

The State of the Internet and Digital Rights in the Republic of Moldova (2019–2025)

At first glance, the internet sector of the Republic of Moldova from 2019 to 2025 demonstrates a success story: widespread transition to fibre-optic networks, the launch of 5G networks, and one of the highest levels of network decentralisation in the region, indicating a mature and competitive market. The active alignment of legislation with EU standards within the framework of the European integration course only complements the picture of progressive reforms. However, behind these impressive technical achievements lies another, much more alarming reality related to the state of digital rights and freedoms.

Against the background of regional crises, in particular the war in Ukraine, Moldova's information space has become an arena of fierce confrontation. Under the pretext of protecting national security and combating disinformation, the authorities, primarily through the Information and Security Service (SIS), have begun actively resorting to blocking dozens of internet resources, including news websites and major media outlets. New legislative initiatives that introduce liability for spreading "fake news" contain vague wording which, according to human rights defenders, create risks for freedom of speech and can be used to suppress criticism.

Thus, Moldova has found itself at a crossroads where technological progress coexists with increased state control over content. How do these two opposing trends coexist? Will a country aspiring to join the European Union be able to find a balance between ensuring information security and respecting the fundamental rights of citizens online? The present report offers an in-depth analysis of these processes, examining how technical development affects digital freedoms and what consequences for the future of the Moldovan internet may result from the course chosen by the authorities.

Disclaimer: This document was partially generated using several large language models (LLM). The information presented in it is based on the analysis and generalization of data from the specified sources, however, the process of its structuring, generalization, and presentation was performed

using artificial intelligence technologies. It is recommended to use this text as a starting point for further research and to verify critically important data from primary sources.

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1. General Information

1.1. Geographical location

The Republic of Moldova is a landlocked state in Eastern Europe. The country borders Romania to the west and south-west and Ukraine to the north, east and south.¹ Most of its territory is located between the Dniester and Prut rivers. The Prut River forms the entire western border of Moldova with Romania, while the Dniester forms part of the border with Ukraine in the north-east and south-east.¹ In the extreme south, Moldova has access to the Danube over a section approximately 200 metres long.¹ The geographical coordinates of the country are 47° north latitude and 29° east longitude.¹ The total area ranges from 33 843 to 33 851 km².¹ The geopolitical position of Moldova, squeezed between the European Union (in the person of Romania) and Ukraine, has a significant influence on its foreign policy, trade routes and exposure to regional conflicts. These factors, in turn, can indirectly affect the country's information security and its internet policy.

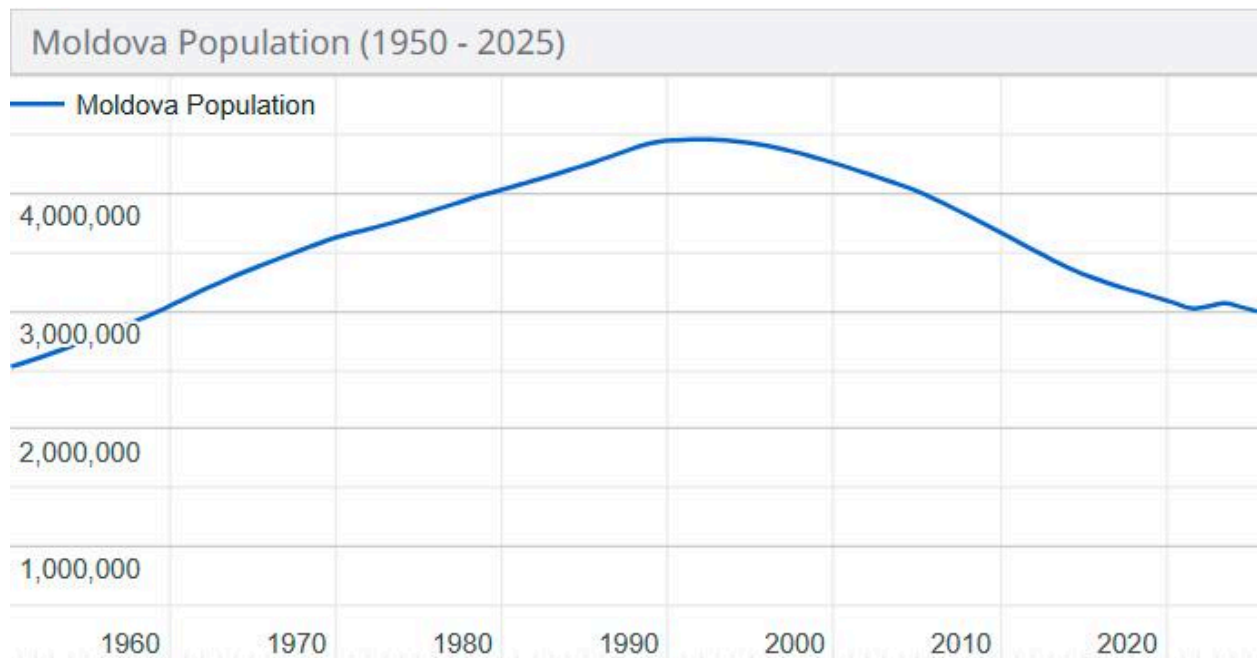
1.2. Population

In recent years, the population of Moldova has shown a tendency to decline, caused by both natural decrease and a high level of emigration.³ According to preliminary data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) of the Republic of Moldova, the population with usual residence as of 1

January 2024 was 2 423.3 thousand people.⁵ The preliminary results of the 2024 population census also indicate a figure of approximately 2.4 million people.⁷ This demographic situation directly affects the number of internet users and the overall coverage of digital services.

The country is experiencing a steady ageing process: the ageing coefficient (share of the population aged 60 and over) reached 25.2% as of 1 January 2024.⁵ Life expectancy at birth in 2023 was 71.9 years.⁵ Population density at the beginning of 2024 was estimated at 79.8 persons per km².⁵ The share of the urban population in 2025 is projected at 57.72%, while the median age of residents is 38.6 years.⁴ The shrinking and ageing population may, in the long term, slow the growth of new internet users while simultaneously creating demand for digital services adapted for the elderly.

Chart 1: Population dynamics of the Republic of Moldova (1950–2025)



Source: *worldometers.info*

Significant discrepancies in population estimates from different sources (NBS, Macrotrends, Worldometers) indicate difficulties in accurately counting the population, especially in the context of significant migration flows – both emigration of Moldovan citizens and the recent influx of refugees from Ukraine.¹⁷ This directly affects the accuracy of relative indicators such as internet penetration rate. The 2024 census data⁷ are critically important for obtaining a more accurate demographic picture and must be used to adjust previous estimates and calculations.

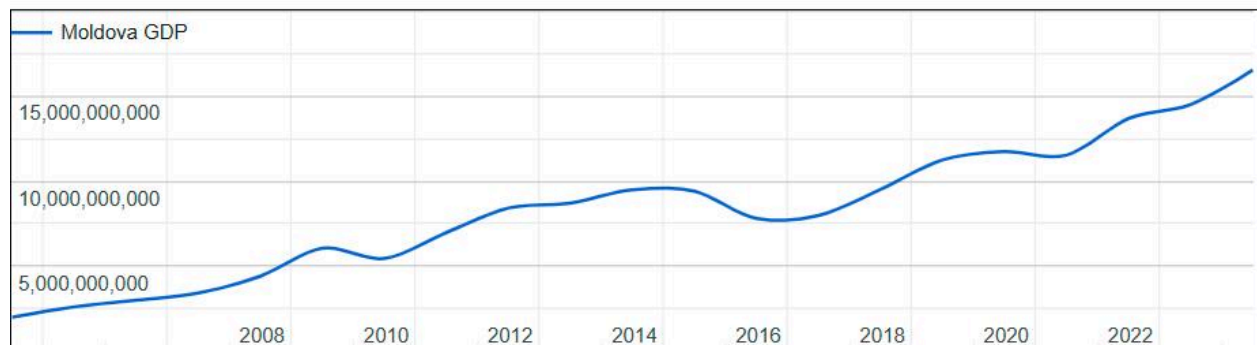
1.3. Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Moldova's economy is classified as developing, with GDP per capita below the European average.¹⁹ In recent years the country's economy has shown considerable volatility, experiencing both growth periods and declines influenced by regional crises (including the war in Ukraine and the associated energy crisis) and internal structural problems.¹⁷ This instability can restrain long-term investment in capital-intensive projects, including the development of digital infrastructure.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank regularly publish GDP assessments and forecasts for Moldova.²² Data from the National Bureau of Statistics are also an important source of information on the country's economic indicators.¹⁹

Chart 2: Dynamics of nominal GDP of the Republic of Moldova (2003–2023)

Moldova GDP (Nominal, \$USD) 2003-2023



Source: *worldometers.info*

Despite economic difficulties, forecasts for 2024–2025 generally point to a resumption of growth, albeit with varying estimates of the pace.²⁰ The success of this growth and its impact on the digital sector will largely depend on the continuation of structural reforms, the need for which is pointed out by international partners²¹, and on regional stability. Sustained economic growth can lead to higher disposable incomes and, consequently, increased demand for internet services and digital devices, as well as stimulate investment in the ICT sector.

1.4. Main economic characteristics

Moldova remains one of the least economically developed countries in Europe.¹⁹ The country's economy is heavily dependent on agriculture²⁹, remittances from citizens working abroad¹⁷, and external financial assistance.³² Dependence on agriculture makes the economy vulnerable to climate change, such as droughts¹⁷, which can affect rural incomes and their access to internet services. In recent years there has been noticeable growth in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector, which is becoming increasingly important for the country's GDP and exports.²²

The key economic sectors are:

- **Agriculture:** viticulture, fruit growing, vegetable growing, cereal cultivation (wheat, maize), sunflower, sugar beet and tobacco.²⁹
- **Industry:** mainly food processing (agricultural product processing, winemaking), as well as light industry and certain areas of mechanical engineering.²⁹
- **ICT sector:** demonstrates dynamic growth, attracting investment and creating qualified jobs.²²
- **Services sector:** includes trade, transport and the developing tourism sector.¹⁹

Structural problems of Moldova's economy include a high level of corruption¹⁷, insufficient diversification, low level of foreign direct investment¹⁷, infrastructure development problems²⁹, significant dependence on imported energy resources¹⁷ and the impact of political instability on economic policy.¹⁷ The war in Ukraine had a serious negative impact, leading to an economic downturn in 2022, rising inflation and an increase in the current account deficit.¹⁷ The growth of the ICT sector is a positive factor, but its sustainable development requires solving problems such as "brain drain", indirectly confirmed by the high level of emigration³², and improving the overall investment climate.

