

# CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME

**Alina G. PROFIROIU**

*Department of Public Administration and Management, Bucharest University of Economic Studies,  
Bucharest, Romania  
alina.profiroi@amp.ase.ro*

**Corina-Cristiana NASTACĂ**

*Department of Public Administration and Management, Bucharest University of Economic Studies,  
Bucharest, Romania  
corina.nastaca@amp.ase.ro*

**Roxana M. BRIŞCARIU**

*Department of Public Administration and Management, Bucharest University of Economic Studies,  
Bucharest, Romania  
roxana.briscariu@man.ase.ro*

## Abstract

The present pilot study analyzes citizens' perceptions of the project implementation of Romania- Moldova Joint Operational Cooperation Programme (JOP). The main objectives of the study are: (1) To investigate the influence of different factors on the successful implementation of the projects funded by the Romania-Moldova JOP 2014-2020; (2) To analyze the main aspects that could enhance the implementation of Romania-Moldova JOP 2014-2020; (3) To propose recommendations to improve the future Cross-border Cooperation Programme between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The research methodology consists of an opinion survey based on a questionnaire conducted among citizens living and/or working in areas close to the border and who benefited or can benefit from cross-border cooperation projects. The main findings of the study are: (1) the main challenges in projects' implementation are represented by insufficient financial resources for co-financing as well as the lack of human resources with expertise in the field; (2) the most important technological resources for a successful implementation of cross-border cooperation projects are project management software as well as modern communication equipment and (3) the need of harmonizing the legislation between the two participating countries that would lead to reduced implementation time and increased transparency.

**Keywords:** Cross-border cooperation, Romania-Moldova Joint Operational Programme (JOP), The European Neighbourhood Instrument

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cross-border cooperation is an essential element in promoting sustainable development and strong bilateral relations between countries. It is not only a dimension of international relations, but also an important tool for promoting stability and prosperity in the Europe and Black Sea region (Brunet-Jailly, 2022). In recent decades, Romania and the Republic of Moldova have shown a growing interest in

**CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

strengthening cross-border partnerships, seeing this form of cooperation as an effective measure of tackling common problems and opportunities for mutual development. Cross-border cooperation between Romania and the Republic of Moldova is particularly important and relevant from multiple perspectives, having a significant impact on both countries. Romania and the Republic of Moldova share common historical and cultural origins and cross-border cooperation serves to strengthen these links.

In our endeavor to analyze the perception of cross-border cooperation programs between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, we observed a notable lack of specialized literature addressing this topic. The subject has been less explored, and the current body of research is limited, reflecting a deficiency in comprehensive data and scientific evidence. This gap underscores the need for more rigorous empirical studies and systematic analyses to better understand the dynamics and impacts of Romania-Moldova JOP.

Going back to cross-border cooperation in Europe, the construct is vast and rich, evolving over the decades. The first cross-border cooperation initiative, known as Euregio, was established in 1958 at the German-Dutch border. This was followed by the Upper Rhine Conference in 1963, which involved France, Germany, and Switzerland (Beck, 2013; Wassenberg et al, 2015; Brunet-Jailly, 2022).

In 1990, the Interreg Programme was introduced to promote cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation. This initiative aimed to mitigate the impact of the Single Market's introduction on border regions. A significant development occurred in 2006 with the establishment of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). This programme aimed to enable public bodies, regional and local authorities, and associations to create new cooperation entities with legal personality (Wassenberg et al, 2015; Beck 2015; Lundén, 2018; Brunet-Jailly, 2022). The most recent significant programme, which is also part of our study, is The Interreg Programme for 2014-2020. Funded through the European Regional Development Fund, this programme supported cross-border cooperation with a substantial budget aimed at fostering regional development and cohesion.

The present pilot study explores the perceptions of citizens regarding the implementation of the Romania-Moldova JOP. The structure of this article begins with an introduction, followed by a literature review that examines the dimensions of cross-border cooperation and the main elements of the Romania-Moldova JOP. The article then presents the research methodology, outlining three primary objectives. Subsequently, the paper proceeds with the presentation of the main findings of the study, followed by the conclusion, research limitations, and recommendations.

This study aims to provide valuable insights into the current state of cross-border cooperation between Romania and Moldova and offers actionable recommendations to enhance future cooperation initiatives.

## 2. KEY ASPECTS REGARDING CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Around the world, there are still countries that dispute their border areas, and more than that, in some cases, the border regions become conflict zones. Also, most of the time, border regions struggle with economic problems and social challenges, the disparities between non-border and border regions being usually pretty high (Fricke, 2014, Lundén, 2018). The issues faced by communities in border regions can be addressed through cross-border cooperation. It was observed that border regions with good cooperation relations managed to achieve a higher level of social and economic development (Brunet-Jailly, 2022).

Cross-border cooperation is a phenomenon that refers to collaboration and interaction between regions or countries close to a common border. This form of cooperation helps to manage and solve common problems and promotes sustainable development in the involved regions. It can be defined as a process of institutionalized collaboration between sub-national authorities beyond their national borders (Novotná et al, 2014, Hálová & Jiří, 2014). One of the main aspects of cross-border cooperation is addressing specific problems in a wide range of day-to-day administrative areas. Additionally, it involves establishing cross-border contacts and developing new institutions (Mirwaldt et al., 2009; Krabokoukis et al., 2024). Cooperation between regions with common borders is advantageous for socioeconomic development, aiding countries in responding to common problems and challenges, ensuring secure borders, and fostering the development of relations between people from different cultures (Mattsson & Petterson, 2005; Kukovič & Haček, 2018).

