

## Jews

### Profile

There are an estimated 5,500 Jews in Moldova (data: American Jewish Yearbook, 2002). Most Jews speak Russian as a first language (73 per cent), living in urban areas.

### Historical context

Within the Russian Empire, Chisinau and the surrounding area were designated part of the Pale of Settlement and had a thriving Yiddish-speaking community. In 1897 Jews made up 12 per cent of Bessarabia's population. Chisinau was the site of two significant pogroms in the early nineteenth century: the first in 1903, in which some 49 Jews lost their lives and a further 500 were injured, and the second in 1905, in which a further 19 Jews were killed. These events became the subject of Chaim Nachman Bialik's work of Hebrew literature, *Be-Ir ha Haregah* ('In the City of Slaughter'). Nazi genocide, war and emigration had reduced numbers to 65,700 (1.5 per cent) by 1989.

After the late 1980s, some 40,000 Moldovan Jews are thought to have emigrated to Israel. This process was encouraged by new opportunities to naturalize as Israeli citizens and by the advance of the Moldovan/Romanian language to the detriment of Russian. In 1998 the Moldovan government adopted a decree convoking the First International Congress of Moldavian Jews. Since that time increased efforts have been made by the Moldovan state to support the Jewish community, although anti-Semitic trends in wider society remain a source of concern.

### Current issues

Within the Russian-speaking community, anti-Semitism has appeared among more extreme Russian nationalists. In the unrecognised republic of Transnistria some 70 Jewish gravestones were vandalized in March 2004 at the Tiraspol Jewish Cemetery.

At the same time, there has been a religious revival and a chief rabbi has been appointed to Chisinau. In 2003 commemorations of the Chisinau pogrom of 1903 took place with the participation of state officials, including President Voronin; a monument was opened in a park at the old Jewish cemetery in Chisinau. Teaching of the history of the Holocaust was also introduced into national school curricula in 2003. Nonetheless, representatives of the Moldovan Jewish community claim that anti-Semitic views continue to be expressed amongst nationalist opposition parties in Moldova.