



Home Office

**Border &  
Immigration Agency**

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY DOCUMENTS

# MOLDOVA

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9 JULY 2007

**RDS-IND**

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION SERVICE

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## 1. Preface

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- i This Country of Origin Information (COI) Key Documents has been produced by Research, Development and Statistics (RDS), Home Office, for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 9 July 2007.
- ii The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. It does not contain any Home Office opinion or policy.
- iii For Home Office users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- iv As noted above, the documents identified concentrate mainly on human rights issues. By way of introduction, brief background information on Moldova is also provided. Please note this background material is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the key documents listed.
- v This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.
- vi Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional documents are very welcome and should be submitted to the Home Office as below.

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## 2. Background information about Moldova

**Full Country Name:** The Republic of Moldova

**Area:** 33,843 sq km

**Population:** 4.32m

**Capital City:** Chisinau (population: 656,000)

**People:** Moldovan/Romanian (65%), Ukrainian (13.8%), Russian (13%), Gagauz (Christian Turks) (3.5%), Jewish (1.5%), Bulgarian (2%), other (1.2%)

**Main Languages:** Moldovan and Russian

**Religion(s):** Eastern orthodox (98%), Jewish, Baptist

**Currency:** Moldovan lei

**Political system:** A form of parliamentary democracy, with a strong presidency

**Major political parties and alliances:** Communist Party, Popular Christian Democratic Party, Moldova Noastra (Our Moldova), Democratic Party

**Government:** Parliamentary Republic

**Head of State:** President Vladimir Voronin

**Prime Minister:** Vasile Tarlev

**Foreign Minister:** Andrei Stratan

**Membership of international groupings/organisations:** United Nations, World Trade Organisation (WTO), Council of Europe, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), International Monetary Fund (IMF), Interpol, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), NATO's Partnership for Peace, Stability Pact for South East Europe, GUAM (FCO Country Profile 2007) [2a]

Formerly part of Romania, Moldova was incorporated into the Soviet Union at the close of World War II. Although independent from the USSR since 1991, Russian forces have remained on Moldovan territory east of the Dniester River supporting the Slavic majority population, mostly Ukrainians and Russians, who have proclaimed a "Transnistria" republic. The poorest nation in Europe, Moldova became the first former Soviet state to elect a Communist as its president in 2001. (CIA World Fact-book) [6]

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### GEOGRAPHY

Moldova is a landlocked country in Eastern Europe and borders Romania and Ukraine. The terrain consists of rolling steppe with a gradual slope towards the Black Sea. Moldova has cold to moderate winters and generally warm summers. It has natural resources of lignite, phosphorites and gypsum. Rich black soils make it very suitable for agriculture. (FCO Country Profile 2007) [2a]

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### RECENT HISTORY

Most of the territory of Moldova was before World War II the Romanian province of Bessarabia, which was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940. This was combined in 1947 with existing Soviet territory - an area on the left bank of the Nistru (Dniester) river, to which Stalin gave the status of autonomous region (now known as Transnistria) - to form the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), one of fifteen Soviet republics.

As the political climate began to ease in the late 1980s under Gorbachev, nationalist stirrings began in Moldavia as well as in other republics of the Soviet Union. It became a strong trend by 1989, leading to a declaration of independence by the now renamed Moldova in August 1991. (FCO Country Profile 2007) [2a]

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## TRANSNISTRIA

The population of the Transnistrian region is 40% Moldovan, 28% Ukrainian and 23% Russian. Much of the Russian population moved there from Russia in Soviet times as a workforce for the Soviet Republic's industries, many of which are located in this region. The region's leadership maintains close links with Russia: its 'President' Smirnov hails from Siberia, moved to Transnistria in 1987 and holds Russian citizenship.

