibid.

The experiences of LGBTIQ+ population with justice institutions such as the police, courts and prosecutors indicate a pervasive discrimination within Moldova's justice system, ranging from indifference to overt hostility, including a lack of respect and understanding of the rights of this population group. For instance, many participants reported that police officers dismissed or refused to process their complaints due to their sexual orientation. In this regard, a focus group participant recounted: "When I filed a complaint, the officer refused to accept it because the reason mentioned was my sexual orientation".¹⁸ Another participant described how police officers disrespected and humiliated them as a victim of domestic violence and even extorted money, further illustrating the deeply ingrained bias within law enforcement:

Despite being the victim, I was made to feel humiliated and scared. The officers laughed at us, knowing we were a gay couple. In the end, they extorted money from me instead of helping. This experience left me feeling unsafe and unsupported by the police.¹⁹

The testimonies of the LGBTIQ+ community members further reveal negative experiences with other justice institutions such as the courts and the state prosecutor, whose actions implied a lack of respect, adequate support and discriminatory behaviour:

I also faced difficulties during a court session with someone who threatened to kill me. The state prosecutor stood up without my permission and asked for a closed session. As far as I know, I should be the one requesting a closed session if I have personal matters to discuss. She stood up without any indication from me or my lawyer and requested a closed session, making me feel that the prosecutor was not on my side but rather supporting the person who has threatened me.²⁰

In addition, participants reported that the justice system's use of outdated or offensive language exacerbates their feelings of alienation. One person recounted how a prosecutor referred to their sexual orientation using derogatory terms during a court proceeding, stating: "It made me feel very uncomfortable and unsupported".²¹

However, certain justice institutions, such the Equality Council, appear to provide due support and protection to the LGBTIQ+ community by responsibly handling discrimination cases. A focus group participant illustrated this as follows:

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

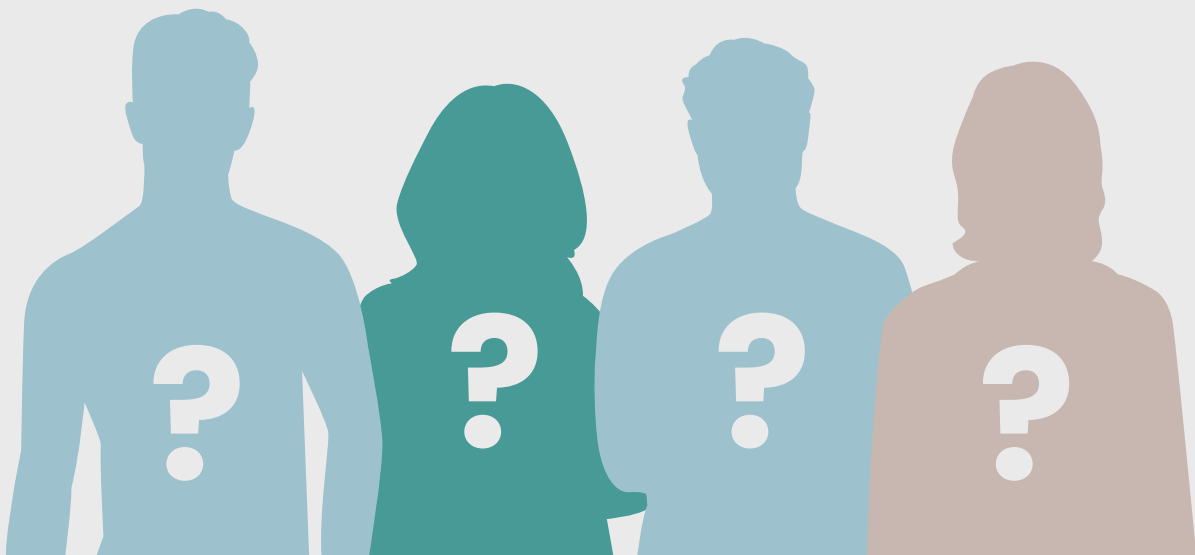
21. Ibid.

In 2014, my partner and I were denied access to a karaoke club because of our sexual orientation. We filed a complaint with the Council for Equality, and they found the club guilty of discrimination. The owner apologised, and we were eventually allowed back.²²

The findings thus show that the critical issues faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals in Moldova's justice system are primarily rooted in systemic discrimination and a lack of sensitivity among legal authorities. As one participant remarked:

I think the most critical issue is the pervasive lack of understanding and respect for LGBTIQ+ individuals within the justice system. This issue manifests itself in many ways, from insensitive handling of cases to outright discrimination and harassment. It's crucial to address this at all levels, from police officers to judges.²³

Participants frequently cited the lack of training and awareness among police officers and judicial officials as contributing factors to the discrimination they encountered. Moreover, participants expressed concerns about the lack of accountability for discriminatory actions, with many noting that there were few, if any, consequences for officials who engaged in such behaviour. This absence of accountability creates an environment in which discrimination is not only tolerated but, in some cases, perpetuated by the very institutions tasked with upholding the rule of law.



22. Ibid.

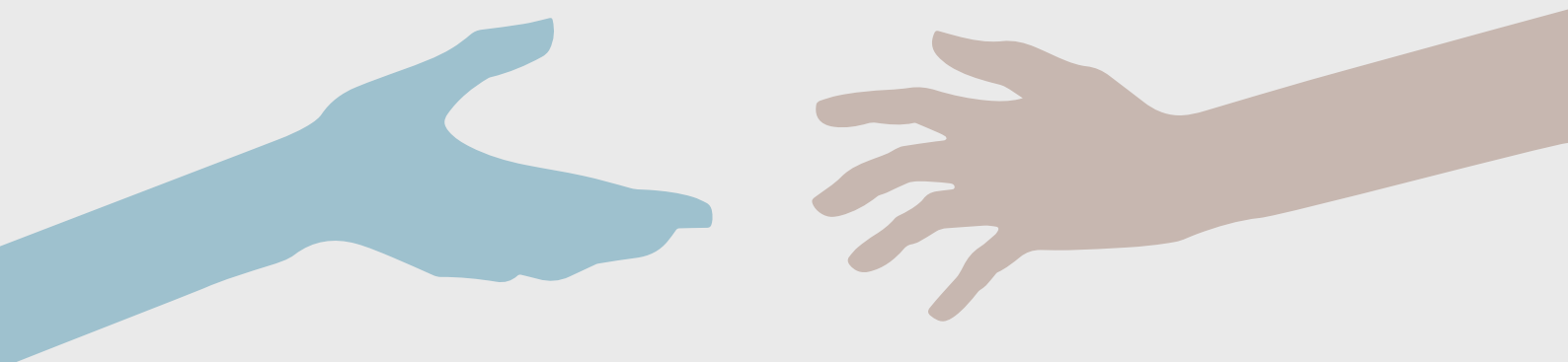
23. Ibid.

As a result of unfair treatment, focus groups participants pointed to a pervasive lack of trust in Moldova's justice system. The general sentiment among participants is that the justice system is neither fair nor supportive of their community. One individual articulated this view succinctly, stating: "For me to feel comfortable seeking help there needs to be visible and consistent action against discrimination".²⁴ This lack of trust is compounded by the inconsistency with which laws and regulations are applied, as some officials demonstrate overt hostility, while others exhibit a more neutral or supportive stance. The inconsistency creates uncertainty, making LGBTIQ+ individuals hesitant to engage with the system, as they cannot reliably predict whether they will be treated fairly:

I am hesitant to trust the justice system because of past experiences. For me to feel more comfortable there needs to be more transparency and consistency in how cases are handled.²⁵

Another participant in the focus group also highlighted the issue of trust:

Given my experiences, I have very little trust in the justice system. For me to feel comfortable seeking help there needs to be visible and consistent action against discrimination. This includes holding individuals accountable and ensuring that those who interact with us are educated and respectful. Trust can only be built if the justice system shows it values and protects everyone equally.²⁶



24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

KEY FINDINGS ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE OF LGBTIQ+ PERSONS

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS SHOW THAT:

- The LGBTIQ+ population possesses a **moderate understanding of their legal rights and how the justice system operates**, often **relying on NGOs for legal assistance and information sharing**;
- Members of the **LGBTIQ+ community indicate they frequently experience discrimination by the police, the courts, and prosecutors, often facing dismissive or hostile behaviour**, including lack of respect and understanding of the rights of this population group;
- **The use of offensive language and lack of respect from legal professionals can lead to biased case outcomes, further marginalising LGBTIQ+ individuals. However, the Equality Council was recognized for addressing discrimination cases effectively**, contrasting with other justice institutions;
- Due to systemic discrimination and inconsistency in legal proceedings, LGBTIQ+ individuals expressed **a significant distrust in the justice system**.