1.5. General political situation

The Republic of Moldova is a parliamentary republic³² where legislative, executive and judicial powers are separated and interact in accordance with the Constitution.³⁷ The country has a multi-party system.³² As a result of the 2021 parliamentary elections, the majority in Parliament was obtained by the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS); the main opposition force is the Bloc of Communists and Socialists.³⁶

Country leadership:

- **President:** Maia Sandu, in office since December 2020 and re-elected in November 2024.³⁶ The President is the head of state and guarantor of sovereignty.³⁷
- **Prime Minister:** Dorin Recean, heading the government since February 2023.⁴¹ The government is responsible for internal and external policy.³⁷
- **Speaker of Parliament:** Igor Grosu, in office since July 2021.⁴⁴ Parliament is the highest legislative body.³⁷

Administrative division: The territory of Moldova is divided into 32 districts, municipalities (including Chişinău, Bălţi, Cahul), the autonomous territorial entity of Gagauzia and the administrative-territorial units of the left bank of the Dniester (Transnistria), whose status remains unsettled.³⁷

The key vector of foreign and domestic policy is European integration.²² In June 2022 Moldova received EU candidate status⁵¹, and in June 2024 official accession negotiations began.⁵² Serious challenges remain the Transnistrian region problem²⁹, high level of corruption and the need for judicial system reform.¹⁷ The war in Ukraine has a significant impact on Moldova's security, economy and information space.¹⁷ Disinformation and foreign interference, especially from Russia, are recognised as significant threats to national security.¹⁸

Political polarisation of society on geopolitical issues and the unresolved Transnistria problem create a complex background for forming a unified state policy in the field of information and cybersecurity. This can lead to contradictory legislative initiatives and complicate their effective implementation. The emphasis on European integration stimulates legislative reforms, including in the internet sphere (for example, the new Law on Electronic Communications⁵⁰), but is also accompanied by measures to combat disinformation⁵⁶ which raise concerns among human rights defenders regarding potential restriction of freedom of speech. This poses the task for Moldova of finding a balance between European human rights standards and the need to ensure information security.

2. Internet

2.1. National domain

The national top-level domain (ccTLD) for the Republic of Moldova is .md.⁵⁹ It was introduced on 24 March 1994, after approval by the University of Southern California Information Sciences Institute (predecessor of IANA).⁵⁹ The first Moldovan internet server, mdearn.md, began operating on 1 January 1994, and in May 1995 the .md domain was fully delegated to the Republican Centre of Informatics of Moldova (RCI).⁵⁹

Administration of the .md domain has gone through several stages. Initially it was managed by RCI, later renamed MoldData. Subsequently, the management rights were transferred to various commercial structures, including American companies, one of which went bankrupt, after which in 2003 management of the domain was returned to the state of Moldova.⁵⁹ Since 30 August 2019, by government order, MoldData was absorbed by the Information Technology and Cyber Security Service (STISC), which became the national registrar of the .md domain.⁵⁹ This transition to a state structure can be regarded as a step towards strengthening state control over the national domain zone, which may have both positive (stability, security) and negative (risk of censorship) consequences.

The .md domain is intended for natural and legal persons associated with Moldova.⁵⁹ Registration of domain names is carried out directly at the second level.⁵⁹ There are certain restrictions: registration of names containing obscene language, offensive expressions or words that violate public order is prohibited.⁵⁹ The domain supports DNSSEC technology for increased security but does not support internationalised domain names (IDN) with non-Latin characters. The length of a domain name must be from 3 to 63 characters (two-letter .md domains are unavailable).⁶⁰

An interesting feature of the .md domain is its dual use: in addition to national identification, it is actively used by the international medical community due to the association of the abbreviation “MD” with “Medical Doctor”.⁶⁰ This creates unique opportunities for its international promotion but may also somewhat blur its national identity in the global internet space. The number of registered domains in the .md zone shows growth: from more than 12 000 in 2007⁵⁹ to approximately 25 000 in 2020⁵⁹ and around 34 700 in 2023–2025. This 40% growth since 2020 is partly due to the price reduction for registration in 2020.⁶⁰

2.2. Number of users

Estimates of the total number of internet users in Moldova vary depending on the source and counting methodology. According to DataReportal at the beginning of 2025, there were 2.42 million internet users in the country, corresponding to an internet penetration level of 80.2% of the total population.⁶³ However, the same source in its January 2024 report gave the figure of 2.14 million users and a penetration level of 63.5%.⁶⁴ Such a significant discrepancy in the penetration level with a relatively similar absolute number of users over a short period is likely due to the use of different estimates of the total population for calculations.

Other sources also provide differing data: ITU reported 63.5% internet users in 2022¹⁸, while Eurostat indicated that in 2022 88% of households in the Eastern Partnership countries, including Moldova, had internet access.⁶⁶ An earlier UNDP report for 2019 estimated internet penetration at 88%.⁶⁷ Kepios analysis cited by Noi.md indicated a 3.5% (78 thousand) decrease in the number of internet users between January 2023 and January 2024.⁶⁴ At the same time, DataReportal's 2023 report reported a 14.7% increase between 2022 and 2023.⁶⁸ These discrepancies highlight the importance of the counting methodology (individual users, households, active users) and the need for a cautious approach to interpreting the data until the final results of the 2024 population census are published.

Despite the high overall internet penetration level, the problem of the digital divide persists in Moldova. This inequality manifests itself both between urban and rural areas¹⁸ and, probably, across age and socio-economic groups.⁶⁹ For example, rural areas often have lower-quality access to broadband internet⁶⁹, and access to computers in poorer households is significantly lower than in wealthy ones.⁶⁹ The new Law on Electronic Communications is aimed, *inter alia*, at reducing this digital divide.⁵⁰ Ensuring equal access to information and digital rights for all citizens is an important task for the country.

2.2.1 Fixed internet

The fixed broadband (FBB) market in Moldova demonstrates steady growth, with fibre-optic (FTTx) becoming the key technology.⁷¹ At the same time, the number of subscribers using xDSL and coaxial cable technologies is declining.⁷¹ Most fixed internet users choose tariff plans with speeds from 30 to 100 Mbit/s and above 100 Mbit/s.¹⁸ The rapid transition to fibre-optic technologies indicates infrastructure modernisation, which should positively affect internet speed and quality. However, if FTTx deployment is concentrated mainly in cities, this may exacerbate the digital divide, leaving rural areas with outdated and lower-quality access technologies.

The fixed FBB market is dominated by Moldtelecom, historically the state-owned company. Despite the presence of other providers such as StarNet Solutions and Orange Moldova, Moldtelecom retains a significant market share, which may indicate barriers to full competition, possibly related to control over the “last mile” infrastructure.

Table 1: Largest fixed internet providers in the Republic of Moldova and their market share (by number of subscribers)

Provider Name	Website Link	Market Share (%)	Year of Assessment	Source
Moldtelecom SA	www.moldtelecom.md	50,6	2024	⁸⁷
StarNet Soluții SRL	www.starnet.md	22,0	2024	⁸⁷
Orange Moldova SA	www.orange.md	14,1	2024	⁸⁷
Other providers (total)	-	13,3	2024	⁸⁷

Note: 2024 market share data are based on information from the ANRCETI 2024 annual statistical report, available at the link in.⁸⁷

In 2021 the revenue shares were as follows: Moldtelecom – 61.7%, StarNet Solutions – 21%, Orange Moldova – 6.2%.⁷¹ The presence of a significant number (110 in 2023¹⁸) of registered providers does not always translate into active competition at the end-user level throughout the country.

2.2.2. Mobile internet

Mobile internet in Moldova is the main way for a significant part of the population to access the network, as evidenced by penetration exceeding 100% (indicating the use of multiple SIM cards or devices by one user).⁸⁵ Mobile internet is predominantly used via smartphones.⁷⁰ 4G networks provide wide coverage of the country’s territory (99% of the population in 2023⁶¹), and the introduction of 5G technology began in 2024.¹⁸

The mobile communications and mobile internet market in Moldova is characterised by a high degree of concentration. The main players are Orange Moldova and Moldcell, followed by Moldtelecom (Unité).

Table 2: Largest mobile internet providers in the Republic of Moldova and their market share (by number of active SIM cards for internet access via smartphones, 2024)

Provider Name	Website Link	Market Share (%)	Source
Orange Moldova SA	www.orange.md	51,6	⁸⁷
Moldcell SA	www.moldcell.md	25,5	⁸⁷
Moldtelecom SA	www.moldtelecom.md	6,6	⁸⁷

Note: 2024 market share data are based on information from the ANRCETI 2024 annual statistical report, available at the link in.⁸⁷ The remaining percentages to 100% relate to other usage categories or are not specified in the source for this breakdown.

In 2021 the revenue shares from mobile internet services were: Orange Moldova – 60–63.5%, Moldcell – 28.8–33%, Moldtelecom – 7–7.7%.⁹² The dominance of two major operators (Orange Moldova and Moldcell) in the mobile communications and mobile internet market may limit competitive pressure, affecting tariffs and innovation, despite the formal presence of a third player.

2.3. Internet access speed and quality of services provided

The quality and speed of internet access in Moldova show a positive trend, especially in the fixed FBB segment due to the active introduction of fibre-optic technologies. According to Ookla Speedtest Intelligence for January 2025, the median mobile download speed was 48.29 Mbit/s, and for fixed FBB – 133.96 Mbit/s.⁶³ This is a significant increase compared to the beginning of 2024, when the median mobile internet speed was 29.51 Mbit/s and fixed – 106.00 Mbit/s.⁶⁴

In particular, over the 12 months to January 2025, the median mobile download speed increased by 63.6%, and fixed – by 26.4%.⁶³