Following peace efforts by the Foreign Ministers of Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and Romania in April 1992, Presidents Yeltsin and Snegur signed an agreement in December 1992 confirming Moldovan territorial integrity and providing for the deployment of a tripartite Russian, Moldovan and Transnistrian peace-keeping force in Transnistria. They also agreed that a special status should be negotiated for Transnistria. However, no agreement on the status of Russian forces was ever formally concluded. In July 1994 the Moldovan parliament approved a constitution according to which Transnistria and Gagauzia would be granted a special status. In December 1994, after several months of negotiations, legislation was adopted and duly implemented on Gagauzia. (FCO Country Profile 2007) [2a]

In February 2003 the Moldovans and Transnistrians agreed to establish a Joint Constitutional Committee (JCC) to draft a new Moldovan constitution for a re-integrated state. The JCC has met regularly but progress has been slow. Deep differences remain on the fundamental questions of the structure of the federation and the relative powers of the entities. Progress since then has been limited, although the Ukrainian settlement proposal put forward in March 2005 has given some impetus to the process. The Ukrainians and Moldovans requested EU assistance in improving the transparency across the Ukraine/Moldova border. The EU has responded positively to this request, and on 30 November 2005 launched a border mission to Moldova and Ukraine to help in efforts to address the security concerns associated with illegal trade across the border. (FCO Country Profile 2007) [2a]

Although unlikely to break out into violence again, the conflict is a concern for Europe, especially given Moldova's position as a future neighbouring country of the enlarged EU. Not only is Moldovan territorial integrity undermined, but there are serious security concerns too (e.g. alleged arms smuggling to other regional conflicts and cigarette, people and drugs trafficking to the West). (FCO Country Profile 2007) [2a]

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## RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

In July 2000, the Moldovan parliament voted by a large majority to change the constitution, ending direct presidential elections and creating a Parliamentary Republic. However, in December 2000 the first attempt by parliament to elect the president ended in disarray, resulting in the dissolution of parliament. In the subsequent February 2001 parliamentary elections, the Communist Party of Moldova won more than two-

thirds of the seats in the parliament (50.2% of the vote) and elected party chairman Vladimir Voronin as the new President. (FCO Country Profile 2007) [2a]

Moldova held parliamentary elections on 6 March 2005, with the ruling Communist Party winning 46.1% of the vote, equivalent to 56 of the 101 seats in parliament. This was down from their previous majority of 71 and meant that they could not elect the President on their own (which requires 61 seats). The leaders of the two opposition parties which also won seats, the Democratic Moldova bloc (BMD) and Christian Democrats, both promised not to co-operate with the Communists. However, the BMD coalition fragmented after the election, with eight BMD deputies leaving to form the Democratic Party and a further three creating an informal parliamentary group. All 11 voted on 4 April for the incumbent President, Vladimir Voronin. The Christian Democrats also voted for Voronin, who ultimately won a total of 75 votes, securing his re-election as President. (FCO Country Profile 2007) [2a]

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## ECONOMY

**GDP:** US\$ 2.988bn (2005); US\$ 3.356bn (2006)

**GDP per head:** US\$ 831 (2005); US\$ 936 (2006)

**Annual Growth:** 4% (2006) and 5% forecasted growth for 2007 (IMF estimate)

**Inflation (CPI end of period):** 4.4% (Official figure for 2002), and 15.7% for 2003

**Major Industries:** agro-foods, wines and beverages, textiles, metals, tobacco, vegetable oil, electrical appliances, shoes and leather products

**Major trading partners:** Russia, Romania, Ukraine, Germany, Italy. Russia, the US, France and Spain are significant investors in Moldova

**Exchange rate:** (06 June 2007): 1 GBP = 24.50 Lei; US\$ 1 = 12.29 Lei; 1 EUR = 16.61 Lei. (FCO Country Profile 2007) [2a]

Agriculture accounts for around one quarter of total GDP. The fertile soil of the river valleys supports wheat, corn, barley, tobacco and sugar beet, as well as beef and dairy cattle. Moldova is also well known for its vineyards and fruits. The country does not have significant mineral deposits, so has to import all of its supplies of oil, coal, and natural gas from Russia and Ukraine. As a legacy of the former USSR internal trade system, Moldova remains particularly dependent on Russia as a market for its agricultural products and for imports of energy and raw materials.

