



SARA Law Research Center

International Journal of Legal and Social Order, <https://www.ccdsara.ro/ijlso>

ISSN 2821 – 4161 (Online), ISSN 2810-4188 (Print), ISSN-L 2810-4188

Nº. 1 (2025), pp. 154-180

GOOD GOVERNANCE THROUGH OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE: ROMANIA'S LEGAL INSTRUMENTS FOR INSTITUTIONAL CONSOLIDATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Received 27.11.2025; accepted 16.12.2025

First online publication: 16.12.2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55516/ijlso.v5i1.281>

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Abstract

The article analyzes the ways in which Romania contributes to strengthening institutional resilience and promoting good governance in the Republic of Moldova through Official Development Assistance (ODA). Based on the legal framework provided by Law no. 213/2016 and key bilateral agreements, the study examines Romania's role as both donor and strategic partner in supporting democratic reform, legislative harmonization, and administrative capacity building. The analysis draws on RoAid's Annual Plans and Activity Reports from 2023 and 2024 to identify funding directions, thematic areas, implementation methods, and achieved results.

The methodology combines documentary analysis with case study research, focusing on projects aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 16, particularly those targeting the justice system, anti-corruption efforts, and institutional modernization. Romania supports these processes by deploying legal experts, providing technical assistance, and implementing training programs for local public administration, thereby reinforcing the rule of law and judicial independence.

Findings reveal a coherent approach grounded in soft power diplomacy and development policy coherence. The Republic of Moldova has received more than half of Romania's bilateral ODA in recent years, confirming Romania's role not only as a donor, but also as a model and facilitator of institutional reform. In

this context, Romanian ODA emerges as a strategic and normative tool, supporting Moldova's European integration and contributing to Romania's commitments under the 2030 Agenda and its OECD accession process.

Key words: *Official development assistance; good governance; sustainable development goals; institutional resilience; bilateral cooperation.*

INTRODUCTION

In the first part of this article, I will present Romania's legal instruments aimed at supporting institutional resilience in the Republic of Moldova, specifically through Official Development Assistance (ODA).

ODA is a publicly funded action by developed countries and is allocated to underdeveloped or developing states, with the central objective of promoting economic development and the welfare of developing countries, having a concessional character (RoAid, 2018). Funds are allocated through two types of implementation: direct and indirect. Direct implementation is carried out through: public procurement of goods, services, or works necessary to achieve the objectives of development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, in accordance with public procurement legislation; through donations; through the transfer of expertise to beneficiaries; and through the granting of scholarships for study and research. Indirect implementation is achieved through voluntary contributions provided to beneficiaries based on a financing agreement or a Ministerial Order issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; through grants; or through budget support (Articles 4 and 5 of Government Decision no. 690/2017).

Official Development Assistance (ODA) includes both bilateral support, offered directly to developing countries, and multilateral contributions directed to international organizations. Within bilateral assistance, two main forms are distinguished: grants and loans, including government-to-government lending. Grants involve the transfer of non-reimbursable funds or technical cooperation support, leveraging Romanian experience, technology, and knowledge to help develop human capital in partner countries. They may also include financial contributions for specific projects implemented via international organizations. Bilateral loans, such as those granted by governments, offer financial resources to recipient states under favorable conditions, such as reduced interest rates or extended repayment terms, and may support both economic development programs and private sector investment.

Multilateral assistance refers to voluntary contributions made by donor states to international institutions, such as United Nations agencies. The primary criterion that qualifies an action as part of ODA is its developmental intent: it must aim primarily to promote economic development and improve living conditions in beneficiary countries.

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In the second part of this article, we analyze the case of the Republic of Moldova—both as a strategic partner of Romania and as an EU candidate country—which has benefited from substantial Romanian support through ODA instruments aimed at strengthening state institutions and advancing the implementation of SDG 16 of the UN 2030 Agenda (peaceful societies, effective justice, and strong institutions). Moldova remains the top bilateral recipient of Romanian ODA. Through various programs and projects, RoAid (*the Romanian Agency for International Development Cooperation*) actively supports the objectives of SDG 16 in the Republic of Moldova.

The analysis of multi-annual programs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports, and RoAid annual plans highlights several concrete interventions: the strengthening of public administration, modernization of the emergency service 112, professional training, and improvements in judicial procedures, all aligned with SDG 16. Romania's contribution to ODA reached 0.16% of GDP in 2024, still below the EU's target of 0.33% by 2030.

We also examine how the method of implementing Romanian ODA (independent variable: direct vs. indirect implementation) influences the degree of institutional consolidation in the Republic of Moldova (dependent variable: expressed through the presence of reforms, institutional partnerships, and local response). Based on this relationship, we propose the following hypothesis: ODA projects implemented directly by Romania, through expert transfer and professional training, contribute more visibly to institutional consolidation in the Republic of Moldova than those implemented indirectly, through grants or donations. The research question posed is: *How does the type of ODA intervention applied by Romania influence the institutional effectiveness of its partners in the Republic of Moldova?*

I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to institutionalist theory, institutions consist of specific sets of norms and rules that regulate and structure human interaction in order to reduce certain uncertainties. (North, 1990) It defines institutions as “humanly devised constraints... designed to structure interaction” and highlights that the evolution of institutions essentially explains differences in economic performance, some institutions foster economic growth and social cohesion, while others lead to stagnation (North, 1990). Another perspective is outlined by (Van Nederveen Meerkerk, 2013) which shows that inclusive political institutions are those that protect the interests of the entire society and generate inclusive economic institutions, ultimately leading to the society's sustainable prosperity. In contrast, (North, 1990) presents extractive institutions (i.e., those oriented toward enriching elites) as responsible for development blockages and political conflict. All of this suggests that good governance—understood as a societal institution that respects

human rights and the rule of law—is a sine qua non condition for development interventions to be effective. In the specialized literature, institutionalism emphasizes the role of historical relative advantages, particularly the influence of the pre-existing institutional context and critical junctures that can shape the direction of state evolution (path dependency theory and institutional change) (*North*, 1990). Consequently, the analysis of ODA must take into account that the success of external support is directly proportional to its adaptation to the mentalities, legal customs, and administrative capacity of the beneficiaries or partner institutions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