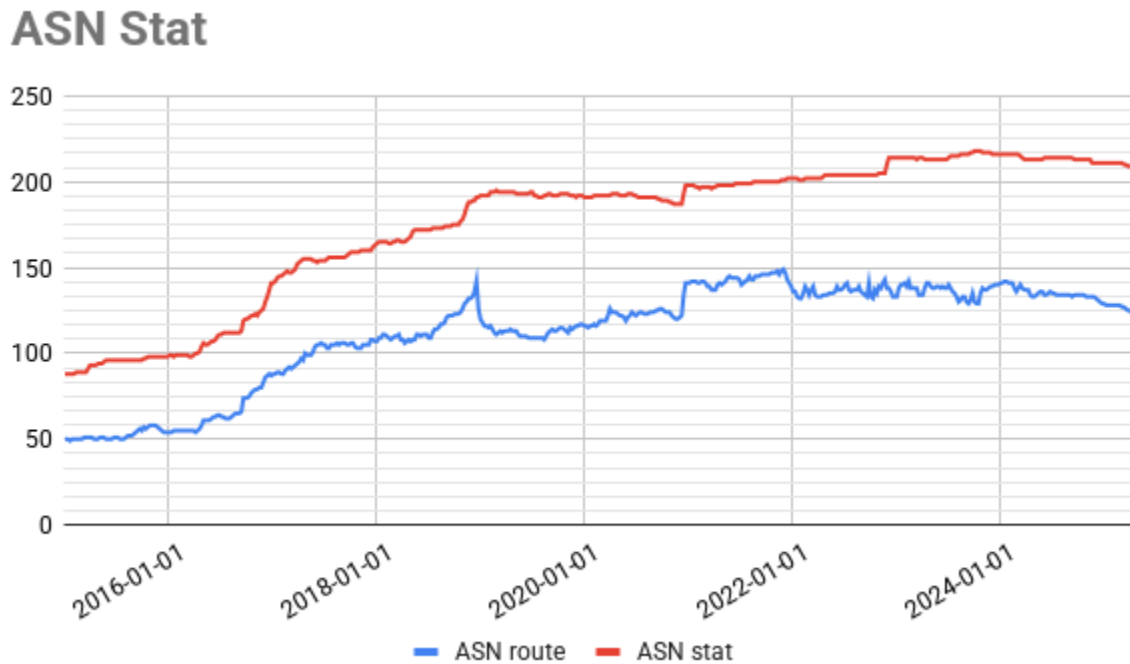
According to Internet Society Pulse for 2023, the average FBB download speed was 114.36 Mbit/s, and for mobile internet – 31.66 Mbit/s.⁶¹ ITU data for 2023 indicate an average mobile FBB download speed of 36.6 Mbit/s and upload speed of 12.4 Mbit/s, with a packet latency of 81 ms.⁹⁴ In the Speedtest Awards report for Q1–Q2 2024, Moldcell was recognised as the operator with the fastest mobile network, achieving a Speed Score™ of 50.64, with a median download speed of 43.09 Mbit/s and upload of 11.96 Mbit/s.⁹⁶

Despite overall progress, the availability of high-speed internet may be uneven, especially between urban and rural areas, which underlines the importance of further infrastructure development to ensure equal access to quality internet services for all citizens. ANRCETI monitors the quality of services, including fixed and mobile telephony and fixed and mobile FBB, and has the right to impose sanctions for non-compliance with requirements.⁹⁴

2.4. Development of providers and autonomous systems

The development of Moldova's internet infrastructure is reflected in the number of registered and routed Autonomous Systems (AS). An Autonomous System is a set of IP networks and routers managed by one or more operators with a single routing policy. According to Internet Society Pulse for 2025, Moldova had 147 active networks (AS).⁶¹ RIPE NCC is the regional internet registry (RIR) for Europe, the Middle East and parts of Central Asia, including Moldova, and is responsible for the allocation of IP addresses and AS numbers.⁹⁸

The dynamics of the number of Autonomous Systems (AS) registered and routed in Moldova, according to RIPE NCC data (if available through RIPE Stat or reports), shows growth in internet infrastructure and the number of independent players in the market. The RIPE NCC report of May 2022 noted significant growth in the number of LIRs (Local Internet Registries) in Moldova after 2016, related to changes in IPv4 address allocation policy.¹⁰⁰ As of March 2022, Moldova had 53 RIPE NCC members owning 143 LIR accounts.¹⁰⁰

Chart 3: Dynamics of Autonomous Systems in Moldova (2015–2025)

The chart demonstrates steady growth in the number of registered AS: The red line (“ASN stat”) shows stable and significant growth in the total number of registered autonomous systems throughout the decade. The most intensive growth was observed in the period 2016–2019, after which it continued at a more moderate pace. This indicates systematic development of internet infrastructure and an increase in the number of independent network operators (internet providers, large companies, state institutions).

Growth of active (routed) AS: The blue line (“ASN route”), showing the number of AS announcing their networks in the global routing table, also follows the overall growth trend. This means that new AS are not only registered but are actively put into operation, expanding the connectivity of the Moldovan internet segment.

Gap between registration and routing: The chart shows a constant and increasing gap between the total number of AS and the number of routed ones. This is normal practice for any internet ecosystem. The difference of 84 systems (211 registered and 127 routed) indicates that approximately 40% of AS are used for specific tasks.

Stabilisation in recent years: By 2024–2025 the growth rate has slowed somewhat, and the line of routed AS shows fluctuations. This may indicate market saturation, consolidation processes among operators or temporary economic factors affecting the launch of new networks.

The indicator “number of AS per capita” is key for assessing the level of development and decentralisation of the internet in a country. Comparison with neighbouring countries shows that Moldova occupies a leading position in the region in terms of the number of autonomous systems per capita, indicating a high level of development of its internet infrastructure. For example, with approximately 81 AS per million inhabitants, Moldova is ahead of Romania (approximately 68 AS per million) and Ukraine (about 58 AS per million). This indicator brings Moldova closer to digital leaders of Eastern Europe such as Estonia.

Final conclusions:

- High network density: Moldova demonstrates a very high indicator of the number of autonomous systems per capita. This indicates a high level of decentralisation of internet infrastructure, healthy competition among providers and significant network autonomy for a relatively small country.
- Regional competitiveness: In terms of relative density of internet networks, Moldova not only does not lag behind but surpasses its closest neighbours, indicating the maturity and development of its internet market.
- Sustainable development: The decade-long growth trend, confirmed both by the total number of registrations and the number of active systems, indicates stable and long-term development of the national internet infrastructure.

Thus, despite modest absolute figures, in relative terms (per capita) Moldova’s internet ecosystem is one of the most developed and competitive in the region.

Table 3: Top 10 largest Autonomous Systems in Moldova

#	Number of AS	Name	Web Site	Foreign neighbour count	Local neighbour count	Total neighbour count	Foreign neighbours share
1	8926	Moldtelecom	http://moldtelecom.md	79	46	125	63%
2	1547	JSC InterDnestrCom (IDC)	http://idknet.com/	109	3	112	97%

3	39279	I.S. Centrul de Telecomunicatii Speciale	https://stisc.gov.md	40	6	46	87%
4	25454	Orange Moldova SA	http://orange.md	11	34	45	24%
5	15836	Arax-Impex	https://arax.md/	5	29	34	15%
6	31252	StarNet Moldova	https://www.star.net.md	18	16	34	53%
7	25455	Guardfox	https://www.guardfox.com	30	2	32	94%
8	60602	Innovahosting net	https://innovahosting.net	26	3	29	90%
9	35346	IT & Network Solutions	http://www.itns.net	2	24	26	8%
10	43289	TRABIA	https://www.trabia.com	21	3	24	88%

The table allows assessment of the internal structure of Moldova’s internet connectivity and confirms the previous conclusions about the maturity and decentralisation of its network.

Analysis of connectivity structure

Clearly pronounced operator roles: The list clearly shows different business models and strategic roles of operators:

- **National leader and main gateway (Moldtelecom, AS8926):** As a historically established operator, Moldtelecom has the largest number of both local (46) and foreign (79) peering connections. This makes it the central node for the entire country, providing both wide internal coverage and the main volume of international traffic.
- **Operators focused on the domestic market (Orange, Arax-Impex, IT & Network Solutions):** These companies have a very low share of foreign neighbours (8–24%). They focus on maximum connectivity within Moldova, actively exchanging traffic with other local networks. This directly indicates developed internal peering, which reduces latency for end users and reduces dependence on expensive international transit for local data.
- **Transit and hosting companies (Guardfox, Innovahosting, TRABIA):** These players have a dominant share of foreign connections (88–94%) with a minimum number of local ones. Their main task is to provide international connectivity, hosting and services requiring direct access to the global network rather than to local users.

- **State network (STISC, AS39279):** The Centre for Special Telecommunications, as befits a state structure, is oriented towards international connectivity (87% foreign neighbours) to ensure resilient and secure channels for state needs, minimising peering with commercial operators within the country.
- **Network isolation of Transnistria (IDC, AS1547):** The data for InterDnestrCom (IDC) clearly illustrate how political division is reflected in network topology. With 109 foreign connections and only 3 local ones (within Moldova), this network is almost completely isolated from the Moldovan internet space. 97% of traffic is exchanged with the outside world (most likely via Ukraine and Russia) rather than with Moldovan operators.

Final conclusions

- **Presence of a mature peering community:** The large number of local connections among key internet providers confirms that Moldova has a developed ecosystem of direct traffic exchange. This is a key sign of a healthy and efficient internet market, contributing to increased speed and reduced access costs for end users.
- **High degree of competition and diversification:** The Top 10 demonstrates not a monopoly but a healthy competitive environment with players of different strategies: from “last mile” operators to international transit companies and hosters. This ensures route diversification and increases the overall resilience of the Moldovan internet segment.
- **Confirmation of decentralisation:** The analysis of Top 10 operator connectivity complements the conclusion about the high number of AS per capita. It becomes obvious that these are not just “paper” registrations but real working networks that actively interact with each other, creating a complex, competitive and decentralised internet environment.

2.5. IPv6 penetration

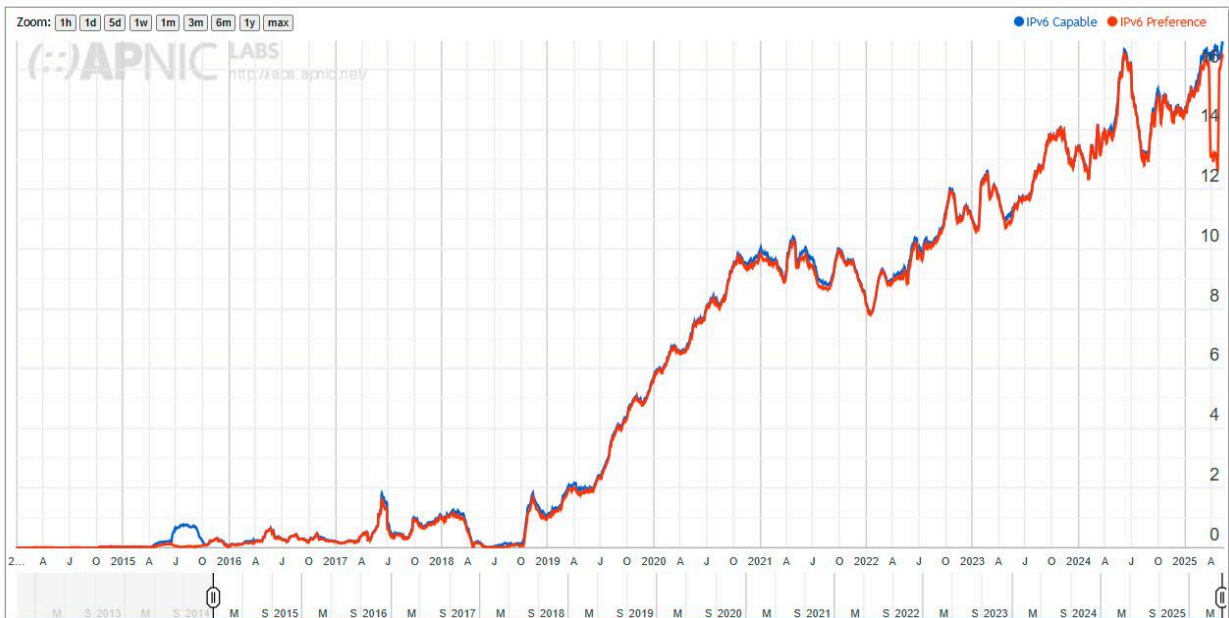
The transition to the new version of the internet protocol IPv6 is an important factor for the further development of the internet, as the IPv4 address space is exhausted. IPv6 penetration in Moldova is at an early stage but shows some dynamics. According to Internet Society Pulse for 2025, 12% of users in Moldova could access online resources using IPv6, which is below the European average (24%).⁶¹