In spite of macroeconomic improvement, Moldova remains the poorest country in Europe, with a significant external debt; The GDP per capita is significantly below the average for CIS and central European states. During the 1990s, Moldova drew heavily on multilateral lending, but the IMF and World Bank have periodically suspended lending over Moldova's failure to meet the necessary conditions.

However in July 2003 the IMF announced that it was not continuing its financial package to Moldova, due to the Moldovan Government's failure to meet a number of requirements. Surprisingly, Moldova managed to do relatively well without external support, mainly due to significant remittances from Moldovans working abroad. (FCO Country Profile 2007) [2a]

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## HUMAN RIGHTS

The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. Security forces beat persons in custody, there was incommunicado detention, and prison conditions remained harsh. Other problems included selective official harassment and intimidation of the political opposition ; judicial and police corruption; monitoring by security forces of political figures through unauthorized wiretaps and, at times, illegal searches; intimidation of journalists; obstacles to official registration of some religious groups; persistent societal violence and discrimination against women and children; trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation; discrimination against Roma; limits on workers' rights, and child labour. (United States State Department 2006) [1a] (p1)

Although Moldova has made some progress on human rights and democracy since gaining independence in 1991, serious reform in key areas is still needed. The government decriminalised libel in 2005, and has promised to implement the key political reforms set out in its ENP action plan. However, the UN Committees on Human Rights, Racial Discrimination and the Rights of the Child have all expressed concern at Moldova's human rights record. There are also continuing allegations of ill-treatment and torture of suspects and prisoners by Moldovan police officers and concern at levels of corruption within the Moldovan police force and in other areas of public life, including the judiciary. (FCO Human Rights report 2006) [2b]

The human rights situation in the secessionist Transnistria region is more worrying. Political and linguistic rights and freedom of expression are curtailed. The EU and OSCE have regularly called on the authorities to improve the human rights situation, including by granting a fair trial to Ilie Ilascu, imprisoned and facing the death sentence since the 1992 secessionist conflict. Mr Ilascu was finally released in May 2001, a move that was welcomed by the EU, the OSCE and the Council of Europe. The remaining two political prisoners (Andrei Ivantoc and Tudor Petrov Popa) were released in June 2007, only after fully executing their 15-years sentence in a Transnistrian prison. (FCO Country Profile 2007) [2a]

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## POLICE ABUSE OF SUSPECTS AND DETAINEES

The national police force is the country's primary law enforcement body. It is subdivided into regional and city police commissariats, which are subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Police corruption remained a problem. During the first eight months of the year, authorities brought 135 criminal cases against ministry employees, 105 of them for abuse of office by using of violence and torture.

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, in practice the authorities did not observe these prohibitions. On August 30, police arrested nine members of the NGO Hyde Park during a sanctioned protest. They were detained without food or water for 40 hours in badly ventilated cells.

The law allows judges to issue arrest warrants based on cases presented by prosecutors. Authorities must promptly inform detainees of the reason for their arrest and the charges against them. Suspects may be detained without charge for 72 hours. The law provides accused persons the right to a court hearing on the legality of their arrest. However, these rights were not always respected in practice. (United States State Department 2006)



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## PRISON OVERCROWDING

Conditions in most prisons in the country and in the separatist Transnistria region remained harsh, and in some instances were life threatening, with serious overcrowding. Cell sizes did not conform to local legal requirements or to international standards. The incidence of malnutrition and disease, particularly tuberculosis, was high in all prisons. Conditions were particularly harsh in pretrial and presentencing facilities. In June 2005 several hundred inmates of a prison in the Transnistrian city of Tiraspol started a violent hunger strike to protest the conditions of their confinement and treatment. Representatives from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) were later allowed to visit the prison, where conditions continued to be harsh.