ETHNIC MINORITIES

Ethnic minorities in Moldova face significant barriers in accessing justice, largely stemming from limited understanding of justice processes, systemic discrimination, language barriers, and socio-economic disadvantages.

The analysis of findings suggests that ethnic minorities have limited knowledge of the justice system and legal processes. This gap in knowledge is exacerbated by the complexity of the legal system, language barriers, and lack of accessible information. Many participants expressed that they depended on local NGOs or community organisations to help them understand their rights and navigate the legal procedures. As respondents indicated, while these organisations provided vital support, their resources were often insufficient to meet the needs of all ethnic minority groups.

Participants' limited knowledge of the justice system, coupled with the lack of accessible legal resources, exacerbated the challenges they faced when interacting with justice institutions in their attempts to resolve various disputes. The most common disputes reported by focus group participants included issues related to land, housing, employment, and obtaining personal documents. At the core of these disputes are acts of discrimination against this population group. For example, participants noted that landlords frequently refused to rent to them due to their ethnicity, and they encountered significant obstacles in obtaining essential personal documents, such as birth certificates and ID cards. One focus group participant explained this issue as follows:

In our community, discrimination is a common issue. For example, many of us face challenges when trying to rent apartments. Landlords often refuse to rent to us because of our ethnicity. This has led to several legal disputes, but it feels like the system is biased against us. We've also had issues with civil documentation, where officials make the process unnecessarily difficult.²⁷

Or as another respondent noted:

I have experienced discrimination at work. When I tried to report it, the process was discouraging. The officials were dismissive, and it felt like my case wasn't taken seriously because of my ethnic background.²⁸

In addition, discussions in focus group suggested that disputes in relation to land were the common issues: "Property disputes are another major problem. In our village, several families have been fighting for years over land ownership issues".²⁹

27. Focus group with ethnic minorities, held online on 5 June 2024, Chisinau.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

However, in attempting to resolve the disputes, many participants initially sought to negotiate directly with the involved parties, or turned to local NGOs, legal aid organisations, or community leaders for assistance. Additionally, some participants preferred alternative dispute resolution methods, such as community mediation, as they were seen as more accessible and culturally sensitive. One participant mentioned: “We have considered community mediation as an alternative. It’s often more accessible and feels less intimidating than going through the formal legal system”.³⁰ Yet, the effectiveness of these methods varied. While community mediation helped resolve some disputes, it was not always suitable for more complex cases.

These dispute resolution approaches are the result of pervasive negative experiences with the justice system, as manifested in discriminatory practices, dismissiveness from legal authorities, lack of responsiveness and efficiency, cultural insensitivity and corruption. The testimonies highlighted that:

The responsiveness of [justice] services is generally poor. There’s a noticeable lack of cultural sensitivity among officials. They often make us feel unwelcome and treat our cases as less important. The outcomes are rarely fair, and it seems like justice is harder to achieve for us compared to others.³¹

In property disputes and civil documentation issues, participants felt that the justice system often favoured individuals with more resources or connections, further marginalising ethnic minorities.

Access to justice for ethnic minorities is further challenged by language and economic barriers including spatial distances to justice institutions and mechanisms. Many ethnic minorities do not speak Romanian fluently, and there is a shortage of interpreters or legal materials available in their native languages.

As one participant noted, “Language barriers are a significant challenge. Many of us don’t speak Romanian fluently, and there are few resources available in our native languages”.³² Moreover, affordability of legal services was indicated as one of the key factors in searching alternative means for dispute resolution or interaction with justice institutions. Additionally, geographical accessibility was raised as a concern, with many legal services being concentrated in urban areas, far from rural minority communities.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

The systemic barriers and discriminatory practices ethnic minorities face when attempting to navigate legal processes not only hinder their ability to seek justice but also significantly undermine their trust in Moldova's justice system, with many participants expressing doubts about its capacity to treat them fairly. One participant articulated this sentiment, stating, "There's lack of trust because of the repeated experiences of discrimination and poor treatment".³³ Participants pointed to systemic biases and lack of accountability for discriminatory behaviour by legal officials as key reasons for their mistrust.

ROMA ETHNIC MINORITY

Like other ethnic minorities, Roma population face significant barriers related to language, economic hardship, and pervasive discrimination in accessing justice. However, their interactions with the legal system reveal specific vulnerabilities, particularly concerning personal documentation, property rights, and a deep-seated mistrust of legal institutions.

A critical issue that uniquely affects the Roma community is the widespread lack of personal documentation, which severely impedes their access to basic legal services and civil rights. Many Roma individuals are effectively stateless, as they lack essential identification documents necessary for accessing housing, employment, healthcare, and even education. As one participant observed, "Many Roma people do not have proper identification documents, which makes it difficult for them to be recognised as citizens".³⁴ In contrast to other ethnic minorities, for whom language or economic barriers may dominate, the issue of statelessness is a defining feature of the Roma community's legal challenges.

Furthermore, the Roma population is more likely to face disputes in relation to property rights compared to other ethnic minorities and general population. Due to often lack of formal ownership documentation, many Roma families are vulnerable to eviction and legal challenges to their property rights.

Focus group discussions further reveal that Roma individuals experience disproportionate discrimination from law enforcement compared to other ethnic minorities. Many reported frequent racial profiling and arbitrary stops by the police:

My cousin was arbitrarily stopped by the police just because he looked Roma. They accused him of theft without any evidence and treated him very harshly.³⁵

33. Ibid.

34. Focus group with Roma population, held in Chisinau on 14 June 2024.

35. Ibid.

The way in which Roma individuals resolve disputes reflects their broader experiences with exclusion from formal legal structures. Similar to other ethnic minorities, Roma often turn to local NGOs for assistance, relying on organisations such as A.O. Uniunea Tinerilor Romi din Republica Moldova “Tărnă Rom” to provide legal aid and support in navigating complex legal processes. However, despite these organisations’ critical role, their limited resources and capacity often leave many Roma without adequate legal recourse. In response, the Roma community frequently resorts to alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, particularly community mediation. These informal methods are often preferred because they are culturally sensitive, quicker, and more accessible than formal legal proceedings. Additionally, seeking assistance from their own community and informal networks of family and friends is a common practice in dispute resolution for this population group.



Trust in Moldova’s justice system is notably low among the Roma, even more so than among other ethnic minorities. This deep mistrust stems from repeated experiences of discrimination, racial profiling, and unfair treatment by legal authorities. Many Roma feel that the police, courts, and lawyers are not there to protect their interests but instead to target and marginalise them. The fear of retribution, combined with experiences of injustice and the lack of fair outcomes, reinforces a cycle of disengagement from legal processes, further entrenching the community's isolation.



KEY FINDINGS ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE OF ETHNIC MINORITIES INCLUDING ROMA COMMUNITY

THE RESEARCH SHOWS THAT:

- Ethnic minorities, including Roma people, have a **limited understanding of the justice system and legal processes**. This is exacerbated by complex legal procedures, language barriers, and **lack of accessible legal resources**;
- Ethnic minorities believe they frequently experience **discrimination in housing, employment, and civil documentation** processes;
- **The justice system is perceived as biased, with participants recounting dismissive or culturally insensitive treatment** from legal authorities. Legal outcomes often favoured those with resources, further marginalising ethnic minorities;
- Language and economic barriers in accessing justice are common for ethnic minorities in Moldova. Additionally, the high cost of legal services and the geographical concentration of legal institutions in urban areas create significant access to justice barriers for these population groups;
- **The Roma community faces unique challenges**, particularly the **widespread lack of personal documentation**, making it difficult for many Roma individuals to access basic legal services and civil rights;
- Ethnic minorities in Moldova, including the Roma community, **frequently rely on alternative dispute resolution mechanisms such as community mediation and support from NGOs** to address their legal issues;
- **Mistrust of legal authorities is prevalent** among ethnic minorities in Moldova.

REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Moldova experience numerous barriers in access to justice, with systemic challenges such as language barriers, lack of legal knowledge, and bureaucratic inefficiencies shaping their interactions with the justice system. The absence of formal protections for the IDPs and a widespread lack of trust in Moldova's legal institutions compound these challenges, making access to justice an ongoing struggle.

A recurring theme throughout the focus group was the impact that unfamiliarity with legal processes and insufficient access to reliable information has on the vulnerability of refugees and IDPs. Their limited understanding of asylum, residency, or dispute resolution processes leaves them mostly reliant on informal support networks and local NGOs that, while well-intentioned, often lack the expertise or resources required to navigate complex legal landscapes effectively. A Syrian refugee participating in a focus group stated:

***When I first arrived in Moldova, I was very unfamiliar with the legal processes. I relied heavily on fellow refugees and some local NGOs for information. I interacted with immigration services but found the process confusing and daunting due to language barriers and lack of clear guidelines. Most of my information came from word-of-mouth and community support networks, which weren't always accurate.*³⁶**

Similarly, an IDP from Transnistria highlighted that “[t]he information was scattered and difficult to access, making it challenging to determine which steps to follow”.³⁷ The absence of the dissemination of comprehensive information particularly affects those for whom Romanian is not a native language, rendering their attempts to access justice more daunting and fraught with uncertainty.

The participants' experiences further underscore the dysfunctions inherent in Moldova's justice system, revealing a landscape marked by inefficiencies, cultural insensitivity, and frequent bureaucratic hurdles. A focus group participant described applying for asylum as “[a] stressful experience, with overwhelming paperwork and long waiting periods without updates,”³⁸ which not only delayed resolution but amplified the emotional toll of displacement. Likewise, an IDP from Transnistria recounted their struggle with fragmented and inconsistent information, noting that “[t]he processes were disjointed, with no clear path to follow”,³⁹ highlighting lack of coherence and coordination within the justice system. The absence of formal legal frameworks for IDPs further complicates their efforts to secure their rights, leaving them without the necessary protections and creating significant disparities in access to justice compared to other groups.

36. Focus group with refugees and IDPs, held on 13 June 2024, Chisinau.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

The resulting mistrust in Moldova's justice institutions among refugees and IDPs was palpable throughout the discussion. Participants consistently expressed scepticism regarding the fairness and transparency of legal proceedings. For instance, a Ukrainian refugee participating in a focus group observed:

Trust is a big issue. We often feel that the system is not designed to help us but rather to benefit those with power and money. I would prefer alternative dispute resolutions within the community, but if forced, I would approach the formal system with a lot of scepticism. There needs to be more accountability and transparency to rebuild trust.⁴⁰

This sentiment was echoed by another focus group participant, an IDP, who noted that:

The lack of responsiveness and accountability in the formal justice system erodes trust. I would only turn to it as a last resort. There needs to be a major overhaul to restore faith in the system. More transparency and a focus on fairness are essential. Until then, I would rely more on community support and NGOs for assistance. The absence of formal legislation for internally displaced persons further undermines trust in the system.⁴¹

The perceived lack of cultural sensitivity and inconsistent treatment of cases further alienates these groups, as confirmed by a social worker who participated in research and emphasised that "Many refugees are reluctant to seek legal help because they feel the system won't treat them fairly."⁴²

Given the challenges associated with formal legal processes, many participants reported turning to alternative means of dispute resolution. Community mediation and support from local and international NGOs were viewed as more accessible, culturally sensitive, and expedient options compared to formal legal channels. In this view, participants indicated that:

These methods are usually quicker and less formal, which makes them less intimidating. They can be very effective for smaller issues, but they lack the legal authority to enforce decisions, especially in more serious matters. However, they provide much-needed support and guidance.⁴³

Nonetheless, while these alternatives are effective for minor disputes, they lack the formal authority needed to address more complex cases, such as those involving residency or property rights, which necessitate interaction with the formal justice system.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

KEY FINDINGS ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE OF REFUGEES AND IDPS

THE RESEARCH SHOWS THAT:

- ▶ **Refugees and IDPs frequently lack sufficient knowledge of legal procedures, leaving them reliant on NGOs and informal networks**, which are often inadequate to navigate complex legal systems;
- ▶ Language barriers were reported as a common obstacle in accessing justice for these groups. **The lack** of legal information and resources in their native languages hinders their ability to engage with the justice system;
- ▶ Refugees and IDPs encounter significant bureaucratic inefficiencies within the justice system, characterised by prolonged delays, excessive paperwork, and poor institutional coordination;
- ▶ The absence of formal legal protection framework for the IDPs leaves them without critical protections, resulting in unequal access to justice compared to other vulnerable populations;
- ▶ Due to perceived experiences of bias, lack of transparency, and unresponsiveness, refugees and IDPs exhibit **low levels of trust in the justice system**, often opting to avoid formal legal channels;
- ▶ **Many refugees and IDPs rely on community mediation and NGO support** as accessible, culturally sensitive alternatives to formal justice, but these methods often fall short in addressing complex legal issues.

RESIDENTS OF RURAL AREAS

Focus group participants from rural areas consistently expressed feelings of distance and isolation from the justice system, a disconnect manifested in several ways. Firstly, their understanding of judicial processes and procedures, as well as the flow of information, was notably limited. Interactions with justice institutions were described as infrequent, typically occurring only after the alternative means of resolving disputes had failed. Secondly, the physical distance from legal institutions, combined with inadequate infrastructure and the high costs associated with legal services, further exacerbated the challenges rural residents face in accessing justice. Lastly, participants frequently cited experiences of discrimination and bias during their interactions with certain institutions, compounded by perceptions of inefficiency and corruption.

The focus group discussions shed light on the types of disputes commonly faced by residents of rural areas, including land disputes, water usage conflicts, inheritance issues, and challenges in accessing social services. These disputes often stem from unclear property boundaries or the lack of proper documentation, exacerbating the difficulties rural residents encounter when seeking resolution. One participant highlighted the prevalence of land disputes, stating:

Land disputes are very common in our area. My family has been embroiled in a boundary conflict with a neighbouring family for years. The local administration once re-drew property lines without proper consultation, which sparked the conflict. It's been a long and frustrating battle, often turning hostile.⁴⁴

Another respondent echoed these concerns, focusing on inheritance issues:

Inheritance issues are another major problem. When my grandfather passed away, the division of his land became a huge issue. There were no clear documents, and we ended up in a bitter dispute with relatives. The local authorities weren't very helpful, and it's still unresolved.⁴⁵

These examples illustrate the deep-rooted nature of disputes in rural areas, where the lack of formalised property documentation and the inefficiency of local authorities often result in long-standing, unresolved conflicts.

44. Focus group with residents of rural areas, held online on 30 May 2024.

45. Ibid.

In terms of dispute resolution, participants indicated that direct negotiation between the parties or alternative approaches, such as mediation involving third parties like churches or local NGOs, were frequently employed. Despite the frequent use of these informal methods, respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the success rate, noting that those approaches were not always effective in resolving disputes. Formal legal mechanisms, on the other hand, were seldom utilised due to the perceived complexity and high costs associated with accessing legal services. As one participant remarked:

For our land dispute, we first tried to resolve it directly with the other family, but that didn't work. We then approached the local mayor's office, but they were of little help. Eventually, we sought assistance from a legal company. They provided legal counselling and helped us file a formal complaint, but the process has been slow and costly.⁴⁶

Or as another focus group participant noted:

In the case of our inheritance issue, we tried family mediation first, which didn't work. We then turned to the local church for advice and support. When that also failed, we contacted a legal company. They helped us understand the legal procedures and provided access to a lawyer.⁴⁷

The role of community leaders in mediating disputes was also highlighted by several participants, who noted that while local leaders often played a central role in resolving conflicts, their lack of legal authority to enforce decisions represented a significant limitation. Mediation through community leaders is typically more effective in less complex disputes that can be resolved quickly, but it remains an inadequate solution for more complicated or contentious issues.