APNIC also provides data on IPv6 deployment levels. Although specific annual data from the APNIC JSON file for Moldova¹⁰² were not extracted in this study due to access restrictions, general data for the Eastern Europe region show that IPv6 deployment level (14.59% capable and 13.28% preferring IPv6 networks) is lower than in Western Europe or Asia.¹⁰⁴ The RIPE NCC report of May 2022 also

characterised IPv6 deployment in Moldova as being at the “early adoption stage”, typical for post-Soviet countries, and below the global average.¹⁰⁰

Chart 4: Dynamics of IPv6 penetration in the Republic of Moldova (2015–2025)

Use of IPv6 for Republic of Moldova (MD)



Source: *stats.labs.apnic.net*

The low level of IPv6 deployment in Moldova, despite the availability of allocated IPv6 addresses to providers, indicates a slow transition and potential future problems with scalability and accessibility of internet resources. To ensure the long-term development of the internet in the country and integration into the global internet space, active steps are needed to stimulate IPv6 implementation both by providers and by state regulators.

2.6. Connectivity index

Two key indicators based on pairwise (peering) connections between Autonomous Systems (ASN) are used to assess the level of integration of an internet segment.

- **Global Connectivity Index:** This index is the total number of unique connections between each local ASN and each external (foreign) ASN. Essentially, it measures how widely and diversely

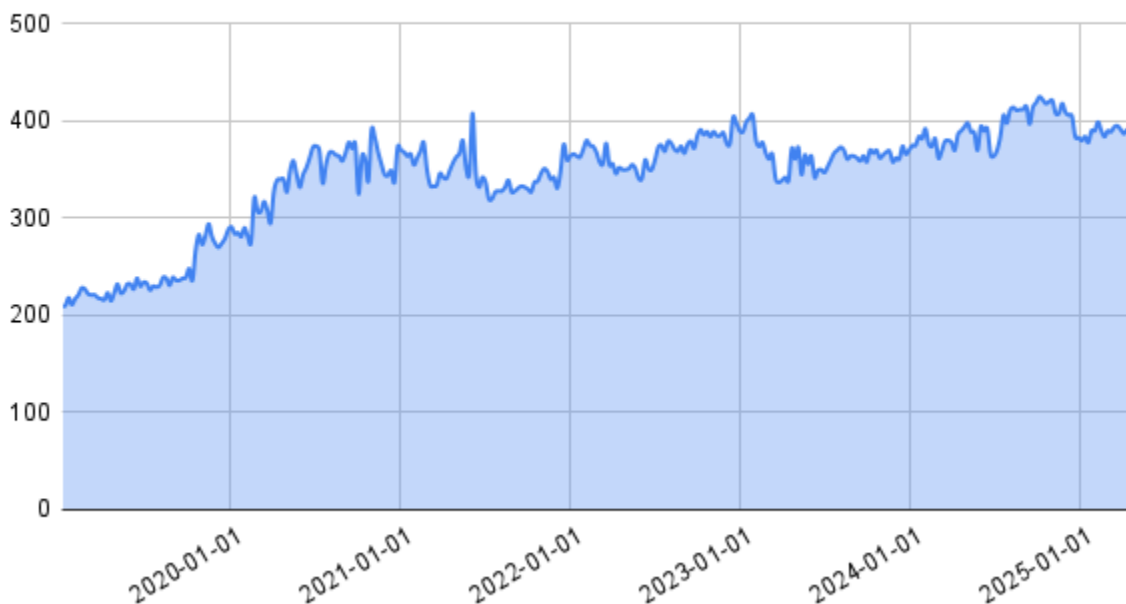
the internet segment is connected to the rest of the world. The higher the indicator, the more “windows” the country has to the global network.

- **Local Connectivity Index:** This index is calculated as the total number of unique connections between different local Moldovan ASNs. It reflects the intensity and complexity of the domestic internet market, in particular the activity at internet exchange points (IXP). A high value indicates a developed internal ecosystem that allows efficient traffic exchange within the country, minimising latency and dependence on external channels for local data.

Analysis of the ratio of these two indices allows understanding of the strategic orientation of the national network: whether it is predominantly self-sufficient or deeply integrated into the global infrastructure.

Chart 5: Dynamics of global connectivity of Autonomous Systems of Moldova (2019–2025)

Global connectivity statistics

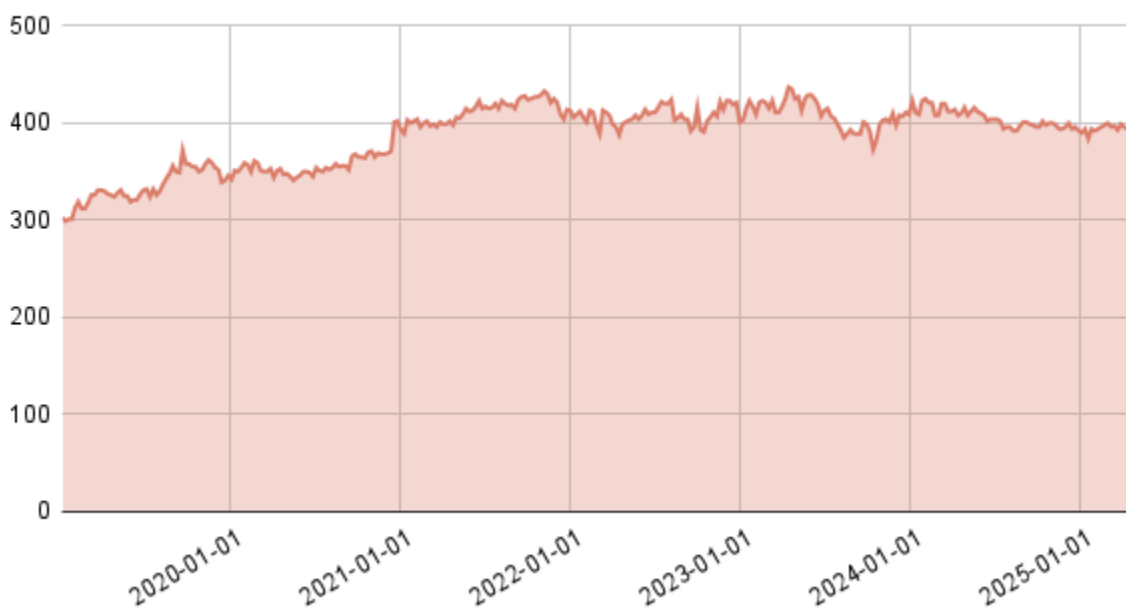


The chart shows a significant strengthening of integration of the Moldovan internet segment into the global network over the period 2019–2025. The Global Connectivity Index almost doubled: from approximately 220 unique connections to a level fluctuating around 400. The most intensive growth occurred in 2020, indicating targeted actions by operators to diversify external connections.

Such dynamics indicate an increase in the number of “windows” to the world, which directly increases the resilience of the national network, reducing its dependence on individual foreign transit operators. Expansion of global connectivity also contributes to improving the quality of access to global resources for end users and creates a more competitive environment for purchasing international traffic.

Chart 6: Dynamics of local connectivity of Autonomous Systems of Moldova (2019–2025)

Local connectivity statistics

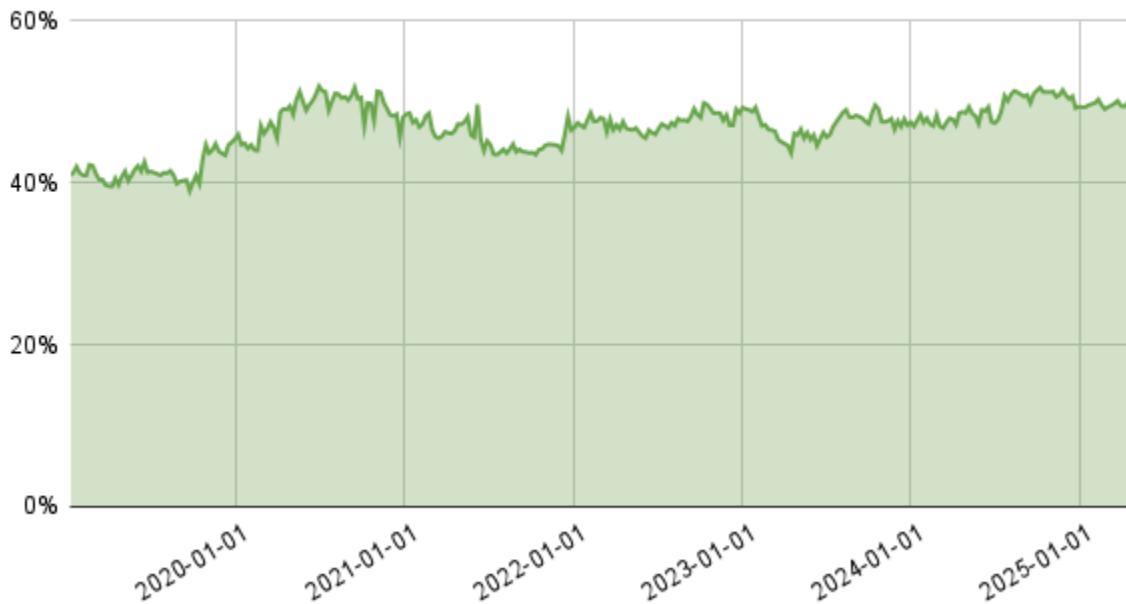


The Local Connectivity Index demonstrates growth from 300 to more than 400 unique connections, peaking in 2022, after which it stabilises at a high level. This growth indicates active development of peering relationships between Moldovan operators and, probably, an increased role of internet exchange points (IXP).

Stabilisation of the index at a high level in recent years is a sign of a mature internal ecosystem. This means that most key players have already established direct connections with each other, allowing efficient traffic exchange within the country. Such developed internal connectivity minimises latency when accessing local resources and reduces the need to use expensive external channels for data transmission between Moldovan users.