On August 14, 170 inmates at the Leova prison 50 miles southwest of Chisinau staged a four-day hunger strike to protest overcrowding, insufficient drinking water, violation of their right to private meetings with lawyers, physical abuse, and intimidation. The Ministry of Justice acknowledged problems at the prison and stated they were due to insufficient state funding.

During the year the Bender prison remained disconnected from municipal water and electricity services. Prison authorities used a generator to provide power and the Department of Penitentiaries arranged special water delivery and improvised outdoor toilets for the 113 prisoners confined to the facility. Bender city officials disconnected the prison in 2003 from water and sewer services out of fear of contamination from inmates infected with tuberculosis. (United States State Department 2006) [1a]

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## VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Domestic violence against women remained a widespread problem, and the law does not specifically address domestic assault. In the first eight months of the year [2006], the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported that it received 212 domestic violence complaints. Of that number eight resulted in serious bodily injury and seven in death. In 2005 the MIA said it received more than 3,000 domestic violence complaints. Women's groups, however, continued to assert credibly that incidents of spousal abuse and rapes were underreported.

The city of Chisinau operated a women's shelter for victims of domestic violence. Private organizations operated services for abused spouses, including a hotline for battered women. The law criminalizes rape but does not specifically address spousal rape. There were 154 cases of rape reported to the interior ministry in the first eight months of the year, but most observers believed that many rapes went unreported. There were no specific government activities to combat rape. Prostitution is not a crime but a violation of civil law punishable by a fine or administrative detention of up to 30 days. Prostitution was widespread, and observers noted that sex tourism, which was particularly prevalent in upscale Chisinau hotels, continued to grow. (USSD 2006) [1a]

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## CHILD ABUSE

There is extensive legislation designed to protect children, and the government provided supplementary payments for families with many children. Although the healthcare system devoted a large portion of its limited resources to care for children, childcare professionals considered the assistance inadequate. While the law prohibits child neglect and specific forms of abuse, such as forced begging, child abuse was believed to be widespread. Although there were no comprehensive or official statistics on the problem, the National Center for Child Abuse Prevention NGO registered 116 cases of abuse during the year. (USSD 2006) [1a] (section 5)

Child labour was a problem. The law sets standards for child labour, including the minimum age for employment, hours of work, and working conditions, and prohibits the worst forms of child labour; however, the government did not effectively enforce these protections. Trafficking in children was a serious problem, the law prohibits trafficking in persons and it carries criminal penalties... ranging from seven years to life imprisonment. However, trafficking remained a serious problem and the country is a major source for trafficked persons, particularly women and girls for sexual exploitation. (USSD 2006) [1a] (section 6d)

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### 3. Index to key source documents

(KB users – click source number to access document directly)

<b>KEY FACTS AND GEOGRAPHY</b>	<p><b>[1a]</b> United States Department of State(USSD) ; Human Rights report 2006 <a href="http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78828.htm">http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78828.htm</a></p> <p><b>[2]</b> Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Country Profile – 2 July 2007 <a href="http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&amp;c=Page&amp;cid=1007029394365&amp;a=KCounryProfile&amp;aid=1019672579768">http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&amp;c=Page&amp;cid=1007029394365&amp;a=KCounryProfile&amp;aid=1019672579768</a></p> <p><b>[6]</b> CIA World Factbook; Moldova <a href="https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/md.html">https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/md.html</a></p> <p><b>[38]</b> Europa World online <a href="http://www.europaworld.com/entry?id=md&amp;go_country=GO">http://www.europaworld.com/entry?id=md&amp;go_country=GO</a></p>
<b>MAP</b>	<p><b>[6]</b> CIA World Factbook:Moldava map <a href="https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/md.html">https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/md.html</a></p> <p><b>[21]</b> United Nations Cartographic Section – Moldava map <a href="http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/moldova.pdf">http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/moldova.pdf</a></p>
<b>HISTORY</b>	<p><b>[2]</b> Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Country Profile – 2July 2007 <a href="http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&amp;c=Page&amp;cid=1007029394365&amp;a=KCounryProfile&amp;aid=1019672579768">http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&amp;c=Page&amp;cid=1007029394365&amp;a=KCounryProfile&amp;aid=1019672579768</a></p> <p><b>[16]</b> Encyclopedia of the World's Minorities; Moldova 2005</p> <p><b>[18]</b> Freedom House: Freedom in the World – Moldova 2006 <a href="http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&amp;year=2006&amp;country=7018">http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&amp;year=2006&amp;country=7018</a></p> <p><b>[38]</b> Europa World online <a href="http://www.europaworld.com/entry?id=md&amp;go_country=GO">http://www.europaworld.com/entry?id=md&amp;go_country=GO</a></p>