Ultimately, the affordability of legal services emerged as a critical barrier for rural residents, limiting their ability to pursue formal legal remedies. The reliance on alternative dispute resolution methods reflects both the economic realities of rural communities and the limitations of these methods in addressing more complex legal issues.

The use of alternative mechanisms in dispute resolution is a consequence of a set of barriers and challenges rural residents face when trying to access justice. The key challenge this population faces is the physical distance to legal services, compounded by poor infrastructure and limited public transportation options. This issue is further exacerbated by isolation and inadequate communication infrastructure, including the lack of internet access, which hinders timely access to legal help and information:

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

The major challenge is definitely the distance and poor infrastructure. Travelling to courts or legal offices often means a whole day lost, not to mention the expense. This discourages many from even pursuing legal action.⁴⁸

Or as other participants indicated:

The isolation of rural areas makes it difficult to get timely legal help. We often face delays and unresponsiveness from legal institutions. The lack of internet access and poor communication infrastructure also hinders our ability to seek help and stay informed about the legal procedures.⁴⁹

Discrimination and bias against rural residents also play a crucial role, with participants pointing out that they are often treated as 'second-class citizens', and that their issues are not taken seriously by legal institutions. Additionally, systemic barriers, such as complicated judicial procedures and the lack of legal aid services, further distance the rural population from exercising their rights and accessing justice.

The experiences with justice institutions, coupled with the barriers rural population faces in accessing justice, have led to a fairly low level of trust in the justice system. Respondents particularly emphasised the lack of transparency and corrupt behaviour of justice officials as key factors eroding their confidence. One participant stated:

The lack of responsiveness and accountability in the formal justice system erodes trust. I would only turn to it as a last resort. There needs to be a major overhaul to restore faith in the system. More transparency and a focus on fairness are essential.⁵⁰

This sentiment was echoed by another respondent, who expressed:

My trust in the formal justice system is quite low. The inefficiency, lack of transparency, and perceived corruption make it hard to believe we can get fair treatment. Unless there are significant improvements, I would be reluctant to seek their help again.⁵¹

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

KEY FINDINGS ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE OF RESIDENTS OF RURAL AREAS

THE RESEARCH SHOWS:

- Rural residents have a **limited understanding of judicial processes** and only engage with legal institutions when alternative dispute resolution methods fail;
- **Physical, infrastructural and economic barriers, as well as no internet, significantly hinder access to justice for the rural population;**
- **Land disputes, inheritance issues, water conflicts, and challenges in accessing social services are common legal issues faced by the rural population,** often complicated by unclear property documentation and inefficient local authorities;
- Dispute resolution strategies primarily rely on **alternative methods such as community mediation, church involvement, and NGO support,** although these approaches often lack legal authority and are insufficient for addressing complex cases;
- **Low trust in the justice system among rural residents** stems from the lack of transparency, inefficiency, and perceived corruption within legal institutions.

RESIDENTS OF SECURITY ZONES

Like other vulnerable population groups, residents of security zones in Moldova encounter numerous barriers to accessing justice, shaped by their unique geographical and socio-political context.

In addition to their limited knowledge of their rights and justice, residents of security zones face significant hurdles related to geographic isolation and security concerns. One of the most commonly cited challenges that dissuades this population group from seeking justice is the difficulty of physical accessing the justice institutions. The presence of military checkpoints combined with the often poor infrastructure make travelling to courts or to legal offices both time-consuming and unsafe. As one participant stated:

Mobility is a significant issue. The presence of military checkpoints and the risk of violence make travelling to legal offices or courts extremely difficult. It's not just the physical danger, but also the time and expense involved. Every trip to the courthouse feels like a gamble with your safety.⁵²

Furthermore, as focus groups participants stressed, communication with legal authorities is often strained. Participants noted that officials tended to treat them with suspicion and an obvious lack of respect, which led to unresponsiveness or delays in dealing with their cases. In addition, there is also a prevalent language barrier for some residents, complicating their interactions with the justice system. As one participant remarked: "Communication with the authorities is a major hurdle... getting straightforward answers or timely updates is rare".⁵³

The most common disputes reported by residents in the security zones involve land ownership, property rights, and interactions with the police and military forces. Land disputes are particularly prevalent, often exacerbated by corrupt or inefficient local authorities:

One significant issue I faced was a land dispute. Our family has owned a piece of agricultural land for generations, but recently, someone else claimed it, saying they had legal documents proving ownership. This led to a drawn-out battle with the local authorities, who were either corrupt or too inefficient to resolve the matter swiftly. It's a nightmare because, in addition to the legal headache, there's always the underlying threat of military involvement, which can escalate the situation.⁵⁴

52. Focus group with residents of security zones, held on 16 May 2024 in Chisinau.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

Another prominent challenge for residents of security zones include overwhelmingly negative experiences with the police, who are often seen as extensions of the military forces. These interactions are characterised by intimidation, arbitrary detentions, and lack of legal representation. One participant recounted being detained during a police sweep for supposed security threats, describing the ordeal as “[t]errifying... I had no legal representation and was treated like a criminal.”⁵⁵ Such incidents contribute to a deep-seated fear of the police and foster mistrust in the broader justice system.

In seeking redress, residents of security zones often resort to both formal and informal means of dispute resolution. While many initially attempt to resolve conflicts through local authorities or land registry offices, the perceived corruption and inefficiency of these institutions often force them to seek help from local NGOs or community leaders. Though NGOs provide vital legal assistance, the process is slow and costly, and many disputes remain unresolved for years. Likewise, community mediation or informal negotiations led by traditional leaders are frequently employed as an alternative dispute resolution method. These methods, while more accessible and less intimidating, are limited in their effectiveness, as they lack legal authority, making them inadequate for resolving more serious conflicts.

The mistrust in the justice system that permeates other vulnerable groups in Moldova is also strongly felt among residents of security zones. Namely, respondents highlighted what they perceived as the biased nature of the system, where decisions often favour those with money and connections, leaving vulnerable populations without recourse. As one participant stated, “Trust in the formal justice system is quite low... I would avoid seeking their help unless significant changes are made.”⁵⁶ The lack of accountability and transparency within the system further erodes confidence, with participants preferring to rely on informal community networks for support.

Given the heightened vulnerability of residents in security zones, prompt systemic actions are required. Foremost, there is a need to improve transportation infrastructure and create mobile legal services that bring justice closer to these communities. Additionally, participants called for greater transparency and accountability in legal processes, alongside the efforts to streamline bureaucratic hurdles. Finally, the provision of legal education and awareness campaigns is crucial to empower residents with knowledge of their rights and the legal procedures they must navigate.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

KEY FINDINGS ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE OF RESIDENTS OF SECURITY ZONES

THE RESEARCH SHOWS THAT:

- Residents of security zones in Moldova believe they face significant barriers to accessing justice due to **geographic isolation, poor infrastructure, and security concerns** making travel unsafe and costly;
- **Their limited knowledge of legal rights and the justice system** further complicates the efforts of this population to seek justice;
- **Negative experiences with the police**, characterised by what is seen as intimidation and arbitrary detentions, foster the vulnerability of this population group;
- Many residents of security zones rely on **informal dispute resolution methods like community mediation or NGO support**, though these are inadequate for more complex legal issues;
- **There is widespread mistrust in the formal justice system**, with decisions perceived as biased in favour of those with wealth and connections.

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Focus group discussions with religious minorities in Moldova reveal deeply entrenched challenges these communities face in their daily lives. Focus group participants recounted numerous instances of discrimination across various social spheres. From employment to education, members of religious minorities face prejudice, with their beliefs often seen as alien or incompatible with the majority culture. A participant shared how their religious community was unfairly targeted by authorities, stating, “They wanted to label us as extremists based on educational material taken out of context. We had to go to court to defend our rights”.⁵⁷ This example illustrates the broader trend of religious minorities being misunderstood or deliberately misinterpreted, often resulting in legal disputes or social isolation. Such discrimination extends into daily life, where individuals from these communities are frequently subjected to derogatory remarks or unfair treatment, particularly in workplaces or public services.