The European Commission (2015; 2024b) identifies the main objectives of cross-border cooperation as follows: encouraging entrepreneurship and the development of SMEs, culture, and cross-border trade; improving the common management of natural resources; fostering connections between rural and urban areas; enhancing access to transport and communication networks; and promoting the common use of infrastructure (European Commission, 2015; 2024b).

However, cross-border cooperation can be a challenging process due to cultural diversity, different political systems and legal frameworks in the neighboring countries, and different levels of economic development or other specific factors and conditions in the border areas. However, these differences lead to a high potential for developing innovative strategies and solutions for the border regions and their problems (Schulz, 2013; Beck, 2013; Jacobs, 2016; Nienaber & Wille, 2020). Despite the overarching framework of common legislation, challenges persist in the procedural implementation of the cross-border mechanism due to the specific particularities of each country. For example, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Rudolf and Kovač (2023) highlight that individual member states have the autonomy to enact supplementary data protection laws. This autonomy results in variations in legal

interpretations and enforcement practices. Consequently, the diversity from the cross-border regions can be approached either as an opportunity or a challenge (Nienaber & Wille, 2020).

In Europe, the cooperation between border areas was addressed through the development of the Schengen area, and also due to the EU's Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) that encouraged good and beneficial cross-border cooperation between Member States and their non-EU neighbours (Brunet-Jailly, 2022, Kukovič & Haček, 2018, European Commission, 2024a). In the last decades, the European border regions followed a positive development trend, being encouraged inclusively through financial instruments (Păceșilă, Colesca & Popescu, 2022), to develop partnerships that include private and public entities, as well as NGOs situated in the border areas. These partnerships contributed to the cross-border cooperation in neighboring areas and to the development of peripheral areas through different types of investments, programs, and projects (Kukovič & Haček, 2018).

Implementing cooperation initiatives helps to improve European integration, being one way in which the European institutions support the idea of a "Europe without borders" (European Union, 2014). Finally, while international relations are usually conducted through bilateral or multilateral intergovernmental agreements, local and regional authorities are actively involved in both the design and implementation of cross-border projects (Džinić and Panara, 2024). The aim is thus to support multi-level governance and contribute to the creation of a "Europe of Regions" (Borras-Alomar et al. 2024). This can be seen as an innovative, but only partially effective and even controversial, effort to revive the meaning and functionality of borders and border regions within the EU and also across the EU's external border (Celata & Coletti, 2015, Kurowska-Pysz et al. 2018, Delitheou & Georgakopoulou, 2019).

### **2.1. The cooperation between Romania and the Republic of Moldova**

Cross-border cooperation represents one of the most important elements of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which covers 16 countries situated along the European Union's external border. In addition, until the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Neighbourhood Policy was one of the few areas of dialogue and cooperation between Russia and the EU. The cross-border cooperation in the EU is achieved through programs funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument. The beneficiaries of this financial instrument are the Member States and neighboring countries with which they have a direct border on land or sea (European Court of Auditors, 2024). The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) supports socio-economic development, encouraging political stability in these regions. An example of a program funded through this instrument is the Romania-Moldova JOP (implemented in the 2014-2020 period), which targeted projects contributing to economic and social development in border regions (European Commission, 2024b). Based on empirical data, Popescu (2011) reveals that Iași, one of the largest cities

situated on the eastern border of Romania, and the European Union, demonstrates substantial potential to catalyze economic development across a broader region and bolster cross-border cooperation with the Republic of Moldova. The city's positive impact on its peri-urban areas has contributed significantly to demographic stability and the establishment of secondary and tertiary sector activities

The European Union considers cross-border cooperation at its external borders to be a top priority in terms of the multilateral development of the participating states. Therefore, the role of cooperation between Romania and the Republic of Moldova is to strengthen and increase the development opportunities of the two countries through the application of the instruments, principles, and procedures of the European Neighbourhood Instrument. This cooperation programme aims to improve economic growth and the quality of life of the citizens in the programme area through joint investments in education, economic growth, culture, cross-border infrastructure, and health, while protecting the citizens of both countries (Chobal & Lalakulych, 2019, Rădulescu et al. 2020, Nadalutti, 2020, Andrei & Luca, 2022).

For the 2021-2027 period, the programme named now The Interreg NEXT Romania - Republic of Moldova programme has a budget of over €97 million in non-reimbursable funding, with an additional national contribution. It will fund projects that help border communities in areas such as health, education, tourism, culture, climate change adaptation, good governance, and border management. The programme was approved by the European Commission in 2022 being managed by the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration. The main objectives of the programme in the current period of financing are: (1) Green Communities; (2) Cross-border social development and (3) Cross-border cooperation (Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, 2022, European Commission, 2024b).

### **3. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH**

The main purpose of this pilot study is to examine citizens' perceptions of the project implementation funded by the Romania-Moldova JOP 2014-2020 and the solutions to improve the functioning of this programme.

The research started with the following objectives:

- (1) To investigate the influence of different factors on the successful implementation of the projects funded by the Romania-Moldova Joint Operational Programme 2014-2020.
- (2) To analyze the main aspects that could enhance the implementation of the Romania-Moldova Joint Operational Programme 2014-2020.
- (3) To propose recommendations to improve the future Cross-border Cooperation Programme between Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

**CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

The research methodology used in this study is primarily based on a survey method. This method involves administering a structured questionnaire to a target population comprising citizens living or working in close border areas. The target population includes individuals who have previously benefited from cross-border cooperation projects or have the potential to benefit from them.