ODA is generally defined as aid intended to promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries. (*Aid Activities*, f.a.). It represents the OECD DAC Committee's standard measure for evaluating donor efforts. In the view of (*Arndt & Tarp*, 2017) its definition remains a subject of debate. Optimistic perspectives on ODA, according to (*Brautigam*, 1992) donors contribute to the development of good governance only if they create conditions for accountability and transparency, which are essential factors for sustainable development. These measures are particularly relevant when civil society and the media are supported, along with the strengthening of the rule of law. In the same spirit, a recent study (*Olaoye & Akinyele*, 2025) highlights that foreign aid improves institutional quality when it is aligned with governance reforms and accountability mechanisms, as external funding can support administrative reforms and investments in institutional capacity. Moreover, economist (*Sachs*, 2005) argues that ODA represents a major stimulus and could lead to the eradication of global poverty (*Burnside & Dollar*, 2000) take an even more nuanced position, demonstrating that aid can stimulate economic growth in countries with sound fiscal policies and good governance, essentially highlighting that aid is effective primarily in states with a certain level of stability. In their study, which analyzed aid flows from 1970 to 1993, they found that assistance had a positive impact on growth in countries with good governance and prudent policies, whereas in countries with weak policies, aid appeared to be ineffective. (*Aid Activities*, f.a.). From these findings, they highlight that only in suitable political environments does aid have a positive impact, and that donors can maximize its effectiveness by directing it toward nations with a certain level of stability.

On the other hand, there are also criticisms regarding the provision of ODA, which draw attention to its potential negative effects, such as (*Knack*, 2001) which, based on comparative data, show that high levels of ODA can erode the quality of governance—for example, as measured by the ICRG indicators on bureaucracy, corruption, and the rule of law. The same study also highlights that when governments rely heavily on external aid, political pressure for reforms weakens, and elites may capture aid funds for their own interests. Moreover, in countries receiving high shares of ODA, governance scores tend to deteriorate. The economic

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literature refers to this phenomenon as the “boon” of external resources (analogous to the “Dutch disease”), as the influx of aid may create budgetary complacency but can also fuel corruption in the absence of clear institutional conditionality (*Knack, 2001*).

Likewise, critics such as (*Bauer, 2006*) argue that if a country has the right conditions for growth—such as sound policies and strong institutions—capital will be generated domestically or attracted through markets, which in turn means that aid becomes unnecessary or inefficient. Furthermore, in the view of (*Easterly, 2001*) and (*Whiteside, 2010*) they argue that ODA often does more harm than good, as it discourages the resolution of local problems and undermines the strength of domestic institutions by fostering dependency—ultimately reinforcing corruption and inertia in recipient countries.

Moreover, Romania supports the political and economic importance of stabilizing and developing the Republic of Moldova, and the budgetary-fiscal policy measures recently proposed by researchers are intended to reduce income inequalities in Moldova (*Balan, 2023*). These emphasize the need to adopt fiscal policies that support the efficient redistribution of resources—an objective that Romania has actively supported through various bilateral actions and collaborative initiatives. Especially in the context of European integration, close cooperation between Romania and the Republic of Moldova in promoting good governance is absolutely essential. According to an analysis of governance dynamics in post-Soviet regions, the European Union plays a significant role in stabilizing democracy and promoting democratic norms in neighboring countries (*Dipama, 2024*). In this way, the Official Development Assistance provided by Romania to the Republic of Moldova is not merely bilateral, but part of a broader network of international support aimed at strengthening Moldova's governance structures. Along the same lines, promoting a cooperation framework that includes both the evaluation and reform of existing laws is essential. Therefore, it is suggested that increased attention must be given to the implementation framework of legislative reforms targeting institutional strengthening (*Mendelski, 2016*). In this regard, such actions can lead to significant progress in strengthening the rule of law and improving essential public services.

This article highlights Romania's advantages as a donor in its relationship with the Republic of Moldova by showing that, unlike major donor powers, Romania benefits from cultural, linguistic, and historical proximity. This relationship is not merely symbolic—the history of Romania–Moldova relations is marked by a deep cultural bond that transcends current political-administrative borders. The two states share a common historical heritage. In this context, bilateral cooperation through ODA is not the expression of a classic donor–beneficiary relationship, but rather a historical and moral commitment to mutual support—

creating a dimension of historical continuity as part of an effort toward institutional, legislative reconnection and support for Moldova's European path.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a mixed qualitative approach, combining documentary analysis with case study methodology, in order to examine how Romania, through its Official Development Assistance (ODA), contributes to institutional strengthening in the Republic of Moldova, particularly in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) (*OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Romania 2023*). The documentary analysis component involved the collection, review, and critical interpretation of official, strategic, and academic sources. The study examined all Annual Cooperation Plans issued by RoAid for the period 2022–2025, alongside the corresponding RoAid Annual Activity Reports, to identify funding directions, legal instruments applied, intervention types (grants, expertise, donations, mobility), and measurable results. Additionally, policy documents published by Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and government institutions were reviewed, as well as international sources such as the OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Romania 2023, which provided validated insight into Romania's performance as an emerging donor, along with aggregated statistical data on allocations and thematic priorities. (*OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Romania 2023*).

The case study method was used to investigate three representative ODA projects implemented in the Republic of Moldova between 2022 and 2025, particularly in the fields of justice and governance. The cases were selected based on their relevance to SDG 16, their public visibility, the level of detail available in official documents, and the impact noted in both reports and media coverage. Each case was analyzed in terms of objectives, implementation methods, institutional partners involved, and official reactions from Moldovan authorities.

To ensure consistency between planning and execution, source triangulation was applied, correlating data from planning documents (RoAid annual plans), implementation evaluations (activity reports), and official press releases and news coverage from both Romanian and Moldovan outlets. This process enhanced the validity of findings and allowed for a broader understanding of the public perception surrounding the selected ODA interventions.

This qualitative methodology enabled not only the identification and description of Romania's legal and institutional tools as a bilateral donor, but also a contextual interpretation of the effectiveness and relevance of its ODA interventions in relation to the institutional resilience of the Republic of Moldova.