Feeling unsafe was a recurring theme in the experiences of religious minorities. Participants expressed concern over the lack of protection from both the state and society. Pressure from government bodies, such as secret services and ministries, contributes to a climate of fear and insecurity. This feeling of the lack of safety is compounded by the perception that societal attitudes toward religious minorities are largely intolerant, making it difficult for these groups to freely practice their beliefs without fear of reprisal or exclusion.

Furthermore, interaction with justice institutions for religious minorities is fraught with barriers. Participants highlighted that many in their communities lack adequate legal knowledge or resources to effectively engage with the justice system. Moreover, geographic isolation and the cost of legal services present significant challenges. For instance, one participant noted that without external legal support, particularly from international organisations, they would not have been able to navigate their legal battles effectively. The procedural complexity of the legal system, combined with an underlying bias against religious minorities, further diminishes their access to justice.

Likewise, the experiences of religious minorities within justice institutions reveal a troubling pattern of unfair treatment. While some participants acknowledged that judges demonstrated objectivity, many felt that legal representatives, particularly those representing state institutions, were poorly informed about the specificities of religious practices. One participant explained,

57. Focus group with representatives of religious minorities, held on 4 April 2024 in Chisinau.

The lawyers representing the Ministry of Justice didn't understand our religion... they tried to impose their own views on what should be considered acceptable.⁵⁸

Furthermore, participants noted that state officials, including those in the justice sector, often lack the cultural competence needed to engage meaningfully with religious diversity, leading to biased or uninformed legal outcomes.

The preparedness of society to embrace religious and cultural differences remains deficient. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the Moldovan society, while nominally multicultural, lacks the openness necessary for religious minorities to feel fully integrated. One participant lamented that “[t]here is little effort to educate the public about religious diversity, and this ignorance breeds prejudice”.⁵⁹ This societal reluctance to accept religious differences feeds into the challenges faced by religious minorities in both social and legal contexts, as it perpetuates a cycle of misunderstanding and exclusion.



58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

KEY FINDINGS ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

THE RESEARCH SHOWS THAT:

- Religious minorities believe they frequently face **discrimination across various social spheres, including employment, education, and public services**, often leading to legal disputes and social isolation;
- **Barriers to accessing justice include limited legal knowledge, geographic isolation, and the high cost of legal services**, making it difficult for religious minorities to navigate the legal system without external support;
- Experiences within justice institutions reveal a perceived pattern of **unfair treatment, with legal representatives and state officials often lacking understanding of their religious practices**, leading to biased and uninformed legal outcomes;
- **The Moldovan society is seen by religious minorities as being largely unprepared to embrace religious and cultural differences**, as public ignorance about religious diversity continues to foster prejudice and exclusion.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Persons with disabilities face a wide scope of challenges that prevent them from exercising their rights on a level playing field with the remainder of the population. A veritable chorus of voices from focus groups highlighted the following main obstacles to access to justice of persons with disabilities: physical inaccessibility of justice institutions, systemic inefficiencies and widespread discrimination.

One of the most persistent barriers faced by persons with disabilities in Moldova is the physical inaccessibility of justice institutions. Participants frequently pointed out the difficulty in reaching and accessing court buildings, which often lack adequate accommodations for individuals with mobility challenges:

I had a challenging experience with accessibility. Due to my disability, I couldn't attend court sessions in person. Initially, they agreed to teleconferencing, but then they kept postponing it or said it was impossible. It was a frustrating process. Eventually, I had to travel to Floresti for the hearings, which was very difficult for me.⁶⁰

This experience reflects a broader issue of physical barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from effectively engaging with the justice system.

Beyond physical inaccessibility, participants noted systemic discrimination and lack of accommodations within the justice process. A focus group participant recounted being made to wait outside a police station because the building was not accessible, saying “[i]t took a lot of effort to even get them to take my case seriously.”⁶¹ This disregard for the needs of persons with disabilities extends to legal professionals, where a general lack of awareness about disabilities exacerbates their vulnerability during legal proceedings.

While the experiences of participants with dispute resolution processes varied, a common theme emerged was the inefficiency and lack of responsiveness from formal justice institutions:

⁶⁰. Focus group with persons with disabilities, held on 21 June 2024 in Chisinau.

⁶¹. Ibid.

When the police came after the robbery at my countryside house, they were quick and efficient initially. However, when it came to court proceedings, the accessibility issues were significant. I had to communicate extensively and even involved the prosecutor to ensure the hearings could continue in my absence. Despite initial agreements, I faced numerous delays.⁶²

Many participants shared similar experiences of protracted legal battles due to the system's inability to accommodate their needs efficiently.

Furthermore, mediation or negotiation was occasionally used as an alternative dispute resolution means by participants. However, their effectiveness was often limited by the unwillingness of the opposing party to cooperate, as well as by the lack of legal authority associated with these informal mechanisms.



62. Ibid.

KEY FINDINGS ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS SHOW THAT:

- The most common barrier persons with disabilities face in accessing justice is **physical inaccessibility**, as many justice institutions lack adequate accommodations for individuals with mobility impairments;
- **Systemic discrimination is seen as persisting**, with legal professionals often lacking awareness and failing to provide necessary accommodations for persons with disabilities;
- **Inefficiency in legal processes is widespread**, with participants experiencing prolonged legal battles due to the system's inability to meet their specific needs.

PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

Focus group HIV-positive discussants felt they were victims of widespread discrimination, notably in the fields of access to health care and rights to privacy, employment, housing and parenting rights. The mechanisms they employ to address these challenges largely depend on their familiarity with their rights, previous experiences with discrimination based on their health status and reliance on informal networks of connections.

Participants revealed that their understanding of legal rights and the justice system is often limited, even though some have access to information through NGOs and community support groups. Yet, many still feel ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of legal proceedings. One participant highlighted this gap, remarking, "I get my information from online resources and support organisations, but the system often feels confusing and intimidating".⁶³

Stigma and discrimination are consistent themes in the experiences of HIV-positive individuals, particularly within healthcare settings. Participants recounted instances where their HIV status was disclosed without consent, creating feelings of humiliation and fear. One participant shared, "There were instances where my HIV status was disclosed to other patients and staff without my consent, which was extremely humiliating".⁶⁴

In addition to privacy violations, delays in treatment and outright denial of care were common topics among the participants. One individual described the systemic failures they faced:

In my case, accessing healthcare has been a significant issue. There have been times when I was refused treatment or faced delays because of my HIV status. The stigma within the healthcare system is still very strong.⁶⁵

Discrimination extended beyond healthcare, affecting participants' ability to find and retain employment, as well as secure housing. One participant recounted being denied a job after disclosing their HIV status:

There was a time when I was denied a job because my potential employer found out about my HIV status. They didn't say it outright, but I noticed a sudden change in their attitude after I disclosed my condition during the medical examination. It felt like a clear case of discrimination.⁶⁶

63. Focus group with people living with HIV, held online on 23 May 2024.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

Another shared their experience in housing, stating:

I experienced discrimination when trying to rent an apartment. The landlord refused to rent to me after I disclosed my HIV status, citing unfounded fears and misconceptions about the disease.⁶⁷

To seek redress, many participants rely on informal networks such as community support groups for mediation, and NGOs as their first point of contact. These organisations play a crucial role by offering legal advice and emotional support, helping individuals navigate the complexities of legal processes they might otherwise avoid. Despite the essential assistance provided by these groups, formal legal actions are often described as slow, emotionally exhausting, and plagued by delays. While informal alternatives are typically less intimidating and more accessible, they lack the legal authority to resolve more complex issues, such as workplace discrimination or housing disputes. Consequently, these informal mechanisms, while offering temporary relief, fall short of securing long-term, legally binding resolutions.