The survey aims to capture a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions, experiences and potential impacts of such cooperation initiatives. The questionnaire is designed to obtain quantitative data, ensuring a holistic analysis of the respondents' opinions. This approach facilitates the identification of key trends, benefits and challenges associated with cross-border cooperation, thus contributing valuable insights to the field of regional development and cooperation studies.

The research started with the following research questions:

***RQ1: What are the different factors of influence on the successful implementation of projects funded by the Romania-Moldova Joint Operational Programme's implementation?***

***RQ2: How can different aspects improve the management of the Romania-Moldova Joint Operational Programme?***

***RQ3: What are the solutions for better functioning of the future Romania-Moldova Cross-border Cooperation Programme?***

The respondents to the questionnaire were chosen using the convenience sampling method, to select respondents for the questionnaire, prioritizing accessibility and ease of reach. A total of 111 participants were included in the sample. The study participants reside in the areas eligible for cooperation projects, as well as those who resided outside the designated program areas but were employed in the eligible regions. This sampling approach was chosen to ensure a diverse and representative perspective on the impact and effectiveness of the Romania-Moldova JOP.

**3.1 Characteristics of the research sample**

About the main characteristics of the sample (Table 1), the gender distribution shows a higher proportion of male respondents compared to female respondents, with approximately 60% of the sample being male. This suggests a potential gender bias in the sampling or may reflect the demographic composition of the population in the targeted area. The age group distribution indicates a relatively balanced representation across the younger age categories, with approximately 24.3% of respondents being under 25 years and an equal percentage in the 25-34 years range. The highest representation is in the 35-44 years category

**CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

at 27%. This suggests a younger to middle-aged demographic, with a smaller proportion of respondents being over 45 years.

About a third of the respondents 32.4% lived in the Republic of Moldova, 27% in Iaşi, 8.1% in Galaţi, and 5.4% of respondents were from Vaslui. In addition, 27% of the respondents did not live in an eligible area, but were working in the Romanian eligible counties. The sample is demographically and geographically diverse. The balanced distribution by age and gender provides a varied perspective on the topic under study, while the strong interest in citizens from the Republic of Moldova and Iaşi underlines the importance of these regions for cooperation projects. The presence of respondents from outside the eligible areas suggests a broad impact and interest in cross-border projects.

**TABLE 1 – DEMOGRAPHIC DATA ON RESPONDENTS**

Item	Categories	Percent
Gender	Feminine	40.5 %
	Masculine	59.5 %
Age group	Under 25 years	24,3%
	Between 25 – 34 years	24,3%
	Between 35 – 44 years	27,0%
	Between 45 – 54 years	13,5%
	55 and over 55 years	10,8%
Residence	Republic of Moldova	32,4%
	Iaşi	27,0%
	Galaţi	8,1%
	Vaslui	5,4%
	Romanian non-eligible counties	27,0%
Work field	Economic sector	24,3 %
	Public sector	21,6 %
	Education	21,6 %
	Health	8,1%
	Tourism sector	10,8%
	Security	8,1%
	Infrastructure and transport sector	5,4%

Source: Authors, own processing (2024)

The distribution of respondents by work field highlights that 24.3% are employed in the economic sector, making it the most represented field in the survey. This is followed closely by the public sector and education, each accounting for 21.6% of respondents. These findings underscore the significant role that public and educational institutions play in cross-border cooperation projects. Furthermore, 10.8% of respondents are from the tourism sector, reflecting a notable interest in the development and promotion of cross-border tourism initiatives. The fields of security and health each account for 8.1% of respondents,

**CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

indicating their importance in the context of cross-border cooperation. Lastly, 5.4% of respondents are engaged in the infrastructure and transport sector, highlighting the critical role of these areas in facilitating regional connectivity and development.

Respondents to the questionnaire come from a wide range of sectors, with a predominance in the economic, public and education sectors. This diversity reflects the varied and multidimensional interests of cross-border cooperation, covering economic, administrative, educational, tourism, security, health, security, health and infrastructure issues.

#### 4. THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The results indicate that respondents are well-acquainted with the cross-border cooperation program. Their opinions, however, vary significantly depending on the specific topics addressed. This variability suggests that while there is a general awareness of the program, the levels of understanding and perspectives on different aspects of the program differ among the respondents.

As presented in Figure 1, the majority of respondents, representing 54.1%, have benefited in the past from the effects of cross-border cooperation programmes, while 45.9% have not. This suggests that a significant number of participants have direct familiarity with the benefits and impacts of these programmes. The positive experiences of these beneficiaries can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and benefits of cross-border cooperation, while the perspective of those who have not yet benefited can identify barriers and opportunities for improving access and participation in the future.

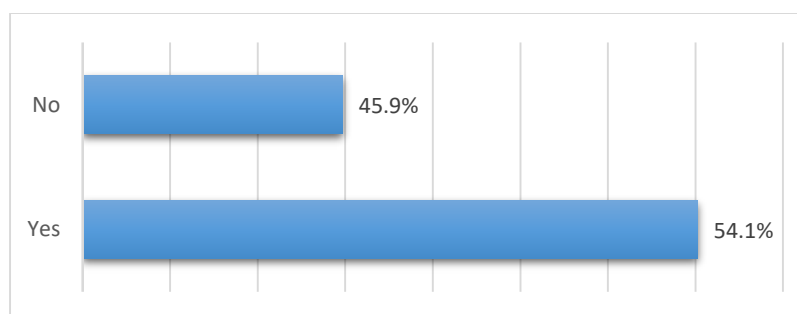


FIGURE 1 - THE PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS THAT BENEFITED FROM THE EFFECTS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Source: Authors, own processing (2024)

Respondents were also surveyed regarding the technological resources deemed necessary for the successful implementation of cross-border cooperation projects. As illustrated in Figure 2, the majority of respondents (62.2%) identified project management software as the most critical technological resource. This highlights the pivotal role of advanced project management tools in facilitating the planning, execution, and monitoring of cross-border initiatives.



**CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

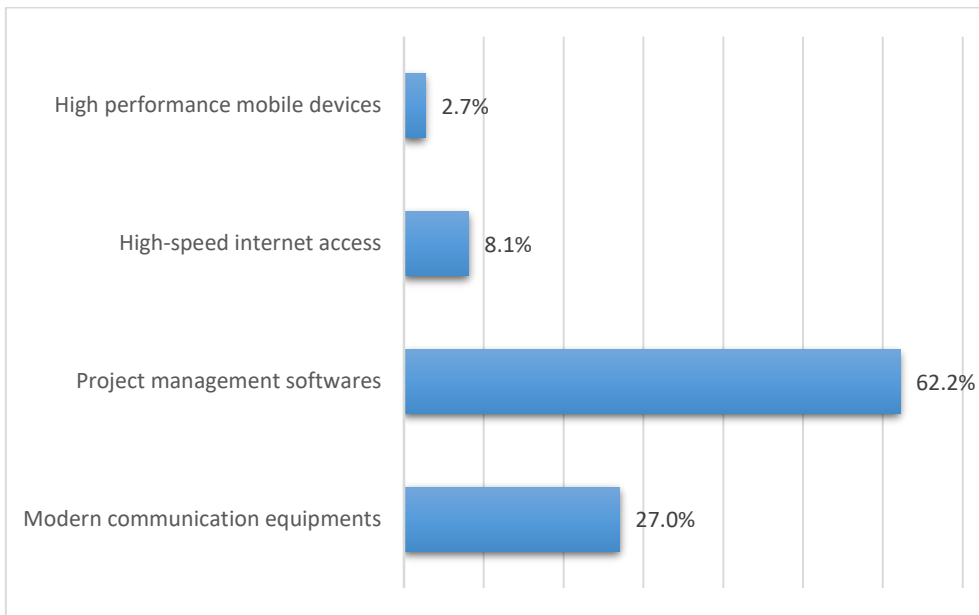


FIGURE 2 - THE TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES NEEDED FOR THE PROJECTS' SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Source: Authors, own processing (2024)

Modern communications equipment was considered essential by 27% of respondents, emphasizing the importance of efficient communications technology. This finding emphasizes the need for reliable and advanced communication systems to support cross-border cooperation. High-speed internet access was seen as essential by 8.1% of respondents, while only 2.7% considered high-performance mobile devices critical. This suggests that while mobile devices are useful, they are perceived as less critical compared to other technological resources for the effective implementation of cross-border cooperation projects.

On the whole, project management software is perceived as the most important technological resource for the success of cross-border cooperation projects, followed by modern communications equipment. This underlines the importance of advanced technological solutions for effective project coordination and management. High-speed internet access and high-performance mobile devices are considered less critical, although they remain relevant in the overall context of the required technological infrastructure.

The participants in the study were asked to comment on some factors influencing the successful implementation of cross-border cooperation programmes. The results pointed out in Figure 3 show that one factor was the lack of transport infrastructure. The respondents had different views on the impact of the lack of road infrastructure on the success of cross-border cooperation projects. 35.1% considered this factor to have a medium impact, 16.2% considered it to have a high influence and 27% attributed it the highest impact. However, 21.6% of the participants believed that its influence was small.

CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME

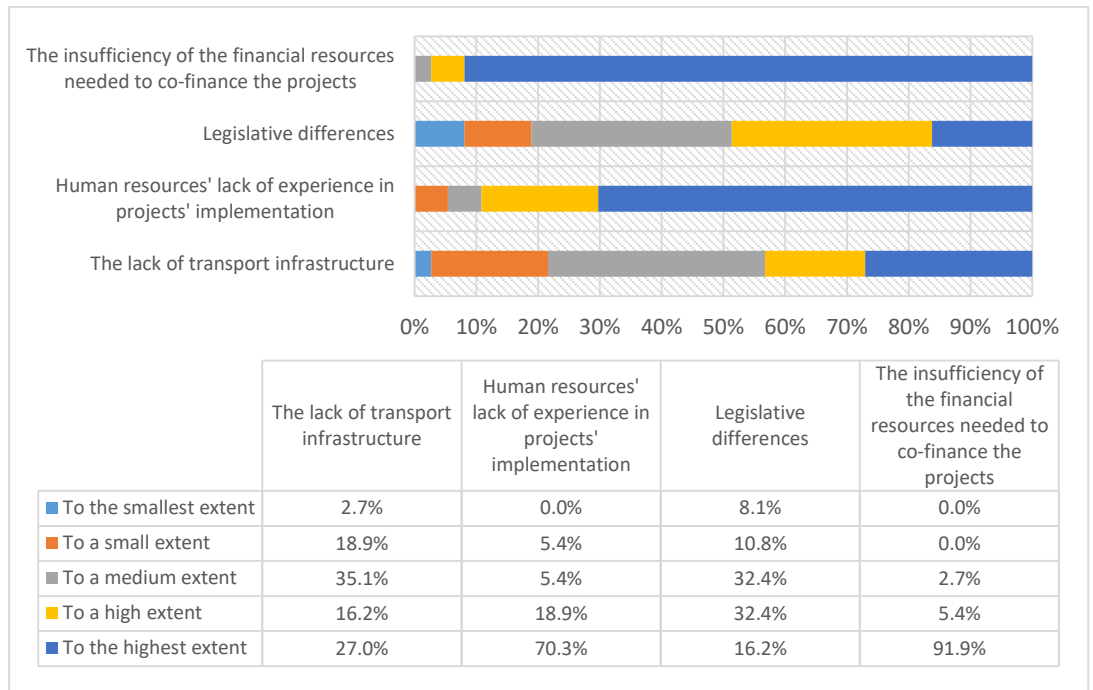


FIGURE 3 - IMPACT OF DIFFERENT FACTORS ON THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECTS FINANCED BY THE CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMME

Source: Authors, own processing (2024)

Another factor that could have a major influence on programmes' implementation is human resources' lack of experience in managing cross-border projects. 89.2% of respondents believed that this influences the success of projects' implementation to a high and to the highest extent. Only 5.4% thought the impact was medium or small.