Chart 7: Dynamics of the ratio of global and local connectivity of Autonomous Systems of Moldova (2019–2025)

Total connectivity share



The chart shows the ratio of external and internal connections and illustrates the strategic orientation of the network. The share of global connections grew from 40% to a stable level of around 50% in 2021. This indicates that during the growth period Moldovan operators paid priority attention to expanding international channels, striving for deeper integration into the global infrastructure.

The achieved balance, in which global and local connections account for approximately half of the total number of connections, is an indicator of a healthy and balanced network strategy. Moldova's internet segment is neither a closed "thing in itself" nor purely transit periphery. It simultaneously supports a self-sufficient internal ecosystem and actively develops its presence in the global arena, which is characteristic of a mature and efficiently managed national network segment.

3. Internet-related legislation

3.1. Principles of internet governance

Internet governance in the Republic of Moldova is based on legislative acts that seek to balance the development of the information society with the need to ensure national security and protect citizens' rights. The key document regulating the field of electronic communications is Law No. 241 of 15.11.2007 on electronic communications.¹¹¹ This law establishes the basic rules and conditions for activities in this area, defines the powers of state bodies and the rights and obligations of providers and users of services. In April 2025 the Parliament of Moldova adopted a new Law on Electronic Communications, which is to enter into force on 1 January 2026 and is aimed at further harmonisation of Moldovan legislation with European Union norms, in particular with the European Electronic Communications Code (EECC).⁵⁰

The principles of internet governance in Moldova are also shaped by the country's international obligations, including within the Council of Europe and the aspiration for EU integration.¹¹⁵ This implies compliance with standards in the field of freedom of expression, access to information and protection of personal data. However, as experts note, in practice there are contradictory trends in the regulation of the online environment, where the authorities' desire to strengthen control over the internet space under the pretext of ensuring security may conflict with fundamental freedoms.¹¹⁵ Platforms such as IGF Moldova serve as venues for multi-stakeholder discussion of internet governance issues.¹¹⁷

3.1.1. Regulation

Internet regulation in Moldova is carried out through a set of laws and subordinate acts, as well as the activities of specialised state bodies. The main law defining the framework for activities in the field of electronic communications until recently was Law No. 241/2007 on electronic communications.¹¹¹ This law covers aspects such as authorisation of providers, management of radio frequency spectrum and numbering resources, access and interconnection of networks, provision of universal services and protection of user rights. With the adoption of the new Law on Electronic Communications in April 2025 (enters into force on 1 January 2026), which transposes the European Electronic Communications Code (EECC) and other EU directives, modernisation of the legal framework is expected, aimed at increasing efficiency, transparency and competitiveness of the sector.⁵⁰

Legislation also addresses cybersecurity issues (e.g. Law No. 48/2023 on cybersecurity¹¹⁸, Law No. 20/2009 on the prevention and combating of cybercrime¹²⁰), protection of personal data (Law No. 133/2011 on the protection of personal data and the new Law No. 195/2024, which will enter into force later¹¹⁸) and combating disinformation (amendments to the Code on Audiovisual Media Services⁵⁸, Law No. 242/2023 on the Centre for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation⁵⁷). These normative acts form a comprehensive, though constantly evolving, system for regulating the internet space in the country.

3.1.2. Regulatory authorities and responsible persons

Several state bodies play a key role in internet and electronic communications regulation in Moldova:

1. **National Agency for Regulation in Electronic Communications and Information Technology (ANRCETI):** The central public regulatory body responsible for regulating activities in the field of electronic communications and information technology.¹³¹ ANRCETI implements the sector development strategy, ensures the provision of universal services, interconnection of networks, protection of user rights and promotion of fair competition.¹¹⁴ The Agency has powers to develop normative acts, issue licences, analyse markets, set tariffs in certain cases and apply sanctions.⁹⁴
 - **ANRCETI leadership (Administrative Council):**
 - **Director, Chairman of the Administrative Council:** Sergiu Gaibu, appointed by Government Decision No. 72-d of 19 April 2023 for a four-year term.¹³³ Profile: <https://en.anrceti.md/directors>
 - **Deputy Director, Member of the Administrative Council:** Denis Șitari, appointed by Government Decision No. 12-d of 05 February 2025 for a four-year term.¹³³ Profile: <https://en.anrceti.md/directors>.
 - *Note: The official ANRCETI website¹³³ lists two members of the Administrative Council. An earlier source¹³² mentioned Grigore Varanița as director, but ¹³³ is more up-to-date by appointment date.*
2. **Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalisation (MDED):** The central public administration body responsible for developing and promoting state policy in the field of economy and digital transformation.¹³⁴ The Ministry participates in the development of ICT-related legislation and coordinates the country's digitalisation efforts.⁵⁰
 - **MDED leadership (key persons responsible for digital policy):**

- **Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Economic Development and Digitalisation:** Doina Nistor, appointed on 14 March 2025.¹³⁴ Profile: <https://mded.gov.md/despre-minister/echipa-ministerului/>
 - **State Secretary (digitalisation):** Michelle Iliev.¹³⁷ Profile: <https://mded.gov.md/despre-minister/echipa-ministerului/>.
 - **State Secretary (quality infrastructure, economic cooperation):** Cristina Ceban.¹³⁴
 - **State Secretary (business environment):** Natalia Selevestru.¹³⁷
 - **Head of the Information Technology and Digitalisation Policy Department:** Andrei Cușcă.¹³⁷
 - *Note: Previously the Ministry of Information Technology and Communications was a separate body¹³⁸, but in 2017 it was reorganised and its functions were transferred to the Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure, and then to MDED.¹³⁴*
3. **Information Technology and Cyber Security Service (STISC):** Responsible for administration of the national .md domain⁵⁹ and plays a role in ensuring cybersecurity of state information systems.
 4. **Information and Security Service (SIS):** In certain cases, especially related to national security and combating disinformation or cybercrime, SIS may be involved in initiating the blocking of online resources or monitoring internet activity in accordance with the law.⁵⁴
 5. **Centre for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation:** Established by Law No. 242/2023⁵⁷ to coordinate efforts to combat disinformation and information manipulation, including online, and has the right to recommend measures to technological companies, including social networks.

3.2. Market monopolisation

The legislation of the Republic of Moldova in the field of electronic communications is aimed at promoting competition and preventing abuse of dominant position. Law No. 241/2007 on electronic communications¹¹² and the new Law on Electronic Communications adopted in 2025 and entering into force in 2026⁵⁵ contain provisions on market analysis, identification of providers with significant market power (SMP) and imposition of specific obligations on them to ensure non-discriminatory access and fair competition. ANRCETI is authorised to conduct analysis of relevant markets and apply appropriate regulatory measures.¹¹⁴

Despite the existence of a legislative framework aimed at demonopolisation, in practice the electronic communications market in Moldova, especially in the fixed communications and

infrastructure segment, has historically been dominated by JSC “Moldtelecom” – a company with predominant state ownership.⁷¹ This company controls a significant part of the “last mile” infrastructure, which can create barriers to entry for new players or complicate competition for existing alternative operators who may be forced to lease infrastructure from the dominant player.⁷⁴ Although many internet providers operate in the market¹⁸, their ability to offer competitive services nationwide may be limited by dependence on Moldtelecom infrastructure.

In the mobile communications segment the market is also highly concentrated among three main operators: Orange Moldova, Moldcell and Moldtelecom (Unité).⁷³ The new Law on Electronic Communications, harmonised with EU norms, is intended to further promote competition, including by facilitating the deployment of next-generation networks and improving access to infrastructure.⁵⁵ However, the effectiveness of these measures will depend on their practical implementation and consistent enforcement by ANRCETI.

3.3. Internet shutdowns by order of authorities

The legislation of the Republic of Moldova provides for the possibility of restricting or suspending the provision of electronic communications services, including internet access, in certain strictly defined cases, usually related to ensuring national security, public order or in emergency situations. Law No. 241/2007 on electronic communications¹¹² contains general provisions on the obligations of network and service providers to assist competent authorities within the limits of the law. More specific mechanisms may be defined in special legislation, for example in laws regulating the activities of the Information and Security Service (SIS) or the state of emergency regime.

Law No. 20/2009 on the prevention and combating of cybercrime¹²⁰ and the recent Law No. 48/2023 on cybersecurity (entered into force in November 2024 according to some sources¹⁴³, although the text of the law¹¹⁸ is dated 16.03.2023 and published 28.04.2023) provide for the possibility of blocking access to websites containing information used for committing serious crimes such as child pornography distribution, cyber fraud or distribution of malware.¹²⁰ A draft government instruction developed for the implementation of the Cybersecurity Law clarifies the procedure: a blocking order can be issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) or the Information and Security Service (SIS) for a period of 30 days with the possibility of extension up to 90 days. The blocking decision must be public and can be challenged in court.¹⁴³

In a state of emergency, which has been introduced in Moldova, for example due to the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁴⁹ or the war in Ukraine, the Commission for Emergency Situations may issue orders having the force of law, including measures to restrict access to certain information resources.

Thus, in 2022–2023 SIS repeatedly requested the blocking of dozens of websites, citing threats to national security and disinformation, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine and alleged Russian interference.⁵⁴ Blocking orders are issued by the Director of SIS and sent to providers for execution.¹⁴⁷ Thus, the legislative possibility of internet shutdown or blocking of internet resources by order of the authorities exists, and its implementation depends on specific circumstances and legal grounds, be it combating cybercrime, ensuring national security or actions within the state of emergency.

3.4. Legislation on “words on the internet”

In the Republic of Moldova there is legislation concerning liability for the dissemination of certain information on the internet, including “fake news” or disinformation, especially if it affects national security, public order or the rights of others. The Constitution of the Republic of Moldova guarantees freedom of expression but provides for its restriction in cases of defamation of the state and the people, incitement to war, national, racial or religious hatred and other actions threatening the constitutional order.⁵³ The Law on Freedom of Expression also provides broad protection to journalists but defines the limits of this freedom.⁵³

In recent years, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the Moldovan authorities have taken steps to strengthen the fight against disinformation. In June 2022 amendments were made to the Code on Audiovisual Media Services (Law No. 174/2018), introducing the concept of “disinformation” as “the deliberate dissemination of false information created with the aim of harming a person, social group, organisation or state security”.⁵⁸ The Code prohibits the broadcasting of audiovisual programmes containing incitement to hatred, disinformation, propaganda of military aggression and other prohibited content. Sanctions for violations include fines and suspension of the broadcasting licence.⁵⁸ These norms also apply to online retransmission of such content by providers under Moldovan jurisdiction.