IV. THE LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF ODA IN ROMANIA

I will begin by outlining the fundamental milestones (the most important documents) of the bilateral relationship between Romania and the Republic of

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Moldova, which were established through Romania's recognition of Moldova immediately after its declaration of independence, on August 27, 1991. Diplomatic relations were officially established on the same date, August 27, 1991. Subsequently, the Agreement on Cooperation in the Fields of Science, Education, and Culture between the Government of Romania and the Government of the Republic of Moldova was signed in Chişinău on May 19, 1992, and entered into force on December 27, 1993. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Subsequently, the Treaty between Romania and the Republic of Moldova on Legal Assistance in Civil and Criminal Matters was adopted on July 6, 1996. (*The Treaty between Romania and the Republic of Moldova on Legal Assistance in Civil and Criminal Matters, July 6, 1996, n.d.*)

Note: The remaining documents that establish the legal framework between Romania and the Republic of Moldova can be consulted by accessing the link provided in the footnote..¹

Next, an important step was taken through the adoption of the Declaration on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between Romania and the Republic of Moldova for the European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, signed in Bucharest on April 27, 2010. This declaration prioritizes the interests of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova and the continuation of key reforms necessary for the country's democratic development and advancement along its European path.

The legal cornerstone of ODA in Romania is represented by the promulgation of Law no. 213/2016 on International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance. According to Articles 1, 2, and 3 of this law, the aim is "to provide long-term support for sustainable development" and "to promote and support peace, security, democratic development, and civil society, including the development of the rule of law and the principles of good governance." (*Law no. 213/2016 on International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance, 2016*) The law thus transposes Romania's obligation to align with other European states following its accession to the European Union in 2007, specifically through the establishment of a distinct entity responsible for implementing ODA programs and projects.

In doing so, Romania also aligns itself with relevant international organizations and legal instruments, such as the 2005 Paris Declaration. (OECD, 2005); the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action (OECD, 2008) şi and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (*Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-Operation, 2011*).

Romania, as an EU Member State, committed to gradually increase its ODA volume to reach 0.33% of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2030. This target requires additional institutional and budgetary efforts to strengthen Romania's

¹ <https://www.mae.ro/node/55111>

capacity for planning, managing, and coordinating development cooperation projects.

At the same time, Romania—although recognized as a donor state—still lacks a fully efficient legal and institutional framework to fulfill its obligations as a contributor to the EU’s development cooperation budget. Moreover, the Romanian Court of Accounts has repeatedly recommended enhancing the MFA’s capacity to monitor funded projects—something that can only be addressed through coherent legislation and a unified monitoring mechanism for the implementation of development assistance policy.

In this context, ensuring an adequate institutional system, financing framework, and national implementation capacity is essential. Increasing the efficiency of managing development cooperation funds and externally promoting Romania’s activity in this field is equally important.

Following the above legislative steps, Government Decision no. 690/2017 was adopted to approve the Methodological Norms for implementing the provisions of Law no. 213/2016. These norms serve as the law’s formal implementation rules.

Finally, the Strategic Multiannual Program for International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance for the period 2020–2023 constitutes the main strategic guidance document. It defines and plans Romania’s general and specific objectives in the field of international development and humanitarian assistance in the short and medium term. (*Romania’s Strategic Multiannual Program for International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance 2020–2023, n.d.*); (*Romania’s Multiannual Strategic International Cooperation Program for Development and Humanitarian Assistance 2024-2027, f.a.*)

Moreover, each calendar year, an Annual ODA Plan is adopted, which sets Romania’s specific objectives in the field of international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance for the respective year, as well as the concrete means of implementation.

This document is drafted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs following consultations with the Consultative Committee and is submitted to the Government for approval via an information note.

To complement the institutional framework, Government Decision no. 678/2017 regulates the establishment of the Consultative Committee on International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance, a body that supports the design and implementation of national policies in this area. The Committee operates under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and brings together representatives of public authorities, academia, and civil society, ensuring a platform for dialogue and coordination among relevant actors.

In support of the legislative framework, Order no. 2364/2025, amending Annexes 1 and 2 of the Minister of Foreign Affairs’ Order no. 1371/2023, establishes eligibility criteria for beneficiaries of public funds allocated for achieving international development and humanitarian assistance objectives. The act

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introduces requirements related to integrity, transparency, non-discrimination, and the adoption of internal ethics and abuse prevention policies.

Another key moment in bilateral relations is the Joint Declaration of the President of Romania, Mr. Klaus Werner Iohannis, and the President of the Republic of Moldova, Ms. Maia Sandu, regarding bilateral cooperation for strengthening the resilience of the Republic of Moldova. (*Press statement by President Maia Sandu after the meeting with President Klaus Iohannis*, 2022) which highlight the objectives set forth in the Bilateral Strategic Partnership for the European Integration of the Republic of Moldova (*Bucharest, April 27, 2010*) and the Joint Declaration of the Presidents of Romania and the Republic of Moldova (*Chişinău, December 29, 2020*). The Republic of Moldova aims to join the European Union by 2030, with Romania's support through political and technical cooperation and the transfer of expertise. The two countries will strengthen their partnership in the fields of defense, security, combating disinformation, and cyber protection. They will also collaborate on border management, crime prevention, and the development of energy interconnections, with the goal of integrating the Republic of Moldova.

4.1. Theoretical and empirical synthesis: ODA as a vector of good governance

Development cooperation between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, materialized through official development assistance (ODA) mechanisms, functions as a multiple vector of "good governance," transcending the simple transfer of financial resources to configure a complex institutional ecosystem of democratic transformation and consolidation of the rule of law. The existing legal framework, structured around Law 213/2016, strategic bilateral agreements, and sectoral protocols, represents a solid legal edifice, inspired by OECD-DAC practices and the principles of efficiency, effectiveness, and predictability of contemporary ODA.

A comparative analysis of the 2019-2024 period reveals a significant qualitative evolution of legal implementation instruments: public procurement, earmarked grants, competitive grants, and voluntary contributions to international organizations allow for differentiated and adaptive implementation of institutional strengthening projects, responding to specific needs identified through direct consultation with beneficiaries. Romania has strategically positioned the Republic of Moldova as its priority bilateral beneficiary, planning significant annual resources for strengthening the public sector and Moldovan community resilience in the context of increasing geopolitical pressures.

The projects implemented range from supporting the Single Emergency Service 112 (cumulative investment >245,000 lei, 2020-2024) and training magistrates at the National Institute of Justice (>219,000 lei, 2023-2024) to grants for civil society organizations dedicated to combating domestic violence (396,378 lei, 2024) – are strategically aligned with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and contribute directly to strengthening the stability, transparency and

efficiency of Moldovan institutions in the process of preparing for negotiations on accession to the European Union.