<p><b>POLITICS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS</b></p>	<p>[1a] USSD, Human Rights report 2006 <a href="http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78828.htm">http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78828.htm</a></p> <p>[2] Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Country Profile – 2 July 2007 <a href="http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&amp;c=Page&amp;cid=1007029394365&amp;a=KCcountryProfile&amp;aid=1019672579768">http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&amp;c=Page&amp;cid=1007029394365&amp;a=KCcountryProfile&amp;aid=1019672579768</a></p> <p>[15] Political Parties of the World</p> <p>[18] Freedom House; Freedom in the World – Moldova 2006 <a href="http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&amp;year=2006&amp;country=7018">http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&amp;year=2006&amp;country=7018</a></p> <p>[39] BBC News - Moldova <a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/3038982.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/3038982.stm</a></p>
<p><b>HUMAN RIGHTS - GENERAL:</b></p>	<p>[1a] USSD, Human Rights report 2006 <a href="http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78828.htm">http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78828.htm</a></p> <p>[3] Human Rights Watch Reverse Ban on Gay Rights Demonstration – May 7 2007 <a href="http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/05/07/moldov15860.htm">http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/05/07/moldov15860.htm</a></p> <p>[4a] The Tiraspol Times news - Torture victims in Moldova jail cells (8 February 2007) <a href="http://www.tiraspoltimes.com/node/963">http://www.tiraspoltimes.com/node/963</a></p> <p>[4d] Moldova political prisoners kept in jail with no trial (7 June 2007) <a href="http://www.tiraspoltimes.com/news/moldova_political_prisoners_kept_in_jail_with_no_trial.html">http://www.tiraspoltimes.com/news/moldova_political_prisoners_kept_in_jail_with_no_trial.html</a></p> <p>[12] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Country Operation plan 2004 <a href="http://www.unhcr.org/home/RSDCOI/3fa76d2a4.pdf">http://www.unhcr.org/home/RSDCOI/3fa76d2a4.pdf</a></p> <p>[27] Confederation of Trade Unions of Moldova <a href="http://www.education-cee.org/displaydocument.asp?DocType=Background&amp;Index=991209276&amp;Language=EN">http://www.education-cee.org/displaydocument.asp?DocType=Background&amp;Index=991209276&amp;Language=EN</a></p> <p>[28a] Amnesty International annual report Moldova 2007 <a href="http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Europe-and-Central-Asia/Moldova">http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Europe-and-Central-Asia/Moldova</a></p>
<p><b>HUMAN RIGHTS – SPECIFIC ISSUES</b> <b>(IN ADDITION TO THE GENERAL REPORTS ABOVE, INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES IS PROVIDED IN THE DOCUMENTS LISTED BELOW)</b></p>	

<p><b>ARREST AND DETENTION – LEGAL RIGHTS</b></p>	<p><b>[1a]</b>    USSD, Human Rights report 2006 <a href="http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78828.htm">http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78828.htm</a></p> <p><b>[12b]</b>    National Human Rights Action Plan of the Republic of Moldova for 2004-2008 <a href="http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/moldova.doc">http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/moldova.doc</a></p> <p><b>[28a]</b>    Amnesty International annual report Moldova 2007 <a href="http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Europe-and-Central-Asia/Moldova">http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Europe-and-Central-Asia/Moldova</a></p>
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