In July 2023 Law No. 242 on the Centre for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation was adopted.⁵⁷ This centre is authorised to coordinate efforts to combat disinformation, information manipulation and foreign interference, including by recommending measures to technological companies and media to eliminate the causes of disinformation.¹³⁰

In March 2025 a legislative amendment to the Code of Administrative Offences was submitted to Parliament, proposing the introduction of administrative fines for disseminating on the internet “false or misleading information whose false or misleading nature can be verified”, if done “intentionally with the aim of misleading the public and causing public harm to democratic

processes, public health or national security”.⁵⁶ The proposed fines range from 50 to 100 conventional units for individuals, up to 150 c.u. for officials and up to 200 c.u. for legal entities, with tougher penalties in aggravating circumstances such as influencing voters or supporting foreign interference.¹⁵⁸ The initiative provides exceptions for satire, humour, advertising, socially significant debates, personal opinion or counter-disinformation provided the false nature of the information is clearly indicated.⁵⁶ This initiative has been criticised by media experts and civil society due to the vagueness of the wording and potential risks to freedom of expression.⁵⁶

Thus, Moldova’s legislation on “words on the internet” is developing in the direction of strengthening liability for the dissemination of disinformation, but the clarity of definitions and enforcement mechanisms remain a subject of discussion and concern in terms of maintaining the balance between security and freedom of speech.

3.5. Legislation on internet blocking

The legislation of the Republic of Moldova provides mechanisms for blocking internet resources in certain cases related to combating cybercrime, protecting national security and combating disinformation. These measures are regulated by several normative acts and implemented by various state bodies, creating a complex but functioning system of control over online content.

In general, the state must not impede access to information and communication on the internet through blocking or content filtering, but is obliged to take measures to protect certain categories of users, for example children.¹⁵⁹ However, there are legislative grounds for restricting access to resources.

3.5.1. Legislation

The main normative acts regulating the blocking of internet resources are:

1. **Law No. 20/2009 on the prevention and combating of cybercrime¹²⁰:** This law (with subsequent amendments, for example the draft amendments of June 2024¹²¹) provides for blocking access to websites containing information used for committing crimes such as child pornography distribution, fraud, malware distribution or incitement to disclose confidential data.¹²⁰
2. **Law No. 48/2023 on cybersecurity** (entered into force in November 2024 according to some sources¹⁴³, although the text of the law¹¹⁸ is dated 16.03.2023 and published

28.04.2023): This law also contains provisions allowing the authorities to suspend access to websites in the context of combating cyber threats.¹¹⁸

3. **Law No. 753-XIV of 23.12.1999 on the Information and Security Service of the Republic of Moldova** (with subsequent amendments, for example Law No. 136 of 08.06.2023¹⁴²)¹⁴⁰: Grants SIS powers to ensure information security and, in certain cases, to initiate blocking.
4. **Code on Audiovisual Media Services No. 174/2018** (with amendments of June 2022)⁵⁸: Prohibits the dissemination of disinformation and other harmful content through audiovisual media services, including those available online, and provides for sanctions up to suspension of the broadcasting licence.
5. **Legislation on the state of emergency** (for example Law No. 212/2004 on the state of emergency, siege and war¹⁴⁹): Allows the Commission for Emergency Situations to issue orders restricting access to information to ensure public safety. It was on the basis of decisions of this commission and orders of the SIS Director that website blocking was carried out in 2022–2023.⁵⁴

The new Law on Electronic Communications adopted in April 2025 and entering into force in January 2026 harmonises Moldovan legislation with European norms but does not directly detail blocking procedures, leaving it to special laws.⁵⁵

3.5.2. Blocking procedures

The procedure for blocking internet resources in Moldova depends on the legal basis and the bodies involved.

In the general case related to cybercrime, according to Law No. 20/2009 and the draft subordinate acts to the Cybersecurity Law No. 48/2023, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) or the Information and Security Service (SIS) may issue a blocking order for access to websites.¹⁴³ Such an order is issued for 30 days with the possibility of extension up to 90 days. The blocking decision must be public and can be challenged in court, while the authorities are obliged to submit evidence within 3 days.¹⁴³ Internet providers are required to execute the blocking order within 24 hours, and users attempting to access a blocked resource are redirected to a government page with explanations and information about the appeal procedure.¹⁴⁴

In a **state of emergency** the procedure is simplified. The Information and Security Service (SIS), on the basis of decisions of the Commission for Emergency Situations or on its own initiative (if provided for by the state of emergency), issues an order to block certain online resources, which is sent to electronic communications providers for immediate execution.⁵⁴ The National Agency for

Regulation in Electronic Communications and Information Technology (ANRCETI) informs providers of their obligation to block the specified sources and monitors the implementation of these orders.¹³⁹

In the case of detection of **disinformation** in audiovisual media services (including online platforms falling under the Code on Audiovisual Media Services), the Audiovisual Council has the right to monitor and apply sanctions, up to suspension of the broadcasting licence.⁵⁸ The Centre for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation may also recommend that technological companies take measures to eliminate disinformation.¹³⁰

Despite formally prescribed procedures, experts note that in practice blocking methods (e.g. DNS blocking) may be ineffective and easily bypassed by experienced users using VPN and other tools.¹³⁹

3.5.3. Registries of blocked internet resources

In the Republic of Moldova there is no single, constantly updated and publicly available official registry of all blocked internet resources on all grounds. Information about blockings appears fragmentarily, mainly through messages from the Information and Security Service (SIS) or ANRCETI during periods of state of emergency or in connection with specific cases of combating disinformation or cybercrime.

Thus, SIS publishes lists of sites subject to blocking on the basis of its orders issued in accordance with decisions of the Commission for Emergency Situations.⁵⁴ For example, in October 2023 SIS published a list of 31 websites whose access was restricted.¹⁴⁷ Previously, in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, SIS also ordered the blocking of 54 web pages for spreading fake news.¹⁴⁵ These lists are usually published on the official SIS website and communicated to providers through ANRCETI.¹⁴⁶

However, these lists are situational and do not constitute a permanent “black list”. After the cancellation of the state of emergency, decisions of the Commission for Emergency Situations and, accordingly, SIS orders issued on their basis are automatically annulled.¹⁴⁴ This means that access to previously blocked sites may be restored if there are no other legal grounds for their blocking. The absence of a centralised, constantly updated and easily accessible official public registry of blocked resources complicates public control and monitoring of blocking practices in the country.

As indicated above, there is no official single public registry of blocked resources in Moldova. However, lists of sites subject to blocking are periodically published by the Information and Security

Service (SIS) during periods of state of emergency or when taking specific measures to combat disinformation.

- **Official SIS publications:**

- Order of the SIS Director No. 74 of 30 October 2023, containing a list of 31 sites, was published on the official SIS website.¹⁴⁷ Links to the document were also provided in news reports, e.g. <https://sis.md/ro/file/1851> or <https://sis.md/sites/default/files/comunicate/fisiere/Ordinul%20Directorului%20SIS%20nr.74.pdf> (links may become outdated over time).
- Earlier, in March 2020, SIS also published lists of sites blocked for spreading fake news about COVID-19.¹⁴⁵
- These lists are official orders sent to internet providers for execution through ANRCETI.¹³⁹

- **Unofficial sources and aggregators:**

- Information about blocked sites can be found in news publications and reports of non-governmental organisations that track such cases. For example, the portal Stopfals.md covered the blocking of sites with fake news and analysed their effectiveness.¹⁴⁵
- International organisations such as OONI (Open Observatory of Network Interference) collect data on internet censorship worldwide, including Moldova, but at the time of the last review the OONI Explorer for Moldova did not have specific lists of blocked sites or applications uploaded or displayed in the interface.¹⁶¹ OONI data, if available and analysed, can serve as an unofficial source of information on blockings.

The operation of these lists is that SIS identifies resources which, in its opinion, pose a threat or distribute prohibited information and issues an order to block them. This order is communicated through ANRCETI to all internet providers, who are technically required to restrict access to the specified URLs for their users on the territory of Moldova. However, as noted, the effectiveness of such blockings (often at the DNS level) may be limited due to the possibility of using VPN and other circumvention tools.¹³⁹ The absence of a transparent, permanent and easily accessible official registry is a shortcoming of the system, complicating public oversight.

3.5.4. Development of blockings

The practice of blocking internet resources in Moldova has noticeably intensified during periods of escalation of the internal political situation, the COVID-19 pandemic and especially after the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine. The main initiator of blockings is the Information and Security Service

(SIS), citing the need to protect the information space from disinformation, propaganda and threats to national security.

In March 2020, with the beginning of the pandemic, SIS ordered the blocking of 54 web resources accused of spreading fake news about COVID-19.¹⁴⁵ A significant part of these sites were registered abroad under fictitious names, complicating the prosecution of their administrators.¹⁴⁵

During the state of emergency introduced due to the war in Ukraine, SIS repeatedly issued orders to block sites. In October 2023 31 sites were blocked, including major Russian state news agencies (TASS, RIA Novosti) and other resources which, according to SIS, spread disinformation and content capable of generating social tension or threatening national security.⁵⁴ Earlier, in 2023, other sites were also blocked for similar reasons.¹⁴⁴ In April 2025 SIS again requested the blocking of six Russian portals and one Moldovan site accused of anti-EU propaganda.⁵⁴

OONI (Open Observatory of Network Interference) data for Moldova show that measurements are being collected to detect censorship, but at the time of the last review detailed reports with specific lists of blocked sites or applications for the period 2019–2025 had not been finalised or published on their platform.¹⁶¹ However, the OONI platform itself is a tool that allows tracking blockings. Wikipedia, citing ONI reports from 2010, classified Moldova as a country with “selective censorship” in the political sphere.¹⁶⁸ Freedom House in its report “Internet Freedom in Moldova” (probably published in 2024 or late 2023, judging by the context¹⁸) notes that the internet in Moldova is relatively free, although the authorities in recent years have introduced restrictions, especially during states of emergency. It is noted that the authorities block news portals which, in their opinion, spread fakes, while Russian actors systematically use social media to spread pro-Kremlin narratives.¹⁶⁹

Conclusion: The dynamics of blockings in Moldova in the period 2019–2025 demonstrate a clear trend towards strengthening state control over the information space, especially in response to external and internal crises. The main instrument is SIS orders issued within the state of emergency or on the basis of legislation on combating disinformation and cyber threats. Although the authorities declare the necessity of such measures to protect national security, human rights defenders and media experts express concern about possible abuses, lack of sufficient transparency in blocking procedures and potential restriction of freedom of speech. The effectiveness of the blockings themselves is also questioned due to the possibility of bypassing them using VPN and other technologies.¹³⁹

4. Human Rights Violations on the Internet

In the Republic of Moldova, despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and relatively free access to the internet, certain challenges and violations of citizens' digital rights were observed between 2019 and 2025. These violations manifested in various forms, including the blocking of internet resources by decision of the authorities, attempts to criminalize online statements, as well as pressure on media and non-governmental organizations for their online activities. These problems became particularly acute in the context of political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine, when authorities resorted to restrictive measures under the pretext of ensuring national security and combating disinformation.¹⁸

Although no systemic or nationwide internet shutdowns were recorded, the practice of blocking individual websites and online resources became more widespread. Moreover, legislative initiatives aimed at combating “fake news” and disinformation raised concerns among human rights defenders and the media community due to the risk of their selective application and infringement on freedom of expression.⁵⁶

4.1. Internet shutdowns ordered by the authorities

During the reporting period (2019–2025), no cases of complete nationwide internet shutdowns ordered by the authorities were recorded in the Republic of Moldova. International organizations such as Access Now, which track internet shutdowns worldwide, did not list Moldova among the countries that resorted to full internet blackouts in their annual reports in recent years.¹⁷²

However, there were numerous instances of blocking access to individual internet resources, which constitutes a form of restriction on access to information. These blockings were carried out on the basis of orders from the Information and Security Service (SIS), especially during periods of state of emergency declared in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.⁵⁴ For example, in March 2020, SIS ordered the blocking of 54 web pages for “spreading fake news about COVID-19”.¹⁴⁵ In October 2023, 31 websites, including Russian state media, were blocked by SIS order on charges of spreading disinformation and threatening national security.⁵⁴ Similar blockings were also requested by SIS in April 2025.⁵⁴

Although this is not a full “shutdown”, such targeted blockings limit citizens' access to certain sources of information and raise concerns about freedom of speech and media pluralism. Freedom House reports also indicate that Moldovan authorities resorted to internet restrictions, especially

during states of emergency.¹⁸ Information about planned power outages that may affect internet access for individual users is published¹⁷⁵, but this is not related to government orders restricting access to information.