4.2. The capacity paradox: operational excellence versus limited resources

However, the study identifies a fundamental paradox of Romanian ODA: despite its proven operational excellence (budget execution rate of 99.8% in 2024, beneficiary satisfaction of 4/4, project sustainability of 10-30 years), the aggregate volume of Romanian ODA remains relatively modest in relation to the country's economic potential and international commitments.

In 2024, Romania reached only 0.16% of GNI in ODA, significantly below the European target of 0.33% by 2030 and considerably below the UN target of 0.7% of GNI. For the Republic of Moldova, this limitation translates into budgetary constraints that prevent the scaling up of successful pilot projects (e.g., SMURD – only 4 certified trainers instead of national coverage; kindergartens – 1,300 renovated out of a total requirement of >2,000) and a reduction in the capacity to respond to beneficiaries' requests for cooperation in emerging areas (energy, transport, sustainable agriculture).

Increasing the ODA/GNI ratio is therefore essential not only for fulfilling Romania's formal commitments to the 2030 Agenda and OECD-DAC standards, but also for strengthening its strategic role as a reliable partner and regional influence in the development of Eastern Europe. Comparative analyses show that Romania has significantly surpassed Germany (€25.35 million vs. €70.57 million for Moldova in 2024), but this performance reflects Moldova's strategic prioritization rather than a generous total volume of ODA.

4.3. Effectiveness of legal instruments: from legal formalism to social impact

Current administrative and political efforts, bringing together intensified inter-institutional collaboration (57 experts from 10+ Romanian public institutions mobilized in 2023-2024), predictable resource allocation (Justice Action Plan 2025-2027) and monitoring mechanisms based on performance indicators – can ensure that Romanian ODA has a sustainable, measurable, and scalable impact in the Republic of Moldova, contributing to its transformation into a regional model of successful democratic transition and accelerated European integration.

Combining the Romanian legislative strategy (*Law 213/2016, Government Decision 690/2017*) with international institutional standards (OECD-DAC, European Consensus on Development, Paris Declaration), this ODA mechanism aims not only to reduce poverty or provide emergency humanitarian support, but more profoundly to cultivate democratic, transparent, and efficient institutions, which are indispensable for the long-term stability, social cohesion, and sustainable economic prosperity of the Republic of Moldova as a future member state of the European Union.

4.4. Academic contribution – legal-empirical synthesis of good governance through ODA

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This study demonstrates, through comprehensive empirical analysis, that Romania uses a complex and sophisticated legal and institutional framework to provide ODA in support of good governance, directly contributing to strengthening the resilience and institutional capacity of the Republic of Moldova. Through Law 213/2016, strategic bilateral agreements (*the 2010 Strategic Partnership Declaration, the 2025-2027 Justice Action Plan*) and sectoral cooperation protocols, a robust legal foundation has been created for predictable, adaptable, and results-oriented cooperation.

Through specific programs and projects implemented by RoAid, financial resources have been strategically directed towards priority objectives of democratic governance, European integration, and strengthening the rule of law, areas in which Romania's recent experience (EU accession in 2007, post-CVM judicial reforms) offers unique and immediately transferable added value.

The original academic contribution of this study consists of the methodological synthesis of formal legal elements (legislation, treaties, protocols) with quantitative empirical results (budget statistics, performance indicators, execution rates) and qualitative results (beneficiary assessments, official statements, impact analyses), highlighting that Romania's interventions actively and systematically aim to put into practice the principles of good governance—transparency, accountability, participation, effectiveness, and inclusiveness—in the specific context of the Republic of Moldova.

This integrative approach goes beyond previous studies that have dealt separately with either the legal dimension (analysis of ODA legislation) or the empirical dimension (technical implementation reports), offering a holistic perspective on how legal instruments translate into real social impact and measurable institutional transformation.

4.5. Research limitations and future research agenda

However, the study also acknowledges certain methodological limitations that open up new research opportunities:

- a) Data availability: some of the statistics used are preliminary or not fully published (e.g., the OECD reports for 2024 are based on provisional data), which calls for caution in making generalizations and requires further validation with final consolidated data.
- b) Impact monitoring: although projects are systematically evaluated by beneficiaries according to OECD-DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability), there is still no unified system for monitoring the aggregate impact of Romanian ODA on good governance indicators in the Republic of Moldova (e.g., evolution of the Corruption Perceptions Index, Worldwide Governance Indicators scores, progress in fulfilling the *acquis*). This methodological gap limits the ability to establish direct causal links between specific interventions and observed institutional transformations.

c) Beneficiaries' perspective: the predominantly documentary and institutional approach does not sufficiently highlight the perceptions of local actors, Moldovan citizens, beneficiary civil servants, and civil society representatives on the actual effectiveness and perceived relevance of Romanian ODA in their daily lives. Future research based on surveys, in-depth interviews, and focus groups could complement the analysis with the experiential dimension of good governance induced by ODA.

d) Limited comparative analysis: the study focuses on the bilateral relationship between Romania and Moldova, without sufficiently exploring systematic comparisons with other bilateral partnerships of Moldova (Germany, Poland, the Baltic states) or with alternative models for promoting good governance through ODA (e.g., the Scandinavian approach based on sectoral budget support vs. the Romanian approach based on expertise transfer and projects).

4.6. Public policy recommendations: from analysis to action

Based on this comprehensive analysis, concrete public policy recommendations can be formulated, structured on three levels of intervention:

Level I: strengthening the strategic and legislative framework

1. Accelerated legislative harmonization

Systematically continue to harmonize the Moldovan legislative framework with the European *acquis*, taking advantage of intensified Romanian legal assistance for priority institutional reforms (justice, anti-corruption, public procurement, data protection, business environment).

This can be achieved through concrete actions, namely by extending the Justice Action Plan 2025-2027 to other critical areas (public administration, cybersecurity, EU fund management), with a dedicated budget of at least 500,000 lei/year for each area.

2. Increased budget predictability

Adopting a multi-year funding framework (3-5 years) instead of the current annual planning, allowing Moldovan beneficiaries to plan strategically and ensure the sustainability of investments.