Legislative differences also represent an important factor in projects' implementation, with 32.4% of respondents considering to have a medium impact or a high impact. 16.2% believed that these differences had the highest impact and 19.9% considered that the impact was small or to the smallest extent.

The last factor taken into consideration was the insufficient amount of financial resources. 91.9% of respondents appreciated that financial resources have the highest impact on projects' successful implementation. Only 8.1% think that this factor has a medium or high influence.

Overall, it can be observed that the most important factors were the lack of financial resources (the average of responses was 4.89), followed by the lack of human resources experience (4.54). These two factors were identified as the main obstacles in the projects' implementation process, highlighting the need to address these issues in order to improve the success of cross-border cooperation projects. The last important factors were the lack of transport infrastructure (the average of responses was 3.45) and legislative differences (with an average of 3.37). Thus, also these factors were attributed a pretty high

**CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

importance considering the computed averages of responses. The results support the findings of other studies in the field that pointed out that major challenges of cross-border cooperation are different legislative frameworks or the level of financial development of the neighboring countries (Schulz, 2013, Nienaber & Wille, 2020, Jacobs, 2016).

The respondents were asked whether the different legal provisions and administrative procedures between the two countries influenced the management of cross-border cooperation programmes. As Figure 4 shows, most of the respondents, 37.8% considered that administrative differences influenced the management of cross-border projects to a high extent, followed by 35.1% who appreciated that the impact was moderate. A small proportion of respondents, 10.8%, considered that these differences did not have an important impact. Overall, the predominant perception is that administrative differences play an important role in the management of cross-border projects. With a total of 54% of respondents indicating a high or very high influence, it is evident that the harmonization of administrative procedures is necessary for the success of these projects. This underscores the need for efficient mechanisms for administrative coordination and adaptation between the involved partners. Also, as previous research showed, these differences in legislation could be tackled as opportunities and not as negative aspects (Nienaber & Wille, 2020).

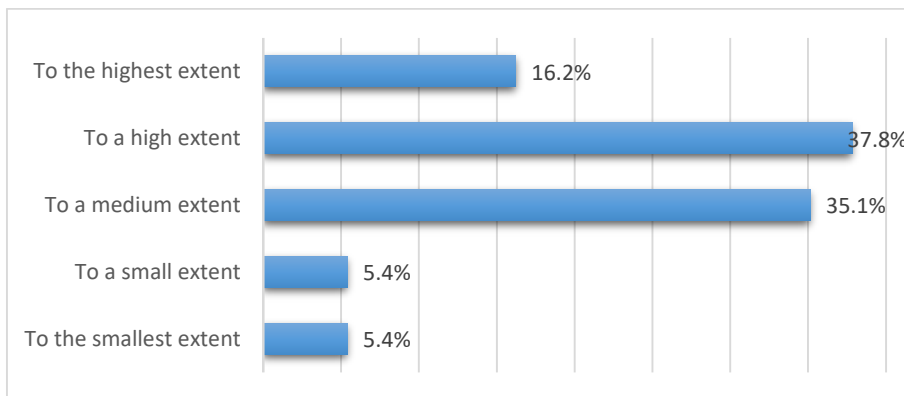


FIGURE 4 - THE INFLUENCE OF LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE DIFFERENCES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMMES  
Source: Authors, own processing (2024)

Respondents were asked if the harmonization of the legislative acts and administrative procedures would lead to a simplified implementation process. According to the results in Figure 5, the majority of respondents, namely 54.1%, considered that harmonization of regulations and administrative procedures would lead to a simplified implementation process to a high extent. In addition, 18.9% respondents expressed the opinion that harmonization would be very effective, while a smaller proportion 5.4%, considered that it would be less effective. In addition, 21.6% of respondents believed that the

**CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

harmonization of the legislation would have no impact on the implementation process. It is important to mention that none of the participants considered that this process would be ineffective.

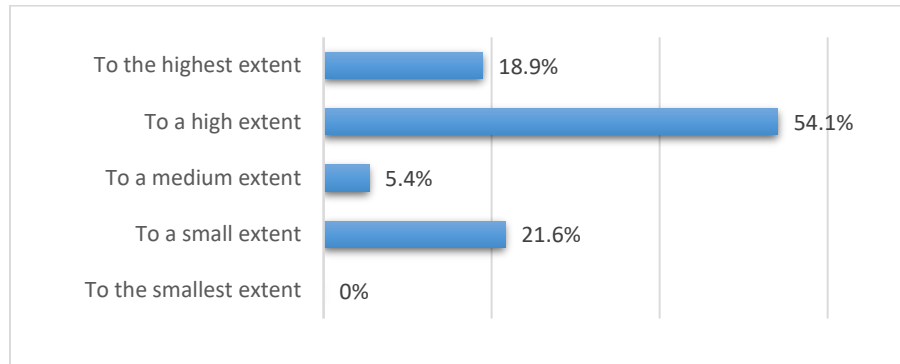


FIGURE 5 - THE IMPACT OF LEGISLATIVE HARMONIZATION ON PROJECTS' IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS  
Source: Authors, own processing (2024)

The participants were also asked about the main benefits of the harmonization of administrative procedures. As observed in Figure 6, the majority of the respondents, 56.8% considered that the main benefit of adopting harmonized administrative procedures between the two participating countries is to reduce the implementation time of cross-border cooperation projects. This suggests that the harmonization of procedures could lead to a more efficient and faster implementation of projects. Increased transparency is also considered an important benefit by 18.9% of respondents, indicating that uniform procedures can facilitate project monitoring and control.