4.2. Criminalization of online speech

In the Republic of Moldova, legislation provides for liability for certain types of statements, including on the internet, that may be qualified as defamation, insult, incitement to hatred, or dissemination of disinformation threatening national security. Although there were few widely known cases of imprisonment solely for social media posts or online articles in recent years, there were instances of administrative prosecution and criminal investigations related to online statements.

Legislative initiatives in recent years aimed at combating disinformation, such as amendments to the Code of Audiovisual Media Services⁵⁸ and proposed amendments to the Code of Offences⁵⁶, provide for fines for disseminating “false or misleading information” on the internet. These measures raise concerns among human rights defenders and media experts regarding their possible use to suppress criticism and restrict freedom of speech.¹⁵⁷

One high-profile case indirectly related to online activity concerns businessman Veaceslav Platon. Although his main charges were related to banking fraud, it was noted that he actively conducted activities on social networks, publishing posts sponsored with significant amounts, while judicial proceedings in his cases were delayed.¹⁷⁶ This is not a direct case of persecution for words, but it illustrates the authorities’ attention to the online activities of public figures.

In the context of the events of 7 April 2009, cases of persecution and torture of protest participants were recorded, some of whom may have been linked to their activity or coverage of the events on the internet, although a direct link to “online statements” as the main element of the crime is not always evident in these cases.¹⁷⁷ The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) issued several rulings against Moldova in cases related to these events, pointing to human rights violations.¹⁷⁷

The U.S. Department of State’s 2021 Human Rights Report on Moldova mentioned that businessman Adrian Ceban from Transnistria, who openly criticized the Transnistrian “authorities” and Russian officials on social networks, was persecuted.¹⁷⁸ Although this concerns a region not controlled by Chişinău, it reflects the risks associated with online statements in a broader context.

Overall, although there are no mass imprisonments for internet posts in Moldova, there is a legislative framework that can be used for administrative or even criminal prosecution for certain types of online content, especially in the context of combating disinformation and protecting national security. This creates a “chilling effect” on freedom of speech on the internet.

4.3. Persecution of media and NGOs

Between 2019 and 2025, cases of pressure and persecution against media outlets and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) occurred in Moldova, including for their activities and publications on the internet. Although direct criminal prosecution for “words on the internet” for journalists and NGO activists was not widespread, other methods of pressure were used.

Media blocking: As mentioned earlier (Section 4.1), the Information and Security Service (SIS) repeatedly initiated the blocking of media websites, especially those considered to be spreading disinformation or threatening national security. In October 2023, 31 sites were blocked, including a number of Moldovan and Russian media resources.¹⁴⁷ Such blockings limit audience access to these media and can be regarded as a form of pressure.

Smear campaigns and intimidation: Media NGOs such as the Center for Independent Journalism (CJI) have repeatedly condemned campaigns of intimidation and discrediting of journalists in the online space.¹⁷⁹ These campaigns often include online harassment, threats, and the dissemination of defamatory information aimed at undermining trust in independent media and individual journalists. In one statement, CJI and other media NGOs demanded that law enforcement authorities hold the perpetrators of such attacks accountable.¹⁷⁹

Legislative pressure: The adoption and discussion of laws concerning the fight against disinformation and regulation of online content also raised concerns among the media community and NGOs. There were fears that vague wording and broad powers of state bodies could be used to put pressure on critically minded media and NGOs.⁵⁶

Restriction of access to information: Media NGOs also pointed to problems with journalists’ access to information of public interest and attempts to restrict press access to court proceedings.¹⁸⁰ Although this is not direct persecution for “words on the internet”, restricting access to information hinders the work of media, including their online publications.

The Freedom House report “Internet Freedom in Moldova” notes that authorities block news portals that they believe spread fakes, and also points to the systematic use of social media to

spread pro-Kremlin narratives, which creates a difficult background for the work of independent media.¹⁶⁹ The U.S. Department of State's 2021 Human Rights Report also mentioned serious restrictions on freedom of expression, including the press and other media.¹⁷⁸

Thus, although direct imprisonment of journalists or NGO activists solely for online publications is not a widespread practice, the combination of factors such as website blocking, online harassment, legislative pressure, and restriction of access to information creates an unfavorable environment for media freedom and NGO activities in Moldova's online space.

5. Civil society in internet governance

Civil society in the Republic of Moldova plays an active, albeit challenged, role in issues of internet governance and the protection of digital rights. A number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) specialize in monitoring media freedom, protecting journalists' rights, promoting digital literacy, and analyzing legislation affecting the internet sphere. These organizations often criticize restrictive initiatives, conduct research, training events, and advocacy campaigns.¹⁵⁶

Despite the efforts of civil society, its influence on state policy in the internet sphere may be limited. Problems such as lack of transparency in decision-making, limited access to information, and periodic pressure on independent voices create obstacles to the effective work of NGOs. Nevertheless, civil society organizations continue to play an important role in informing the public, international dialogue, and protecting digital freedoms in the country.

5.1. Organizations

Several key non-governmental organizations actively working on digital rights, internet freedom, and media issues operate in Moldova:

1. **Promo-LEX Association**

- **Description of activities:** Promo-LEX is one of Moldova's leading human rights organizations. Its activities cover a wide range of issues, including monitoring democratic processes (including elections), human rights protection, and promotion of justice sector reforms. In the context of digital rights, Promo-LEX monitors freedom of expression, analyzes legislation affecting the internet sphere, and conducts training and seminars on digital rights for civil society representatives.¹⁵⁶ The organization also participates in international forums and prepares reports on the human rights situation

in Moldova, including aspects related to the online environment. For example, Promo-LEX conducted training on digital rights together with the Center for Independent Journalism.¹⁸²

- **Website:** <https://promolex.md>¹⁸¹

2. **Centrul pentru Jurnalism Independent (CJI) – Center for Independent Journalism**

- **Description of activities:** CJI is the oldest media NGO in Moldova (founded in 1994) and focuses on supporting free and professional press, protecting journalists' rights, and promoting media literacy.¹⁸⁰ CJI monitors violations of journalists' rights, including online harassment and smear campaigns, issues public statements and petitions demanding that authorities investigate such cases and protect journalists.¹⁷⁹ The organization also analyzes media legislation, develops ethical codes (including the use of AI in journalism¹⁹⁰), and creates tools to combat disinformation (e.g., the Media Radar application).¹⁸⁰ CJI actively participates in events dedicated to media freedom and digital rights.¹⁸⁰
- **Website:** <https://cji.md>¹⁷⁹

3. **Centrul de Politici și Reforme (CPR Moldova) – Center for Policies and Reforms**

- **Description of activities:** CPR Moldova works to promote democratic reforms, human rights, transparency, and good governance. In the field of digital rights, the organization analyzes legislation (e.g., the bill on taxation of foreign online services¹⁹¹), issues of access to information, veil and e-democracy. CPR Moldova also organizes public discussions and forums on topical issues, including civil society participation in shaping state policy.¹⁸⁵
- **Website:** <https://cpr.md>¹⁸⁵

4. **WatchDog.MD Community**

- **Description of activities:** WatchDog.MD specializes in monitoring and analyzing disinformation, propaganda, and information manipulation, especially in the online environment. The organization's experts regularly comment on legislative initiatives related to internet regulation and the fight against fake news and emphasize the need for cooperation between authorities, technology platforms, and civil society to counter these threats.¹⁵⁷
- **Website:** (Specific link to the organization's website is not indicated in the provided materials, but it is mentioned in the context of media monitoring and expertise).

These and other civil society organizations contribute to the protection of digital rights in Moldova, although their work is often complicated by limited resources and a complex political environment.

5.2. VPN and circumvention tools

The use of VPN (Virtual Private Network) and other circumvention tools is a topical issue in Moldova, especially in the context of periodic blocking of internet resources by decision of the authorities. VPN services allow users to bypass geographical restrictions, encrypt their internet traffic, and increase their level of anonymity online, making them a popular tool for accessing blocked content and protecting digital privacy.¹⁹²

In Moldova, as in many other countries, citizens use VPNs for various purposes: from accessing streaming services with regional restrictions to bypassing the blocking of news sites or social networks imposed by the authorities. The use of VPN becomes especially relevant during periods of increased state control over the information space, for example, during emergency situations or political tension, when authorities may resort to blocking sites accused of spreading disinformation or threatening national security.¹³⁹

5.2.1. Status of VPN services

The use of VPN services in the Republic of Moldova is legal.¹⁹³ At present, there are no special laws that directly prohibit or restrict the use of VPNs by citizens for personal purposes, such as privacy protection or bypassing geo-blocks. VPN providers such as NordVPN and Private Internet Access openly offer their services on the Moldovan market, emphasizing their legality and benefits for ensuring online security and anonymity.¹⁹²

However, it is important to note that the legality of using a VPN does not mean that any actions performed with it are also legal. Using a VPN to commit illegal acts (e.g., cybercrimes, distribution of prohibited content) is still prosecuted by law.¹⁹⁴

Moldovan legislation regulating the internet and electronic communications, such as Law No. 241/2007 on Electronic Communications¹¹² or the new Electronic Communications Law (adopted in 2025)⁵⁵, as well as laws on cybersecurity¹¹⁸ and personal data protection¹¹⁸, do not directly prohibit VPNs. However, in the context of combating cybercrime or SIS orders to block sites, internet service providers are obliged to comply with these orders. Using a VPN to bypass such blocks, although technically possible and not directly prosecuted, may be regarded by the authorities as an action that hinders the execution of lawful requirements. At present, there is no information on special laws regulating the advertising or sale of VPN services in Moldova, except for general commercial activity rules.

