

IMPACT North: Regional Capacity Development

Programme Launch Event

6 of October 2026, 09.00 - 14.30

Alecu Russo State University of Bălți, Bălți, Republic of Moldova

Expected participants: approximately 150

Purpose of the event:

The launch event will officially open the IMPACT North: Regional Capacity Development programme and bring together key actors involved in the economic, institutional and territorial development of Northern Moldova. *The event will present the objectives, methodology, activities and expected results of the IMPACT North programme; present and discuss the main findings emerging from the preliminary needs assessment and stakeholder mapping; provide a platform for dialogue between Moldovan and Estonian partners; collect practical inputs from regional stakeholders on key development challenges and opportunities; identify preliminary needs, potential partnerships and areas for future project development; prepare stakeholders for the Regional Project Ideas Hackathon and the subsequent training and mentoring programme; strengthen the regional cooperation network between local authorities, businesses, universities, development institutions and civil society.*

Speakers:

- Mihai Popșoi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova
- Margus Tsahkna, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia
- Andrea Kivi, Executive Director, EstDev
- Kristiina Tammets, Programme Manager, Tartu County Development Agency
- Kadri Tillemann, Lead Expert, IMPACT North
- Vitalie Jereghi, Executive Director, LEADER Network Moldova.
- Representative of the North Regional Development Agency. TBC
- Representative of the Bălți Free Economic Zone / ZEL. TBC
- Representative of Alecu Russo State University of Bălți, Rector.

The interventions will focus on the importance of regional development, Moldova–Estonia cooperation, European integration and the role of stronger regional partnerships in generating sustainable development.

Moderator of the event: Victor Guzun

Agenda

09:00–10:00 | Registration and Welcome Coffee. *Informal networking between representatives of local authorities, businesses, universities, civil society organizations, regional and national institutions, development partners and the IMPACT North team.*

PART I

10:00–11:00 | Official Opening and Presentation of the IMPACT North Programme

10:00–10:30 | Welcome speeches. Opening remarks and short interventions.

10:30–11:00 | IMPACT North: From Regional Needs to Investment-Ready Projects. Presentation by the IMPACT North team: why IMPACT North, main regional needs and challenges identified during the needs

assessment, programme objectives and expected results, overall implementation approach, project development pathway. Questions and Answers

PART II

11:00–12:15 | 3 Parallel Thematic Working Groups

Participants will work in 3 parallel thematic groups addressing transversal development issues relevant to Northern Moldova. Each thematic group will have 2 lead facilitators (one from Moldova and one from Estonia) and one rapporteur responsible for consolidating the main conclusions.

Suggested Working Group Format

11:00–11:15 – Introduction to the task, division into thematic groups and tables

11:15–11:50 – Inspirational presentation, group discussions

11:50–12:15 – Consolidation of findings within each thematic group. Selection of key messages and preparation of the group presentation

Each thematic group should identify, preferably: 3 key challenges or needs, 3 opportunities or possible solutions, 3 priority areas where IMPACT North could provide further support and propose potential project or partnership ideas.

WORKING GROUP 1. Regional Economic Development through Effective Territorial Marketing. Lessons from Estonia and Opportunities for Northern Moldova. How can Northern Moldova better use its economic, human, cultural and territorial assets to attract investment, businesses, visitors, talent and new development opportunities?

Guiding questions for discussion:

- *What are the main competitive advantages of Northern Moldova?*
- *How clearly are these advantages currently identified and communicated?*
- *What prevents municipalities and regions from marketing themselves effectively?*
- *How can territorial marketing become an economic development instrument rather than simply a communication activity?*
- *How can local authorities, businesses, universities, tourism organizations and communities cooperate in promoting the region?*
- *What can be learned from Estonian municipalities and regions?*
- *How can municipalities become more proactive in attracting investors and supporting existing businesses?*
- *Which local products, services, destinations, industries or skills could become stronger regional brands?*
- *What capacities are currently missing at local and regional level?*
- *What type of projects could be developed through IMPACT North?*

Expected output: Identification of key regional economic development challenges, territorial assets and competitive advantages, capacity gaps, potential investment and territorial marketing initiatives, possible partnerships and project ideas.

WORKING GROUP 2. Stronger Municipalities, Stronger Regions. Estonia's 2017 Local Government Reform and Lessons for Moldova. What can Moldova learn from Estonia's local government reform and from the development of stronger municipal capacities for regional economic development and investment attraction?

Guiding questions for discussion:

- *What changed in Estonia after the 2017 administrative reform?*
- *How did larger and stronger municipalities develop greater institutional and professional capacity?*

- *What was the effect on strategic planning, public services and local economic development?*
- *How did municipalities improve their ability to prepare projects and attract EU and other external funding?*
- *What new competencies and professional capacities became possible at municipal level?*
- *What lessons are relevant for Moldova's current local government reform?*
- *Which Estonian experiences are transferable to Moldova and which should not simply be copied?*
- *What capacities will Moldovan municipalities need after the reform?*
- *How can intermunicipal cooperation and shared services contribute?*
- *What support could IMPACT North provide to municipalities during this transformation?*

Expected output: Identification of key institutional challenges facing local authorities, capacity needs related to administrative reform, lessons from Estonia applicable to Moldova, opportunities for stronger intermunicipal and regional cooperation, potential project ideas and areas for future capacity building.

WORKING GROUP 3. Digital Local Government and the Digital Economy. Opportunities for Moldova–Estonia Cooperation. How can digital transformation help municipalities provide better services, strengthen local economies and create new opportunities for citizens and businesses?

Guiding questions for discussion:

- *What are the main digitalization challenges currently faced by local authorities?*
- *Which municipal processes and services should be simplified or digitalized first?*
- *How can digitalization reduce administrative burden rather than simply digitalize existing bureaucracy?*
- *What digital skills and institutional capacities are missing at municipal level?*
- *How can national digital infrastructure and services be better used locally?*
- *What can Moldovan municipalities learn from Estonia's digital government experience?*
- *How can digital tools improve cooperation between municipalities, citizens and businesses?*
- *How can digitalization support local entrepreneurship and SMEs?*
- *What opportunities exist for developing the digital economy outside the capital?*
- *Where could Estonian institutions, municipalities, companies and experts cooperate directly with partners in Northern Moldova?*

Expected output: Identification of priority digitalization needs, institutional and skills gaps, potential local digital services and solutions, opportunities for developing the regional digital economy, possible Estonia–Moldova cooperation initiatives, potential project ideas for further development.

12:15–12:45 | Coffee Break and Cross-Group Networking. Participants from the three thematic groups exchange perspectives and ideas. Facilitators and rapporteurs use this time to finalize the key conclusions of their working groups.

PART III

12:45–13:45 | From Discussion to Action – Findings and Priorities for IMPACT North. All participants reconvene in the main seminar room.

12:45–13:30 | Each Working Group up to 10 minutes – presentation of key findings, up to 5 minutes – questions and comments

13:30–13:45 | Conclusions and Next Steps. Concluding remarks by the IMPACT North team. *The session will summarize common challenges identified across the three working groups, priority development and capacity-building needs, opportunities for cross-sectoral cooperation, potential project areas emerging from the discussions, implications for the IMPACT North training and mentoring programme, next steps towards the Regional Project Ideas Hackathon in November 2026.*

13:45–14:30 | Networking Buffet Lunch

14:30 | End of the Event