Concrete action: Romania's commitment to a minimum guaranteed budget of 2.5-3 million lei/year for the period 2025-2027, regardless of internal budget fluctuations, thus protecting the continuity of strategic projects.

Level II: Strengthening institutional implementation capacity

3. Strengthening RoAid

Increasing the administrative capacity of the Agency for International Development Cooperation (RoAid) by: (a) expanding specialized staff (project evaluation experts, impact monitoring specialists, communication officers) and, implicitly, the financial resources allocated for human resources, (b) investments in IT systems (integrated project management platform, beneficiary databases, automatic reporting tools), (c) continuous training of staff in international methodologies (PCM, Theory of Change, impact assessment); d) obtaining Pillar Assessment accreditation; e) expanding the financial resources allocated to ODA by

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increasing the budget allocations by the Romanian Government for ODA projects implemented by RoAid in the coming years;

4. Improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

Development of a unified impact monitoring system (SIM-AOD) that integrates: (a) quantitative output indicators (number of beneficiaries, equipment delivered, courses organized), (b) qualitative outcome indicators (perceived improvement in institutional capacity, legislative changes induced), (c) long-term impact indicators (evolution of good governance indicators, progress in European integration).

This can be achieved by establishing partnerships with Romanian and Moldovan academic institutions (SNSPA, Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Moldova State University) for independent external evaluations of major projects, with a budget of 50,000 lei/evaluation.

Level III: Optimisation of the project portfolio

5. Maintaining direct funding for local projects

Continuing and expanding direct funding for local projects with visible and immediate impact (kindergarten renovations, equipment for local hospitals, emergency services equipment) as a complementary component of major institutional reform programs. This dual-track approach ensures both profound structural transformations and tangible results that strengthen the legitimacy of ODA in the public perception.

This can be achieved by allocating a "Local Community Fund" of 500,000 lei/year, dedicated to small and medium-sized projects (10,000-50,000 lei/project), managed through a simplified procedure and rapid implementation (maximum 6 months).

6. Strategic scaling of successful pilot projects

Systematic identification and scaling of pilot projects with exceptional results: (a) SMURD: expansion from 4 to 20 certified trainers, with a target of national coverage in 10 years, (b) Anti-corruption: expansion of equipment from the Prosecutor's Office to all relevant institutions (Moldovan equivalent of ANI, Court of Auditors), (c) Gender equality: expansion from 3 to 10 assistance centers in priority districts.

These actions can be achieved by dedicating a minimum of 30% of the annual budget (\approx 800,000 lei) to scaling up projects that have been empirically validated as having high impact and long-term sustainability.

7. Strengthening trilateral partnerships and co-financing

Developing a trilateral partnership model Romania (expertise + equipment) + EU/Germany/USAID (major funding + standards) + Republic of Moldova (implementation + minimum co-financing of 10%), allowing for increased impact without a proportional increase in the Romanian budget.

These actions can be achieved by identifying and initiating a minimum of two trilateral projects per year in the fields of energy, transport, or the environment, with a total budget of >€1 million, of which Romania's contribution represents 20-25% (€200,000-250,000).

Romania and the Republic of Moldova will further cooperate on attracting European funds, supporting Ukraine's reconstruction, and developing connections between institutions, civil society, academia, and the cultural sector.

V. INSTRUMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTING ODA IN ROMANIA

The national regulatory framework outlines two modalities for implementing ODA projects, namely:

- Direct implementation (Art. 12 of Law no. 213/2016) – this is carried out through:
 - ✓ Public procurement – of goods, services, or works necessary for project implementation, such as the purchase of technological equipment or the construction of infrastructure within partner institutions.
 - ✓ Donations (Art. 12, para. (2) letter b)) – involving the transfer of funds to the partner institution's account, enabling them to purchase needed goods directly.
 - ✓ Transfer of expertise (Art. 12, para. (2) letter c)) – includes consultancy, training, and mentoring missions. For example, Romanian experts may assist partner institutions in drafting institutional strategies in the public administration sector.
 - ✓ Scholarships for study and research (Art. 12, para. (2) letter d)) – financing education and participation in specialized training programs. Through such projects, Romania invests in human capital development in partner states, including in administrative or legal fields.
- Indirect implementation – is carried out through collaboration with external beneficiaries on the basis of funding agreements (via grants or credits) or by ministerial orders. The funding forms include:
 - ✓ Grants (Art. 16 of Law no. 213/2016) – non-reimbursable financial support for projects, programs, or contributions to the budgets of local or regional organizations pursuing common objectives. These are typically awarded to NGOs, public institutions, or international organizations operating in Moldova. Under current legislation, grants may fund bilateral projects (e.g., school-to-school cooperation) or institutional budget contributions (e.g., co-financing of government initiatives), and are provided through competitive procedures or directly allocated with justification.
 - ✓ Direct budget support (Art. 17) – refers to subsidizing the budgets of public institutions in the partner country. While less frequently used in

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Romania, this form entails direct government-to-government transfers to support administrative reforms or public project implementation.

- ✓ Voluntary contributions (Art. 18) – Romania's allocations to multilateral institutions or global financing pools (e.g., contributions to the UN, UNICEF, the EU, or regional partnerships). Through these, Romania supports initiatives that benefit partner countries—such as regional good governance programs—even if the funds are managed by other actors.

Within these projects, in accordance with the provisions of Art. 52, para. (8) of Law no. 500/2002 on Public Finances, as amended and supplemented, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may make advance payments from public funds to beneficiaries of up to 100% of the funding amount for the financing of activities specific to international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. The amounts representing advance payments made by the MFA for development cooperation activities must be justified in accordance with the provisions of the funding agreements or, as the case may be, by ministerial order (Law no. 500/2002 on Public Finances, as amended).

Thus, cooperation sectors from local governance and justice to education and healthcare can be funded through grants aligned with the priorities set in Romania's international development program.

VI. VOLUME OF ODA PROVIDED THROUGH PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS GRANTED BY ROMANIA IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Between 2015 and 2019, Romania allocated approximately €130 million in ODA to the Republic of Moldova, with the largest share directed toward the field of education—primarily through scholarships for young people and bilateral projects. These efforts focused in particular on good governance, anti-corruption measures, and the promotion of sustainability. (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). The €100 million Agreement (2010–2021) on technical and financial assistance, based on non-reimbursable financial support and signed on April 27, 2010, expired on March 28, 2021. For nearly a decade, this agreement allowed Romania to finance emblematic projects, such as the rehabilitation of over 1,000 kindergartens and public educational institutions across the Republic of Moldova. (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021), this agreement expired upon reaching its term in 2021.