The reliance on informal networks and alternative approaches to seeking justice stems from the significant challenges individuals living with HIV encounter when interacting with the formal justice system. Several participants reported facing discriminatory attitudes and breaches of privacy within legal institutions, with biased treatment from legal professionals often influencing the outcomes of their cases. As one participant noted:

The pervasive stigma and misinformation about HIV affect all aspects of the legal process, from filing complaints to receiving fair treatment in court. This adds an extra layer of difficulty to an already challenging situation.⁶⁸

Another participant highlighted the issue of confidentiality, saying:

One major barrier [to accessing justice] is confidentiality. It's hard to trust that our information will be kept private, which deters many from seeking justice. Stigma is another huge issue; even legal professionals sometimes harbour prejudices that affect their judgment.⁶⁹

This discrimination, coupled with the fear of having their HIV status publicly disclosed, leads many to avoid engaging with formal legal systems altogether. This pervasive lack of trust further alienates persons living with HIV from the protections they should be afforded by the justice system.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.

KEY FINDINGS ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV:

THE RESEARCH SHOWS:

- People living with HIV possess **a limited understanding of their rights under the law and the justice system**, despite having some access to information through NGOs and community support groups;
- **Stigma in healthcare** is a common barrier for people with HIV, often resulting in unauthorised disclosure of their health status and delays or denial of treatment;
- **Discrimination in the fields of employment and housing is a common theme, with persons living with HIV being denied jobs or housing due to their HIV status;**
- The members of this population group frequently rely on informal networks of connections such as community support groups and NGOs, for mediation and legal advice, although these coping mechanisms lack authority to resolve complex legal issues;
- **Distrust in the justice system** stems from concerns over confidentiality and bias, often deterring individuals from this vulnerable group from seeking formal legal recourse.

VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Victims of domestic violence encounter a myriad of challenges in accessing justice, which are shaped by a complex interplay of systemic barriers, personal difficulties, and institutional inadequacies that collectively undermine their ability to seek and obtain justice.

In this view, participants repeatedly highlighted the financial constraints of hiring legal representation, the bureaucratic complexity of the system, and the lack of clear guidance on navigating legal procedures as focal obstacles of victims of domestic violence in accessing justice. As one of the focus groups participants remarked:

The biggest obstacles are financial constraints and the complexity of legal procedures. Many victims don't have the financial means to hire a lawyer or to cover the costs of the legal process. Additionally, the lack of clear information on how to navigate the system is a major barrier.⁷⁰

Or as another participant noted:

Accessibility is a major issue. The system is not designed to accommodate the needs of domestic violence victims. Long waiting times for court dates, lack of immediate protection measures, and the overall complexity of the legal process are significant hurdles.⁷¹

Besides, an oft-mentioned barrier concerns the attitude of police officials, which can be dismissive and humiliating for victims of domestic violence. Several victims described initial encounters with law enforcement as dismissive, with a general lack of urgency or sensitivity when addressing domestic violence cases. This led many to feel unprotected, with their cases inadequately addressed or delayed. One participant shared, "I went to the police but it felt like they didn't take my case seriously. It was a very discouraging experience".⁷²

Or as another participant noted:

The policeman's response was not as supportive as I had hoped. There were delays in taking action, and the follow-up was poor. The whole process took a toll on my mental health, and I felt like giving up many times.⁷³

70. Focus group with victims of domestic violence, held on 4 April 2024 in Chisinau.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

Such responses from the police often dissuade victims from continuing to seek legal recourse, especially when combined with the lack of emotional support or follow-up from the law enforcement agencies.

Therefore, when seeking redress many victims turned to informal support mechanisms after their initial attempt to resolve the dispute with the perpetrator failed. Formal legal measures, such as filing complaints with the police or seeking protective orders, felt as time-consuming, unclear, expensive, intimidating and emotionally draining. While many respondents reached out to friends and family for support, the assistance from NGOs protecting victims of domestic violence was invaluable. Many participants found refuge in shelters, received legal counselling, and accessed emotional support through these organisations. Furthermore, the support provided by shelters and NGOs often compensated for the shortcomings of formal justice institutions. As one participant remarked:

The support from the shelter was invaluable. They provided not only a safe space but also emotional and legal support. However, the legal process was daunting and slow. It felt like there were too many hurdles to get a protective order.⁷⁴

Nonetheless, some participants also noted that while NGO support was crucial, it could not always substitute for formal legal interventions, particularly when long-term legal protections were required. In addition, alternative coping mechanisms such as community support, mediation or hotlines were often used, yet only as a temporary alternative to long-term solution:

Many of us rely on community support and informal networks. Some turn to mediation or negotiation, but these are not always safe or effective. Others may use hotlines or seek temporary shelter with friends or family.

The overall experience with accessing justice left many victims of domestic violence feeling distrustful of the formal justice system. Participants expressed that they would be hesitant to rely on formal institutions again due to the perceived inefficiency and lack of empathy from justice professionals. One participant observed, “[m]y experience with the justice system has been frustrating. The delays and lack of empathy from some officials made the process harder.”⁷⁵

In conclusion, the focus group discussions underscored the significant barriers to justice faced by victims of domestic violence in Moldova. Financial constraints, unresponsive police forces, and a complex legal system all contribute to a sense of helplessness among the victims. While NGOs provide critical support, the formal justice system must undergo substantial reforms to better serve this vulnerable population. Only through improving accessibility, enhancing institutional responsiveness, and fostering trust can Moldova’s justice system adequately protect and empower the victims of domestic violence.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

KEY FINDINGS ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE OF VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

THE RESEARCH SHOWS THAT:

- **Financial constraints, bureaucratic complexity, and lack of clear guidance** were repeatedly identified as major obstacles preventing victims of domestic violence from accessing justice;
- **Dismissive and insensitive attitudes of police officials** were frequently reported, with victims of domestic violence feeling unprotected and their cases inadequately addressed or delayed;
- Victims of domestic violence often turn to **informal support** from friends and family, while **essential legal and emotional support** provided by NGOs and shelters helps compensate for the shortcomings of formal justice institutions;
- Other alternative coping mechanisms such as **community support, mediation or hotlines** were repeatedly used, yet only as a temporary alternative to long-term solutions;
- **Distrust in the formal justice system is widespread** among victims of domestic violence, with many expressing hesitation to rely on formal institutions again due to perceived inefficiency and lack of empathy from justice professionals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides recommendations to enhance access to justice in Moldova. These suggestions stem from the study's key findings and build upon the efforts undertaken by Moldovan authorities to develop a legal aid system and bolster the justice system.

The **findings highlight the urgent need to improve access to justice for the people of Moldova**. A significant portion of individuals facing legal disputes did not resolve them or seek assistance from justice sector institutions (only 28.6% of those with legal disputes end up turning to a third party institution to resolve their disputes). Among those who did, many reported negative experiences with the justice system. These individuals, along with others in similar situations, require fairer, more efficient and more affordable pathways to justice.

Realising this recommendation will necessitate **implementing at least some of the following measures**:

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAW AND RAISING AWARENESS ON WHAT ACTIONS TO TAKE IN COMMONPLACE DISPUTES

The survey found low levels of awareness among respondents, and especially the poorest citizens, on how to proceed when it comes to resolving disputes. This is particularly true of some of the most frequently occurring disputes, including those on accessing social welfare and public services, dealing with police-related matters, enjoying labour rights, tackling issues around land, and domestic violence.

As a result, it is **crucial to raise awareness**, a recommendation made all the more important by the fact that 60% of respondents asked for advice from a trusted person. Citizens are the first line of support for those with legal disputes, but the advice of friends, family, peers or other individuals is not as helpful as that of institutions, which means that the population legal knowledge needs to improve. Thus, it is crucial to conduct **outreach sessions** with local communities and adopt a more holistic approach to increasing legal knowledge, beyond faculties of law and training for legal education purposes. Other efforts **such as the creation of a website, app or other easy-to-use tools (including A.I.)** to help citizens learn how to tackle disputes would also help bridge the knowledge gap for citizens.

This recommendation includes the need to **increase the awareness and accessibility of institutions**. The survey findings show that few people turned to auxiliary institutions or other actors such as institutional hotlines, Legal Aid Centres, civil society organisations, mediation services, the Equality Council. They need to be better known by the population at large.

Finally, there is a clear need to **improve knowledge of the law itself**. The findings show that Moldovan citizens lacked legal knowledge in some crucial areas of the law, including the rights of children with disabilities and the women's rights. More resources need to be invested in improving basic legal knowledge, including through awareness-raising campaigns, and other tools that promote outreach to communities.