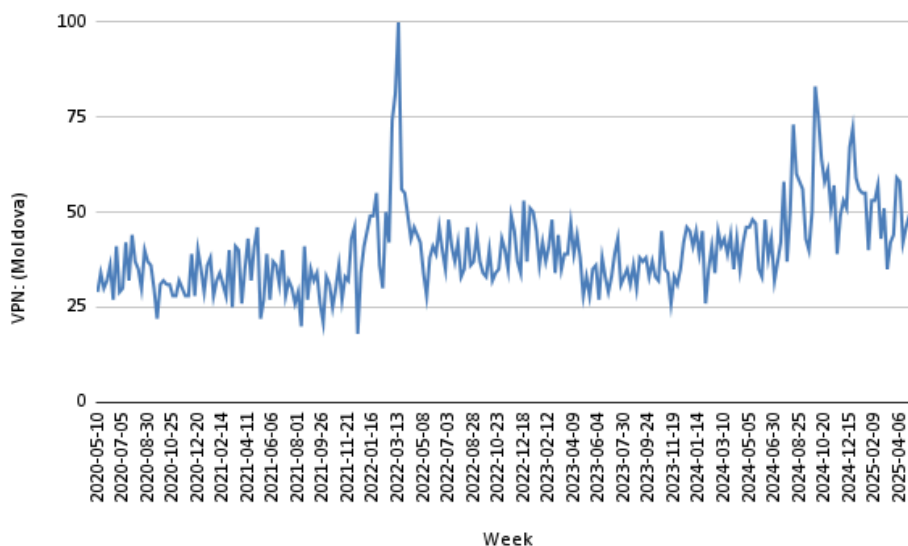
5.2.2. Number of VPN users

No exact official data on the number of VPN users in the Republic of Moldova for the period 2019–2025 were found in the provided materials. VPN usage statistics are often commercial information of the VPN providers themselves or the result of specialized marketing studies that are not always publicly available. The National Bureau of Statistics or ANRCETI apparently do not collect or publish such specific statistics.¹⁹⁵

Indirectly, the growth of interest in VPNs can be judged by the increase in the number of internet resource blockings by the authorities, since VPN is one of the main tools for bypassing such restrictions.¹³⁹ During periods of political exacerbation or the introduction of states of emergency accompanied by site blockings, demand for VPN services usually increases. For example, after SIS blocked a number of sites in 2023 and 2025, users actively discussed and used VPNs to access these resources.¹³⁹

Cases of blocking VPN services themselves at the state level in Moldova are not documented in the provided sources. Although some countries (e.g., China, Russia, Turkey) take steps to restrict access to VPN services that are not government-approved²⁰³, such practice in Moldova has not received widespread coverage. Technically, blocking VPN services is a difficult task, as they use various protocols and servers, and users can switch between them.

Graph 8: Dynamics of VPN-related search queries in the Republic of Moldova (2020–2025)



Source: trends.google.com

Interest in VPNs in Moldova is predominantly situational and reactive and is closely linked to the geopolitical situation in the region. The graph shows a stable baseline level of interest that is sharply interrupted by peaks coinciding with periods of instability and uncertainty. There is no smooth organic growth, which indicates that for most users VPN is a tool to solve a specific problem rather than a means of constant protection.

Analysis of key peaks

Main peak (late February – March 2022): The highest surge in interest almost certainly related to the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. During this period, information tension sharply increased in Moldova as well as in the entire region. This peak could have been caused by a combination of the following factors:

- **Blocking of Russian media:** Moldovan authorities, as well as providers in neighboring countries, began blocking Russian propaganda and news resources. Users accustomed to consuming this content began looking for ways to bypass the blocks.
- **Information hygiene and security:** Against the background of military actions and cyberattacks in the region, part of the audience began using VPNs to protect their data and maintain anonymity online.
- **Declaration of state of emergency:** The declaration of a state of emergency in Moldova may have caused citizens to fear the possible introduction of censorship or internet restrictions, which provoked preventive interest in circumvention tools.

Peaks in the second half of 2024: A series of high surges from August to December 2024 indicate a new period of turbulence. These peaks may be related to the escalation of hybrid warfare, in particular the presidential elections in Moldova (autumn 2024), which are traditionally accompanied by an increase in disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, and information pressure. Users may have resorted to VPNs to access independent sources of information or to protect themselves from online threats during a politically tense period.

Thus, the dynamics of VPN queries in Moldova serves as an accurate barometer of socio-political tension. Sharp surges in interest are not related to technological trends but are a direct reaction of the population to threats to information security and freedom of speech that arise during periods of regional destabilization.

5.2.3. Cases of persecution for using VPN

The provided materials contain no information about cases of direct persecution of citizens or organizations in Moldova solely for using VPN services during the period 2019–2025. As noted earlier, the use of VPN for privacy protection or bypassing geo-blocks is not illegal in Moldova.¹⁹³

Persecution may occur if a VPN is used to commit illegal acts, such as cybercrimes, distribution of prohibited content (e.g., child pornography, hate-inciting materials) or participation in activities threatening national security. In such cases, liability arises not for the use of VPN as such, but for the illegal acts committed with its help.

There is also no information about the persecution of organizations providing VPN services on the territory of Moldova. Many popular VPN services are international companies, and their activities are regulated by the legislation of their countries of registration.

5.2.4. Monitoring of blockings

Monitoring of internet resource blockings in Moldova is carried out both by official structures and by civil society organizations and international initiatives.

Official monitoring:

- **ANRCETI (National Agency for Regulation of Electronic Communications and Information Technology):** Within its powers, ANRCETI supervises the electronic communications market. Although the agency does not directly publish a constantly updated register of blocked sites, it informs providers of the need to block resources on the basis of SIS orders and monitors the execution of these orders.¹³⁹ ANRCETI also publishes statistical reports on market development that may indirectly reflect the impact of blockings on traffic or service availability.¹⁸
- **SIS (Information and Security Service):** SIS is the main body initiating site blockings for national security reasons or to combat disinformation, especially during states of emergency. SIS periodically publishes orders with lists of blocked resources on its official website.⁵⁴

Monitoring by civil society and international organizations:

- **OONI (Open Observatory of Network Interference):** OONI is a global project that collects and analyzes data on internet censorship, site and application blockings, and network

performance. OONI Probe users in Moldova collect measurements that are then published on the OONI Explorer platform.¹⁶¹ Although at the time of the last review specific consolidated reports on Moldova may have been absent, the platform itself provides tools for data analysis on blockings.

- **Freedom House:** In its Freedom on the Net reports and other publications, Freedom House analyzes the situation with blockings and censorship in Moldova, often referring to the actions of authorities during emergency situations.¹⁸
- **Local NGOs (Promo-LEX, CJI, WatchDog.MD):** These organizations also monitor cases of restriction of access to information, site blockings, and pressure on media, publishing statements, reports, and analytical materials.¹⁷⁹ For example, Stopfals.md (a project related to media NGOs) analyzed the effectiveness of blockings.¹⁴⁵

Digest of blocking reports over the last 5 years (2019–2024):

- **2020:** SIS ordered the blocking of 54 sites for spreading fake news about COVID-19.¹⁴⁵ Some of these sites remained accessible due to the ineffectiveness of DNS blocking and the possibility of bypassing it.
- **2022–2023:** In connection with the war in Ukraine and the state of emergency, SIS repeatedly blocked dozens of sites, mainly Russian and some Moldovan, accusing them of disinformation and threat to national security. The largest blocking occurred in October 2023 (31 sites).⁵⁴
- **2024–2025 (beginning):** SIS continued the practice of requesting the blocking of sites spreading disinformation, including anti-EU content.⁵⁴ The government began developing instructions for implementing the Cybersecurity Law that specify the procedure for blocking sites by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and SIS for content related to criminal activity.¹⁴³

Overall, monitoring of blockings in Moldova is carried out by various actors, but there is no single official and constantly updated public resource, which makes comprehensive assessment of the situation difficult.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the state of digital rights and the internet in the Republic of Moldova for the period 2019–2025 reveals a complex and multifaceted picture. On the one hand, the country demonstrates progress in the development of internet infrastructure, especially in the transition to fiber-optic technologies and the expansion of 4G mobile internet coverage, as well as the

beginning of 5G implementation. The level of internet penetration is quite high, although there are discrepancies in data from different sources and a digital divide between urban and rural areas remains. The ICT sector shows dynamic growth and is becoming an increasingly important part of the national economy. Legislation in the field of electronic communications is actively being harmonized with European Union norms, which is part of the country's overall course towards European integration.

On the other hand, certain challenges and alarming trends are observed in the field of digital rights and freedoms. During periods of political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic, and especially after the start of the war in Ukraine, Moldovan authorities resorted to blocking internet resources, mainly under the pretext of combating disinformation and protecting national security. These actions, although possibly dictated by objective threats, raise concerns among human rights organizations and the media community regarding compliance with freedom of speech, access to information, and the risk of selective application of restrictive measures. Legislative initiatives aimed at combating “fake news” and disinformation also contain wording that can be interpreted too broadly and lead to unjustified restrictions.

Cases of direct criminal prosecution for online statements are not widespread, but pressure on media and NGOs through blockings, smear campaigns, and non-transparent decision-making procedures creates an unfavorable environment for their free activities in the online space. Civil society plays an important role in monitoring the situation and protecting digital rights, but its capabilities are limited.

Forecast of developments:

- **Neutral scenario:** The situation with digital rights in Moldova will remain ambiguous. Slow improvement of internet infrastructure and harmonization of legislation with EU norms will continue. However, periodic blocking of resources and restrictive legislative initiatives in the information sphere will persist, especially in response to internal or external crises. Authorities will try to balance between obligations under European integration and national security considerations, which will lead to contradictory practice. The level of self-censorship among users and media may remain elevated.
- **Positive scenario (relaxation of regulation, liberalization):** Under the influence of the European integration process and pressure from civil society and international partners, Moldova will be able to strengthen guarantees of freedom of speech and access to information on the internet. Legislation on combating disinformation will be refined to minimize risks to freedom of expression, and procedures for blocking internet resources will

become more transparent and will provide reliable legal guarantees and the possibility of effective appeal. Dialogue between authorities, technology companies, and civil society on internet governance issues will be strengthened. The digital divide will decrease, and more citizens will gain access to high-quality internet.

- **Negative scenario (strengthening of censorship):** In the event of an escalation of the geopolitical situation, intensification of internal political contradictions, or under the pretext of combating hybrid threats, Moldovan authorities may take the path of further tightening control over the information space. This may manifest itself in the expansion of grounds for blocking sites, the introduction of stricter penalties for disseminating “undesirable” information.

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