In accordance with point 4.2 of Programul multianual strategic de cooperare internațională pentru dezvoltare și asistență umanitară 2020-2023 al României, f.a. (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020), the Republic of Moldova is designated as a priority country due to its geographical proximity and deep cultural and historical ties. The objectives will include—but are not limited to—modern governance, strengthening the rule of law with direct implications for integration into the European space, prison reform, and the prevention and combatting of corruption and organized crime.

Additionally, under point 4.4.2 of Romania's Multiannual Strategic International Cooperation Program for Development and Humanitarian Assistance 2024-2027, f.a. (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the Republic of Moldova is identified as a top-tier priority of Romania's foreign policy, with Romania supporting Moldova's European integration efforts and democratic reform agenda, based on the Strategic Partnership for the European Integration of the Republic of Moldova. This partnership is grounded in the two countries' shared language, history, and culture, as well as a common vision of a unified space from the perspective of European integration. As such, the Republic of Moldova is the primary beneficiary of Romania's international development cooperation policy. The strengthening of the Fund for Democratization and Sustainable Development for the Republic of Moldova, by increasing the funds allocated for international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance activities, constitutes a key priority for the Romanian Government. (*Romania's Multiannual Strategic International Cooperation Program for Development and Humanitarian Assistance 2024-2027, f.a.*)

Therefore, under the previous Multiannual Strategic Program (2020–2023), Romania provided support in accordance with (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020 f.a.) these primarily targeted: domestic refugee-related costs – 522.4 million lei; education and youth promotion – 330.2 million lei; humanitarian assistance – 46.1 million lei; sustainable economic development – 34.5 million lei; and governance and inclusive societies – 12.15 million lei.

Among the 50 public institutions that implemented, financed, and reported the provision of ODA, the main contributors were: the Ministry of Finance, which allocated 59.3% of total Official Development Assistance; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which allocated 21%; the Ministry of Education, which allocated 12.5%; and again the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a separate implementing capacity, which allocated 3.18% of total ODA.

The main ODA recipient countries in 2023 were: the Republic of Moldova – 285.38 million lei; Ukraine – 24.31 million lei; Republic of Turkey – 18.90 million lei; Republic of Armenia – 6.2 million lei; and Republic of Serbia – 9.5 million lei.

It is also important to note that the Romanian Agency for International Development Cooperation, a public institution under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, carried out the highest number of bilateral projects in developing countries under the aforementioned multiannual program. The agency extended ODA to 22 developing states.

FIGURE 1. Geolocation focalisation representation of AOD VNB

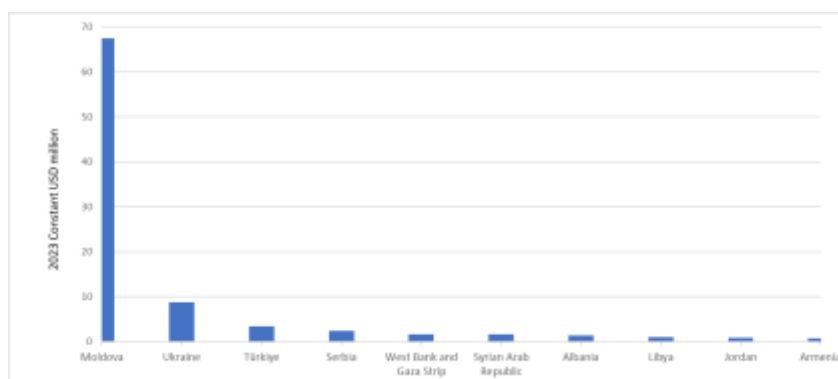
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Source: (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, f.a.)

Bilateral ODA allocations to Romania’s top 10 countries only partially reflects the focus on its priority countries and territories². On average in 2022-23, the allocation to Moldova constitutes 41% of bilateral ODA and the allocation to Ukraine amounted to 5.3%. On average in 2022-23, a total of USD 84 million (51% gross bilateral ODA) was provided to ODA-eligible countries in Europe. Approximately USD 5.1 million was allocated to the Middle East (3.1% of gross bilateral ODA). Only USD 3.2 million (2% of bilateral ODA) was allocated to countries in Africa and none of the four priority African countries appear in the top 10 (average 2022-23 – see Figure 3). Over the same period, 54.1% of gross bilateral ODA went to Romania’s top 10 recipients, which were primarily in Europe (e.g. Moldova, Ukraine and Serbia), as well as the Middle East (e.g. Türkiye, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Syrian Arab Republic and Libya).

FIGURE 2. ROMANIA’S TOP 10 BILATERAL RECIPIENTS, 2022-23 AVERAGE



Source: OECD (2024), OECD International Development Statistics (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/data-00061-en>.

² Albania, Ethiopia, Georgia, Mauritania, the Republic of Moldova, the Palestinian Authority, Senegal, Serbia, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Ukraine

For the year 2024, at the time of writing this article, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not published the report on Romania's activities within the framework of international cooperation policy for development and humanitarian assistance financed from public funds in 2024. so we will refer to the press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stating that the OECD informed the Romanian state on April 16, 2025 (*Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2025), about the 14% increase in the volume of ODA granted by Romania in 2024, compared to 2023. In this regard, data published by the OECD indicates that in 2024 Romania granted ODA totaling \$587 million, the highest level to date, continuing the upward trend of the last ten years. This announcement is relevant because it shows that even though our country is not a member of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), it supports the streamlining of international cooperation policy for development and humanitarian assistance, in the context of Romania's accession to the OECD and the DAC. (OECD, 2025). In this regard, the main beneficiary of ODA provided by Romania in 2024 was the Republic of Moldova, with over 50% of total bilateral ODA actions (worth \$76.6 million, up 19% from the previous year). The actions implemented contributed to strengthening the institutional capacity of the Republic of Moldova with a view to EU accession and to combating the effects of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine. (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025)

VII. CASE STUDY – EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES FROM PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED BY ROMANIA IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA THROUGH ODA AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Romania's support prioritises the interests of Moldovan citizens and the implementation of these strategic bilateral projects, which are closely linked to the continuation of reforms essential for Moldova's democratic development and progress on its European path (*Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2021) The results of the implementation of the Strategic Partnership over the last decade since its signing include: the entry into force of the Association Agreement with the European Union, visa liberalization, the modernization of institutions, and the professionalization of public administration in line with European standards. (*Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2021).