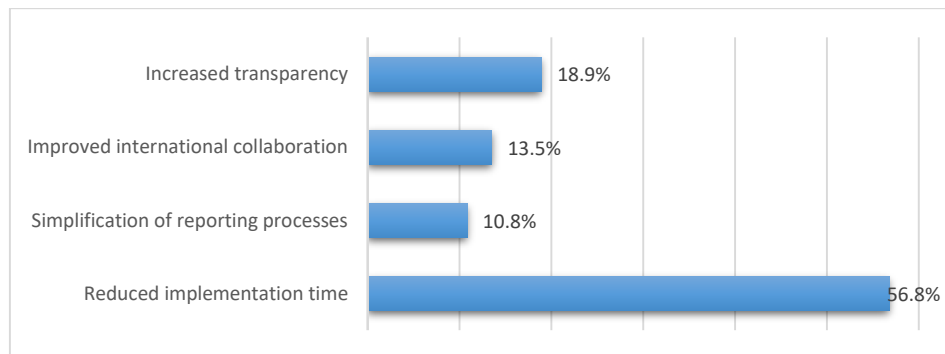


FIGURE 6 - THE MAIN BENEFITS OF HARMONIZED ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES  
Source: Authors, own processing (2024)

Improved international collaboration is appreciated by 13.5% of respondents as an important effect, reflecting the need for closer cooperation between partners. Simplification of reporting processes is seen as an advantage by 10.8% of participants, highlighting the desire to reduce bureaucratic complexity.

In conclusion, the adoption of harmonized administrative procedures is perceived as having multiple benefits, the reduction of projects' implementation time being considered the most significant. This could

**CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

lead to more efficient projects and optimal use of resources. Increased transparency and improved international collaboration are also important, highlighting the need for better coordination and communication. Simplification of reporting processes, although less emphasized, remains a desirable benefit, helping to reduce administrative burden.

The participants in the study were asked if they considered that the implementation of project management systems based on international best practices would improve project effectiveness. As pointed out in Figure 7, the majority of the respondents, representing 67.6%, believed that the implementation of project management systems based on international best practices would improve the efficiency of projects to a high extent. 16.2% of the respondents attributed a medium impact on efficiency, while only 2.7% considered it to have a small impact.

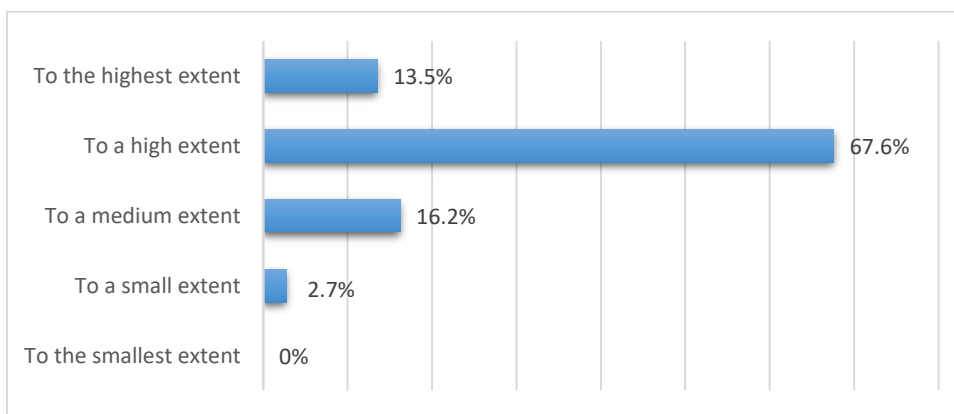


FIGURE 7 - THE INFLUENCE OF MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS BASED ON INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES ON PROJECTS' EFFECTIVENESS

Source: Authors, own processing (2024)

The prevailing perception is that the adoption of project management systems based on international best practices is essential to improve project efficiency. The majority of respondents emphasized the importance of these practices to ensure more efficient and effective project management. This suggests that alignment with international best practice standards could lead to better results and higher value for money in cross-border cooperation projects.

In addition, a question pointed to the impact of international good practices on project transparency. The results presented in Figure 8 show that respondents identified regular and detailed reporting as the most impactful practice for ensuring transparency in project management, followed by continuous staff training, highlighting the need for continuous professional development to maintain high standards of transparency. The implementation of external audits and the use of specialized software facilitating transparency through modern technologies were considered less important outcomes.