BUILDING TRUST IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

The survey findings highlight relatively few people turning to formal justice sector institutions to resolve their disputes, be they the courts, police, and prosecutors, or auxiliary actors like the ones mentioned above. Further findings indicate nearly half of all respondents expressing little or no trust in the justice system, while just one in nine trusts the system partially or fully.

It is therefore apparent that trust must be built, which requires action from the justice system, particularly the courts, police, and prosecutor's office. They must become significantly more transparent in their operations and improve their efficiency to encourage the Moldovan citizens to engage with and rely on the system more frequently.

A particular emphasis should be placed on women and poorer respondents, who are less likely to trust the justice system and to believe they are prejudiced or biased. Tools such as **open days as part of outreach campaigns** should be used by justice sector institutions, especially as those with experience of using the justice system are likelier to trust it (though still questionable).

A strong reason for distrust in the justice system is the **perceived lack of enforcement of the law and the widespread corruption**. Addressing these structural issues requires a systemic approach that's not necessarily within the purview of this report; however, without such an effort, it will be impossible to build the trust necessary to ensure institutions serve their purpose in granting access to justice for Moldovan citizens.

MAKING GREATER USE OF MEDIATION

Respondents were generally effusive about the work of the Mediation Centre, which was not only seen to be treating the respondents fairly and respectfully, but also perceived as fast, efficient and unbiased in resolving disputes. As a relatively cost-effective procedure, Moldova should build an effective mediation system; further, mediation should be promoted by the Moldovan justice system and by its primary institutions, including the courts, in an effort to streamline dispute resolution and increase access to justice.

FURTHER INCREASING ACCESS TO A FUNCTIONAL LEGAL AID SYSTEM

A legal aid system is the bedrock for a fairer system that provides citizens with access to justice. Although Moldova has recognised this and established a legal aid system, the results show that it is having a negligible impact in the overall picture of resolving disputes. It is therefore key for improving access to justice in the country as a whole, that legal aid providers should become better known and more accessible to help meet this need, particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable citizens.

RE-EXAMINING AND STREAMLINING PROCEDURES OF CORE JUSTICE INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING PARTICULARLY COURT ADMINISTRATION

Respondents voiced their dissatisfaction throughout the survey with their treatment by core justice institutions. They voiced their displeasure with the quality of the work of police, local public authorities and courts, which activity was seen as inefficient and slow. Moreover, the respondents found their experiences difficult and stressful. This is particularly true of court administrations, whose work was overwhelmingly seen as slow and inefficient. Accordingly, it would appear necessary for these institutions to consider how they can simplify their processes to ensure a better, less stressful and more efficient, user experience for Moldovan citizens. This would require additional targeted research, functional analyses from the perspective of citizens, and possible additional measures such as training on handling parties.

CONTINUING TO TACKLE CORRUPTION IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

As shown by the findings, there is a worrying level of tolerance of informality and possible corruption among Moldovan institutions. A justice system that encourages citizens to resort to additional payments undermines the rule of law and access to justice. This phenomenon is broader than the purview of this study, but it does underline the central role that corruption – real and perceived – has in undermining trust in the justice system and access to justice.

LEVERAGING INNOVATIVE AND EMPIRICAL APPROACHES TO ENHANCE ACCESS TO JUSTICE.

It is crucial to empirically evaluate the effectiveness of both new and existing mechanisms. Moving forward, methods aimed at improving access to justice should incorporate robust methodological designs to measure their impact. This includes the use of control groups, rigorous research frameworks, randomly selected samples, and other features characteristic of scientific quantitative and qualitative studies.

Additionally, the success rates of these mechanisms must be continuously monitored and widely disseminated to drive ongoing improvements in justice delivery. Finally, it is essential for the justice sector actors to gain exposure to global best practices, enabling them to refine and adopt more effective mechanisms for ensuring access to justice.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

The following recommendations outline some measures to improve access to justice of each of the groups spotlighted by the study:

LGBTIQ+ PERSONS

- Comprehensive training for legal professionals (police officers, judges, prosecutors, and other legal professionals) on LGBTIQ+ issues. This training should focus on anti-discrimination laws, respect for human rights, and proper handling of cases involving LGBTIQ+ individuals to eliminate bias and ensure fair treatment;
- Raising awareness among the LGBTIQ+ community on their rights **and how to access them. This could be implemented through outreach programmes and/or partnership initiatives between NGOs and the justice system** as to enhance provision of legal aid, guidance, and advocacy in navigating legal processes;
- Improving discrimination reporting mechanisms within the justice system to ensure that LGBTIQ+ individuals can report discrimination and seek justice without fear of further victimisation.

ETHNIC MINORITIES INCLUDING ROMA COMMUNITY

- Ensure that **legal information is available in the languages spoken by ethnic minorities**, and increase the availability of interpreters within the justice system;
- **Implement cultural sensitivity training** for police officers, judges, and other legal professionals;
- **Focus on providing legal aid services** to meet the needs of ethnic minorities by the National Legal Aid Council;
- **Enhance the representation of ethnic minorities, including Roma community, within legal institutions.** Greater representation would promote more equitable decision-making and help build trust between these communities and the justice system;
- **Prioritise resolving the widespread lack of personal documentation among the Roma community**, as this issue impedes access to essential services and rights.

REFUGEES AND IDPS

- ▶ **Develop and disseminate legal information in multiple languages** to reduce language barriers;
Establish centralised, easily accessible sources of legal information tailored to the needs of refugees and IDPs. This could involve setting up legal assistance hubs or online platforms providing comprehensive legal guidance;
- ▶ **Enhance and expand legal aid services specifically designed for refugees and IDPs,** ensuring these services are adequately resourced and available to help displaced individuals with their legal challenges;
- ▶ **Introduce regular training for justice professionals,** including judges, police officers, and legal aid providers, to ensure they understand the specific needs and vulnerabilities of these population groups. This training should focus on cultural sensitivity and non-discriminatory practices;
- ▶ **Implement formal legal protections for IDPs** to safeguard their rights and ensure they are treated equally within the justice system. These legal frameworks should address the unique circumstances of displacement and provide specific mechanisms for legal recourse.

RESIDENTS OF RURAL AREAS

- ▶ Invest in infrastructure, **including the internet and transportation** to reduce the physical distance to legal services for this population group;
- ▶ **Expand legal aid services** specifically for rural communities and promote these services to ensure that residents are aware of and can access affordable legal assistance;
- ▶ Expand access to courts and other justice sector institutions **through the use of remote/mobile courts and other institutions.**

RESIDENTS OF SECURITY ZONES:

- ▶ **Invest in transportation infrastructure, and establish mobile legal aid services** to bring justice closer to security zone residents;

- **Increase transparency and accountability within legal processes** to foster trust and fairness. This can be achieved through clearer procedures, improved communication and mechanisms to hold legal officials accountable for their actions;
- **Launch legal education and awareness campaigns** to empower residents with knowledge of their rights and the legal procedures they need to navigate.

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

- **Provide comprehensive training for state officials**, particularly those working in the justice sector, on religious diversity and the challenges faced by the religious minorities;
- Design awareness raising campaigns **to foster understanding of religious diversity**, reduce stigma, and create a more inclusive environment for the religious groups in Moldova.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- **Ensure that courtrooms, police stations, and legal offices are equipped** with ramps, elevators, accessible toilets, proper signage, and teleconferencing options for individuals who cannot travel;
- **Raise awareness and provide comprehensive training for legal professionals**, including lawyers, judges, and police officers, on the rights and specific challenges faced by persons with disabilities;
- **Develop and disseminate legal information in accessible formats**, such as Braille, audio, and easy-to-read texts, to help persons with disabilities better understand their rights and navigate the justice system effectively;
- **Create a specialised hotline for persons with disabilities seeking legal advice**, ensuring that immediate and accessible legal support is readily available.

PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

- **Provide comprehensive training on HIV-related issues to healthcare providers and legal professionals** to improve their understanding and reduce stigma. This would foster more informed and respectful interactions with persons living with HIV;
- **Improve confidentiality protocols across both healthcare and legal systems** to protect the privacy of persons living with HIV and encourage them to seek assistance without fear of their status being disclosed;

- ▶ **Enhance legal safeguards for persons living with HIV** by instituting more robust enforcement mechanisms and imposing tougher penalties on those who infringe upon their rights, thereby ensuring stronger accountability and protection;
- ▶ **Design and launch public awareness campaigns** aimed at dismantling harmful stereotypes and reducing the stigma associated with HIV.

VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- ▶ **Introduce state-sponsored legal aid specifically for victims of domestic violence**, ensuring that financial constraints do not prevent them from accessing legal services and protections;
- ▶ **Streamline legal processes for victims of domestic violence** by reducing bureaucratic complexity, offering clear guidance on legal procedures, and expediting the processing of protective orders and other urgent measures;
- ▶ **Mandate comprehensive sensitivity training for law enforcement officers** to ensure they respond to domestic violence cases with the urgency, empathy, and professionalism required. Establish accountability measures to ensure timely follow-ups and adequate protection for victims;
- ▶ **Reduce waiting times for court proceedings and make immediate protection measures**, such as restraining orders, more easily obtainable for victims of domestic violence;
- ▶ **Foster closer collaboration between the formal justice system and NGOs that support domestic violence victims.** These organisations provide critical legal counselling, shelter, and emotional support, and can serve as intermediaries to bridge the gap between victims and formal institutions;
- ▶ **While informal community mediation, hotlines, and support groups are vital for immediate relief**, ensure these mechanisms are recognized and integrated into a broader support system that includes formal legal protections;
- ▶ **Launch campaigns to raise public awareness** about the legal rights of victims of domestic violence and the services available to them, aiming to reduce stigma and encourage victims to seek justice without fear of dismissal or prejudice.

APPENDIX 1: DETAILED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.

GOALS AND GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE

1.1 Survey objectives

The research comprises two quantitative components, each targeting a distinct population group:

- The general adult population;
- Users of justice institutions categorised into seven service types: courts, prosecution, local authorities, notaries, mediation services, police, and legal aid offices.

1.2 Geographic coverage

The survey has been conducted at the national level, encompassing all regions and rayons and representing both rural and urban areas, excluding the Transnistrian region.

2.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

RESEARCH METHOD:	Online computer-assisted personal interviews. Data were collected using tablets connected to a central server in real time.
INTERVIEW METHOD:	CAPI – Computer Assisted Personal Interview.
TARGET GROUP:	General population aged 18 and over.
SAMPLE SIZE:	• General adult population: 3,066 respondents with a sampling error of $\pm 1.8\%$; • Court users: 78 respondents; • Legal services users: 109 respondents; • Notary service users: 170 respondents; • Police service users: 104 respondents; • Bailiff service users: 109 respondents; • Mediation service users: 14 respondents; • Ombudsperson service users: 49 respondents.
RESEARCH TOOL:	Structured questionnaire. The working languages were Romanian and Russian, depending on the respondent's preference: 81% of the interviews were completed in Romanian, and 19% in Russian.
AVERAGE LENGTH OF INTERVIEW:	15 minutes.
FIELDWORK PERIOD:	31 March – 11 August 2024

SAMPLE DESIGN FOR GENERAL POPULATION:

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS:

- **Stratified Sampling:** Two stratification criteria were applied:

By region: 11 regions corresponding to administrative-territorial units;

By settlement type: villages, towns, and municipalities.

- **Strata Volumes:** Based on the number of households in each region and settlement type, using official statistics (the most recent data for the resident population in 2023);

- **Semi-Probabilistic Selection:** Settlements were selected using a probabilistic scheme, and households were chosen randomly via a step approach;

- **Multistage Sampling:** To reduce costs, a multistage sampling approach was employed:

- **Primary Sampling Unit (PSU):** Settlements (212 localities) within each stratum were randomly selected with probability proportional to size (PPS);

- **Secondary Sampling Unit (SSU):** SSUs within each selected locality were randomly chosen based on street names or geographical coordinates;

- **Tertiary Sampling Unit (TSU):** Households in each TSU were selected randomly using a statistical step method;

- **Ultimate Sampling Unit (USU):** Respondents from each household were selected randomly using CAPI software.

REFERENCE POPULATION:

The entire population and households of the surveyed country, excluding the Transnistrian region. Sampling design was based on the latest 2023 data on population.

SAMPLING FRAME:

- A list of all localities at the first stage;
- A list of SSUs within each selected locality at the second stage;
- A list of all households within each SSU.

SAMPLING SCHEME PRINCIPLES:

- The research sample included **600 secondary sampling units (SSUs)** for the general population survey, with **five households to be visited per SSU**;

- The **600 SSUs** were proportionally distributed according to the stratification criteria. Adjustments ensured that each stratum contained at least one SSU. Adjustments were confined to administrative-territorial boundaries to avoid mixing urban and rural layers. Larger strata absorbed smaller ones as needed;

- Sampling points were assigned to localities within each stratum, ensuring at least one sampling point per locality. If a stratum contained only one locality, all sampling points were allocated to that locality.

SELECTION PRINCIPLES FOR PSUS AND SSUS:

- **The SSUs included in the sample were randomly selected** based on street names and addresses in the urban localities or geographical coordinates in the rural localities;

- **The five households to be visited from each SSU were randomly selected** using a step approach (every third household). The subsequent household to be visited was determined by adding the step value to the number of the initially selected household, and so on.

RESPONDENT SELECTION

Respondents were randomly selected by CAPI software from a list of adult household members. If the selected respondent declined participation, the interviewer moved to a reserve household.

QUANTITATIVE SURVEY WITH USERS – SAMPLE DESCRIPTION:

Simple random selection procedures were applied. Justice institutions and service providers were selected in the same localities as the general population survey.

Respondents-users were selected and interviewed at the entrances of the selected justice institutions.

Due to high refusal rates (particularly at police departments, courts, and bailiff offices), the snowball sampling method and self-administered online surveys (via social media) were also employed to increase the respondent numbers.

QUALITY CONTROL OF COLLECTED DATA

TECHNICAL CONTROL – DATA COLLECTION SOFTWARE

- Logical and validation rules were implemented for questionnaire completion, including skip logic and warnings for incompatible or erroneous answers;
- Response durations were monitored for each question and questionnaire section.

HUMAN CONTROL

- On-line monitoring of fieldwork progress;
- Telephone verification with 16% of respondents (all confirmed their participation);
- Review of audio recordings (interviews deemed too short were rejected);
- Callbacks to clarify inconsistencies.

As a result of quality control, 43 questionnaires were rejected due to excessively short interview durations.

PARTICIPATION RATE:

To complete 3,066 valid interviews, 10,153 households were contacted.

- Gross Participation Rate: 30% (based on all visited households);
- Net Participation Rate: 42% (excluding non-contact or abandoned households);
- Abandonment Rate: 1.2% of interviews were terminated mid-process by respondents.

SAMPLE DESIGN FOR GENERAL POPULATION:

Result	Quantity	Percent
Conducted	3,066	30.2%
Partial interview	125	1.2%
Outright refusals at the door	2,070	20.4%
Refusal by selected respondent	789	7.8%
Respondent unavailable during field period / after 3 calls-back	731	7.2%
Respondent physically or mentally unable/incompetent /ill	242	2.4%
Respondent was drunk	119	1.2%
Unknown if housing unit: no access	1,851	18.2%
Abandoned houses	943	9.3%
Non-residence: Non-residential (business)/abandoned home	217	2.1%
Total	10,153	100%

DATABASE WEIGHTING

Four databases were created, one for each subproject. The databases were weighted to reflect the official population distribution in the surveyed areas, based on the most recent available data at the locality level (usual resident population, 2024). The variables used in the weighting procedure were:

- Type of locality (urban or rural, where applicable);
- Gender (male and female);
- Age groups (18–34 years, 35–54 years, and 55+ years).

The natural sample obtained showed significant differences in representation, particularly in age groups (under-representation of individuals aged 18–34) and gender (under-representation of males). To address these disparities, the weighting coefficient was calculated as the average value between the profile of the official statistics and the profile of the survey sample. This approach balanced the actual population within the country by accounting for labour migration and internal mobility patterns.