Below, we have selected three projects representative of good governance and institutions, carried out by Romania through bilateral cooperation in 2023–2024, as follows:

7.1. Professional training program in European affairs (September 2023).

Romanian Foreign Minister Luminița Odobescu launched this program in Chișinău, dedicated to senior Moldovan officials and diplomats. (*Realitatea MD*, 2023). The main objectives were to effectively prepare Moldova's decision-making elite for European integration – participants will learn about EU policies, EU funding, and key reforms (justice, finance, internal market). Romanian Diplomatic Institute, f.a.)

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The methods consisted of intensive courses and seminars (transfer of expertise), organized in modules by RoAid, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and IDR. (Realitatea MD, 2023). The project was initiated and supported by RoAid, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Institute for Development Relations in Romania, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova (the inaugural event at the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova featured a video message from L. Odobescu and was attended by Prime Minister Dorin Recean). Approximately 400 Moldovan officials (dignitaries, diplomats, and government officials) participated in this training program. The press and officials emphasized that the program gives Moldova access to the experience of Romanian negotiators in the accession process; Minister Odobescu highlighted the "historic" opportunity to accelerate reforms through this training. (Romanian Diplomatic Institute, press release, f.a.) (Realitatea MD, 2023)

7.2. Assistance in the field of justice and the rule of law

In October 2024, Romania and Moldova signed a new action plan on justice in Chișinău. (*Ministry of Justice from the Republic of Moldova, f.a., 2024*) Although this plan covers the period 2025–2027, it outlines specific projects that will begin in 2024. The main objectives are to support Moldovan judicial reform in line with the European acquis, harmonize legislation, increase the independence of the judiciary and the protection of human rights (including prison reform), etc. (Ministry of Justice from the Republic of Moldova, f.a., 2024.) *These objectives will be implemented through technical assistance and training, respectively through Romania's commitment to second experts to key institutions in Moldova (judges, prosecutors, prison officials) and to organize training programs (e.g., training for prison staff). Romania was represented at this meeting by the Romanian Ministry of Justice (Minister Alina Gorghiu) and her Moldovan counterpart (Veronica Mihailov-Moraru), with the support of institutions such as the National Institute of Magistracy of Romania and structures involved in legal cooperation. Following this meeting, the authorities in Chișinău acknowledge that Romania's experience in joining the EU offers "valuable support" (technical expertise and capacity building) for Moldova. The bilateral action plan already provides for professional training for working with prisoners and the exchange of experience in the recovery of criminal assets. The Romanian Minister of Justice announced the dispatch of experts to provide support in digitization, corruption prevention, and the development of anti-organized crime legislation. Through this project, Romania reaffirms its commitment to supporting the modernization of the Moldovan judicial system, a key element of SDG 16. (Ministry of Justice from the Republic of Moldova, press release, f.a.)*

The projects presented focused on training central institutions (the executive and diplomacy), strengthening local administration, and modernizing the justice system—areas that are essential for "peace, justice, and effective institutions" (SDG

16). Multiple sources (RoAid plans and communications from the MFA/Moldovan ministries) confirm that these projects have had a measurable impact on institutional capacity, fulfilling the agreed cooperation objectives.

3. Strengthening the justice system through expert missions

Starting in 2022, Romania, through RoAid, initiated a bilateral assistance program dedicated to strengthening the justice system in the Republic of Moldova. The key actors are INM (Romania), INJ (RM), RoAid, and MAE. The RoAid report highlights that this collaboration "involved trainers, judges, and prosecutors from the Republic of Moldova in professional development activities organized by the INM." (National Institute of Justice of Republic of Moldova, f.a.) The cooperation methodology consisted of three complementary areas, namely continuous professional training, involving judges, prosecutors, and trainers from the Republic of Moldova in professional training activities carried out by the INM in Romania; the exchange of institutional experience through the organization of study visits to judicial institutions (courts, prosecutor's offices, training institutions) for INJ delegations; and the transfer of expertise by sending Romanian experts, INM trainers, or practitioners with experience in the Republic of Moldova to support training courses for magistrates.

In 2022, the program began under the title "Assistance in the field of justice for the Republic of Moldova," focused on strengthening the justice system through the transfer of expertise. The calendar of bilateral activities included: a) The "Justice for Minors" summer school (June 27–July 1, 2022, Sinaia) b) Seminar "Ethics and Judgecraft – The Art of Being a Judge" (September 15–16, Bucharest); c) First working visit to Romania (September 27–29, 2022) d) Thematic seminars at the INM with participants from the Republic of Moldova (October 20–21, 2022, Bucharest); e) Second study visit to Romania (October 24–26, 2022); f) Conference on Combating Money Laundering and Recovering the Proceeds of Crime (November 17–18, 2022, Bucharest); g) Final training mission in Chisinau (December 12–13, 2022);

In 2023, the collaboration was expanded and it was agreed to strengthen the institutional capacity of the NIJ. The flagship activity was the organization, for the first time, of practical internships in Romania for NIJ trainees. Thus, in September–October 2023, seven professional training internships, each lasting three days, were hosted by courts and prosecutor's offices in Romania. (National Institute of Justice of Republic of Moldova, 2023, f.a.) The internships took place thanks to the RoAid project, which explicitly provided for this inter-institutional exchange component in 2023.

At the same time, joint continuing training remained an active component. INJ magistrates and trainers continued to participate in training sessions organized by the INM. For example, in November 2023, two NIJ trainers (including Livia Mitrofan, interim president of the Chișinău District Court) were invited to the 16th EuRoQuod Conference in Romania, a voluntary network of judges concerned with

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the application of EU law. („Conferință EuRoQuod în România”, f.a.), to deepen their knowledge and share it with colleagues in their country. At the same time, in December 2023, Moldovan judges and prosecutors were able to attend specialized INM courses online, such as the seminar "Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust – history, memory, and legislation" (December 7–8) or the training course "Special surveillance methods – technical surveillance" (December 11–12). This participation confirms the continuity of the exchange of expertise in continuing education, facilitating access for NIJ beneficiaries to the expertise and training resources of the INM („INJ Projects 2023”, f.a.) The third major component in 2023 focused on strengthening the institutional capacity of the NIJ, in particular the consolidation of the NIJ's Legal Information Center.