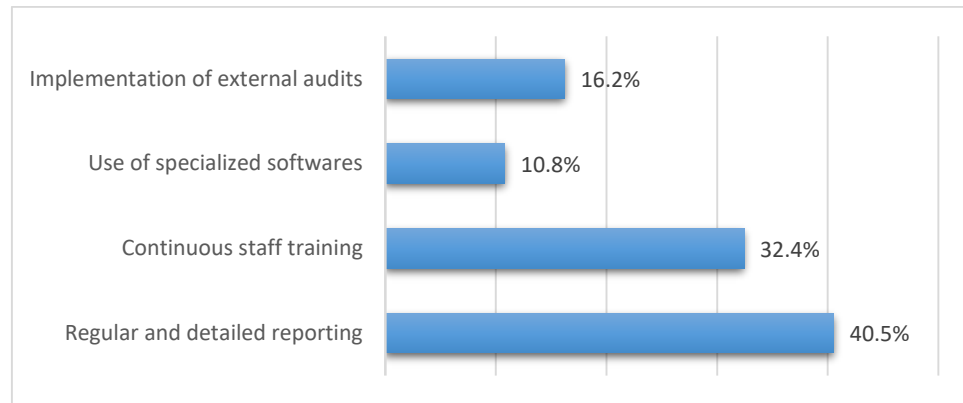
**CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

FIGURE 8 - THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL GOOD PRACTICES ON PROJECT TRANSPARENCY

Source: Authors, own processing (2024)

Regular and detailed reporting was considered as the most influential practice in ensuring transparency in the management of cross-border cooperation projects. This suggests that the provision of regular and comprehensive information is essential to maintain a high level of transparency. Continuous staff training and implementation of external audits are also important, contributing to the competence and integrity of the management process. The use of specialized software, although less emphasized, remains relevant to facilitate transparency through technology.

Overall, the survey results indicate that project management software, reduced implementation time, regular and detailed reporting, and management systems based on international best practices are the primary highlights for the successful implementation of cross-border cooperation initiatives. These findings can inform the allocation of resources and the development of strategies to enhance the technological infrastructure supporting cross-border projects.

## 5. MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The study revealed that the lack of infrastructure is considered an important factor with a high impact on cross-border cooperation, but the biggest challenges are insufficient financial resources and human resources' lack of expertise in project management. Also, the lack of technological resources can negatively influence the successful implementation of cooperation projects between the two countries. In addition, the different legislative and administrative differences present a high risk in the implementation of projects of cross-border cooperation, and a solution could be the harmonization of administrative procedures. Therefore, this harmonization could lead to reduced project implementation time and increased transparency.

**CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

---

Regarding the most important technological resource for successful and efficient project implementation, the software for project management was considered the resource with the main importance, followed by modern communications equipment.

The study also revealed the need to harmonize the legislation regarding project implementation, between the two participating countries because it would lead to reduced implementation time and increased transparency.

In addition, the implementation of project management systems based on international best practices could be a favorable action in the cooperation process between the two countries. An important factor is regular and detailed reporting, as well as continuous training of human resources specialized in these areas. The degree of information plays an important role in the promotion of cross-border cooperation projects along with social networks and online platforms.

Based on the main findings of the study, the following recommendations were designed:

- A harmonized legal framework should be designed, that simplifies and unifies administrative and legislative procedures, with the help of bilateral agreements that standardize environmental and infrastructure regulations to facilitate project approval and implementation.
- High levels of investments in the training and development of administrative personnel in Moldova to equalize project management capacities, should be allocated. This can be achieved through the organization of joint training courses and exchanges of experts to improve skills in European project management.
- The development of a sustainable and mutually accessible co-financing mechanism, such as a joint regional development fund supported by the governments of both countries and the European Union to co-finance strategic projects.
- Investments in joint road and bridge construction and modernization projects, such as the national modernization of the DN28 road in Romania and the R1 road in Moldova, to facilitate cross-border transport.
- The implementation of a robust monitoring and evaluation system to ensure project transparency and efficiency. The use of project management software and regular external audits to track progress and identify quick wins. These measures will contribute to sustainable development and improved relations between the two countries.

**CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

The limitations of the present research are represented by the small sample of respondents in the opinion survey who have benefited from cross-border cooperation projects. The total number of inhabitants in the areas eligible for inter-state cooperation is much higher than the number of respondents.

Future studies should aim to further explore these differences in perception, examining how various demographic and contextual factors influence respondents' opinions. This approach can provide a more nuanced understanding of the opinion about cross-border programme and identify areas where additional information or targeted communication may be needed to enhance stakeholder engagement and support.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT:**

This work was funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania - Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, within the project entitled „Place-based Economic Policy in EU's Periphery – fundamental research in collaborative development and local resilience. Projections for Romania and Moldova (PEPER)”, contract no. 760045/23.05.2023, code CF 275/30.11.2022.

**REFERENCES**

- Andrei, L. & Luca, O. (2022). Towards a sustainable mobility development in Romanian cities. A comparative analysis of the sustainable urban mobility plans at the national level. *Management Research and Practice*, 14(1).
- Beck, J. (2013). Prospects of Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe: Capacity-Building and the Operating Principle of Horizontal Subsidiarity. *International Public Administration Review*, 11, 7.
- Beck, J. (2015). Cross-border cooperation and the European administrative space-Prospects from the principle of mutual recognition. *International Public Administration Review*, 13, 9.
- Borras-Alomar, S., Christiansen, T., & Rodriguez-Pose, A. (2024). Towards a 'Europe of the regions'? Visions and reality from a critical perspective. *Regional and Federal Studies*, 4(2), 1-27.
- Brunet-Jailly, E. (2022). Cross-border cooperation: a global overview. *Alternatives*, 47(1), 3-17.
- Celata, F. & Coletti, R. (Eds) (2015). *Neighbourhood Policy and the Construction of the European External Borders*. Switzerland: Springer.
- Chobal, L. & Lalakulych, M. (2019). Problems and prospects of cooperation of the border regions of Ukraine, Romania, Moldova and Slovakia. *Baltic Journal of Economic Studies*, 5(5), 189-196.
- Delitheou, V. & Georgakopoulou, S. (2019). Integrated territorial investments as a tool for sustainable urban development. The case of Piraeus municipality. *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management*, 14(3), 22-40.
- Džinić, J., & Panara, C. (2024). Engagement with the EU by Local and Regional Authorities from South East Europe. *Hrvatska i komparativna javna uprava: časopis za teoriju i praksu javne uprave*, 24(4), 603-634.



CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME

- European Commission, (2015), *Programming of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) - 2014-2020*, Online, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cbc\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cbc_en).
- European Commission, (2024a), *European Neighbourhood Policy. What is it?*, Online, available at: [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy_en)
- European Commission, (2024b), *Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI – Global Europe)*, Online, available at: [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument-global-europe-ndici-global-europe\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument-global-europe-ndici-global-europe_en).
- European Court of Auditors, (2024), *Sprijinul UE pentru cooperarea transfrontalieră cu țările învecinate Un sprijin valoros, dar punerea în aplicare a început foarte târziu și trebuie remediate problemele de coordonare*, Online, available at: <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/special-reports/cross-border-27-2022/ro/>
- European Union, (2014), *The Schengen area - Migration and Home Affairs*, Online, available at: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files\\_en?file=202009/schengen\\_brochure\\_dr3111126\\_en.pdf](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files_en?file=202009/schengen_brochure_dr3111126_en.pdf).
- Fricke, C. (2014)., *Grenzüberschreitende Governance in der Raumplanung. Organisations- und Kooperationsformen in Basel und Lille*. In S. Grotheer, A. Schwöbel, & M. Stepper (Eds.), *Nimm's sportlich – Planung als Hindernislauf* (pp. 62–78).
- Hálová, P. & Jiří, A. (2014). *Analysis of Investment in Infrastructure and Other Selected Determinants Influence to Unemployment in CR Regions*. Paper presented at 8th International Days of Statistics and Economics, Prague, Czech Republic, September 11–13.
- Jacobs, J. (2016). Spatial planning in cross-border regions: A systems-theoretical perspective. *Planning Theory*, 15(1), 68–90. doi:10.1177/1473095214547149
- Krabokoukis, T., Polyzos, S., & Kantianis, D. (2024). Mapping the landscape of transport infrastructure and regional development. *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management*, 19(1), 5-29.
- Kukovič, S., & Haček, M. (2018). Cross-border cooperation as a tool of escaping crisis conditions in Slovenia. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 14(53), 54-66.
- Kurowska-Pysz, J., Castanho, R.A., & Loures, L. (2018). Sustainable planning of cross-border cooperation: a strategy for alliances in border cities. *Sustainability*, 10(5), 1416.
- Lundén, T. (2018). Border regions and cross-border cooperation in Europe. A theoretical and historical approach. *European Territorial Cooperation: Theoretical and Empirical Approaches to the Process and Impacts of Cross-Border and Transnational Cooperation in Europe*, 97-113.
- Mattsson, M. & Pettersson, Ö., (2005), Cross-Border Collaboration in the North. Viewpoints of Municipal Representatives and Firm Managers on the Bothnian Arc Project, *Fennia International Journal of Geography*, 183(2), 97-107.
- Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, (2022), List of operations financed under Romania-Republic of Moldova Joint Operational Programme 2014-2020, Online, available at: <https://mfe.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/28fa6c703f079040aa8f2889aedb8228.pdf>.
- Mirwaldt, K., McMaster, I. & Bachtler, J. (2009): Reconsidering Cohesion Policy: The Contested Debate on Territorial Cohesion, *European Policies Research Centre*: University of Strathclyde.

**CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ROMANIA- MOLDOVA JOINT OPERATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME**

- Nadalutti, E. (2020). The ethics of cross-border cooperation and its values. *Regions & Cohesion*, 10, 41-63.
- Nienaber, B., & Wille, C. (2020). Cross-border cooperation in Europe: a relational perspective. *European Planning Studies*, 28(1), 1-7.
- Novotná, M., Volek T. & Jiří, A. (2014). *Regional Disparities in Productivity of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in the Food Industry*. Paper presented at 17th International Colloquium on Regional Sciences, Hustopeče, Czech Republic, June 18–20.
- Păceșilă, M., Colesca, S. E., & Popescu, R. I. (2022). Toward Sustainable Development through the Integrated Territorial Investments. An Overview of the Literature in the Field. *Applied Research in Administrative Sciences*, 3(3), 32-44.
- Popescu, C. (2011). The Economy of a Regional Metropolis. Case-Study: Iasi, Romania. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 7(33), 255-276.
- Rădulescu, C. V., Bodislav, D. A., Bran, F., & Burlacu, S. (2020). The impact of cross-border cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and Romania on socio-economic development. *EURINT*, 7, 63-79.
- Rudolf, G., & Kovač, P. (2023). Procedural challenges of cross-border cooperation and consistency in personal data protection in the EU. *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy*, 16(2), 143-170.
- Schulz, C. (2013). *Power topographies in cross-border spatial development policies*. In P. Gilles, H. Koff, C. Maganda, & C. Schulz (Eds.), *Theorizing borders through analyses of power relationships*. Brussels: Peter Lang.
- Wassenberg, B., Reitel, B., Peyrony, J., & Rubió, J. (2015). *Territorial cooperation in Europe: A historical perspective*. Online, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/publications/brochures/2015/territorial-cooperation-in-europe-a-historical-perspective](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/brochures/2015/territorial-cooperation-in-europe-a-historical-perspective)