In 2024, cooperation in the field of justice entered a new phase, more closely aligned with the priorities for the European integration of the Republic of Moldova. The bilateral program continued under the name "Assistance in the field of justice - Strengthening the institutional capacity of the NIJ in the Republic of Moldova." The project was implemented by RoAid. Adrian Cerbu, the new interim director of the NIJ (and himself a former beneficiary of the program), emphasized at the launch the importance of the support provided by Romanian partners in aligning national judicial practices with European standards. (National Institute of Justice of Republic of Moldova, 2024)

One of the first results of the new project was the organization of two training sessions for NIJ trainees (future judges and prosecutors) in Chișinău (September 19–20, 2024) on the rule of law and European Union institutions. In addition to the training sessions in the Republic of Moldova, the program continued to involve mobility and exchanges. According to the plans, new study visits and thematic internships were scheduled for the second half of 2024, including a training module in Romania focused on public communication techniques for judicial staff and advanced sessions on the adoption of the EU acquis.

In 2025, bilateral cooperation in the field of justice remained firmly on the agenda. The authorities in Bucharest and Chisinau highlighted the strategic nature of this partnership as part of Moldova's preparation for EU accession. At the ministerial level, Romania stepped up its support: Romanian Justice Minister Alina Gorghiu announced in April 2024 that around 40 legal experts would be sent to Moldova to help with the justice reform process—a complementary initiative run directly by the Romanian Ministry of Justice. (*Ministry of Justice from the Republic of Moldova, f.a, 2024.*). "We are determined to support Moldova's European path by providing expertise assistance from our ministry. In the coming period, we will work closely with our Moldovan counterparts to identify specific areas where our technical assistance will be most beneficial for the implementation of justice reforms," said Minister Gorghiu.

The INM-INJ cooperation program, supported by RoAid, has had a visible impact on strengthening the Moldovan judicial system, both in terms of human resources and at the institutional level. Over the course of four years, hundreds of Moldovan magistrates in training or in office have benefited from joint activities. Dozens of continuing education sessions, seminars, conferences, and internships have been organized in multiple areas: from judicial ethics and European case law on human rights to complex criminal proceedings (money laundering, human trafficking, hate crimes) and modern court management techniques. Moldovan participants had access to the expertise of some of the most experienced Romanian judges and trainers, as well as to the infrastructure of relevant institutions in Romania.

From a strategic perspective, the cooperation between RoAid, INM, and INJ is an eloquent example of diplomacy through development in Eastern Europe. Romania, as an EU member state and promoter of democratic values, has acted as an exporter of expertise in strengthening the rule of law, responding to the critical needs of a neighboring state and partner.

Last but not least, the impact must also be analysed in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) of the UN 2030 Agenda. Target 16 involves, among other things, developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, as well as ensuring access to justice for all. Moldovan officials have recognized the importance of this contribution. The Ministry of Justice in Chisinau has highlighted that, thanks to Romanian support through RoAid, the ambitious justice reform agenda proposed by the Moldovan government has been able to be implemented more quickly and efficiently.

In conclusion, the bilateral cooperation program in the field of justice between Romania and the Republic of Moldova (2022–2025) has proven to be a catalyst for strengthening justice in the Republic of Moldova, combining the professional training of magistrates with institutional development and high-level political commitments. Romania, through its Official Development Assistance instruments, has assumed the role of strategic partner of Chisinau in the field of justice, acting in the spirit of European solidarity and the promotion of democratic values. The short-term benefits—measurable in the number of people trained and the modernization of training procedures—are intertwined with long-term effects, such as increased institutional capacity, strengthened judicial independence, and an improved climate of integrity and rule of law. All of this contributes to preparing the Republic of Moldova for integration into the European Union and achieving SDG 16 targets, demonstrating how development cooperation can support crucial reforms in a state in transition, with a direct impact on the well-being and trust of citizens in the justice system. („Romania Boosts Moldova’s EU Bid with Justice Experts”, 2024)

The INM–INJ program therefore remains an example of good practice in the region, highlighting the potential of Romania's assistance in strengthening the

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democratic institutions of its neighbors and promoting a common space of justice and European values.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we also analyzed how the method of implementing Romanian ODA influences the degree of institutional consolidation in the Republic of Moldova (dependent variable: expressed through the presence of reforms, partnerships, and local institutional response). Based on this relationship, we propose the following hypothesis: ODA projects implemented directly by Romania, through the transfer of expertise and professional training, contribute more visibly to the institutional consolidation of the Republic of Moldova than projects implemented indirectly, through grants or donations. The research question formulated in this regard is: how does the type of ODA intervention applied by Romania influence the institutional efficiency of partners in the Republic of Moldova?

Based on the research conducted, the validated answer is as follows: ODA projects implemented directly by Romania, through the transfer of expertise, professional training, and technical advice, had a clearer and more visible impact on institutional strengthening in the Republic of Moldova compared to those implemented indirectly, through grants or donations.

This conclusion is supported by the following findings:

1. The magistrate training and inter-institutional cooperation programs (INM–INJ) generated positive official reactions from the Moldovan authorities and were continued in successive cycles.

2. Direct projects involved human interaction, exchange of good practices, and contextual adaptation, which increased institutional absorption and relevance.

3. In contrast, indirect projects (equipment, donations) had a more logistical or symbolic contribution, without a clear link to systemic reform or changes in administrative practices.

4. RoAid and MFA reports consistently highlight the strategic impact of direct projects on SDG 16, particularly in the areas of justice, local administration, and legislative alignment with the EU acquis.

Good governance cannot be exported through political declarations or neutral financial transfers, but is co-constructed through trusted partnerships, systematic transfer of expertise, strategic investments in institutional capacity, and the patience to cultivate profound, sustainable, and authentic transformations. Romania and the Republic of Moldova demonstrate that this process, although complex and often invisible in its immediate impact, produces tangible results that fully justify the investment in development cooperation as a vector of good governance and a catalyst for European integration.

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