

## Moldova

### Update on the context and situation of children

The Republic of Moldova, which is one of Europe's poorest countries, saw a long-lasting political crisis involving three governments within the last 12 months. These multiple rollercoaster rides through Moldovan politics affected the development and implementation of various policies and strategies, including the National Development Strategy "Moldova 2030". This key strategy is currently being updated by the new government, along with the country's preparation of its first SDG Voluntary National Review (VNR).

On the economic side, GDP annual growth slightly decreased to 3.8 per cent. The inability to accelerate and diversify the economy is expected to continue resulting in low standards of living (2018 State of the Country Report). Furthermore, the level of corruption remains high, with according to Transparency International, Moldova being 120th out of 180 countries on its 2019 Corruption Perception Index. Combined with political instability associated risks, it added to the reticence of donors to adopt a more critical approach to their investments.

Household consumption accounts for over 80 per cent of GDP and depends strongly on remittances. The lack of opportunity is the main push factor for migration, particularly for rural youth. The Government's fiscal revenue for social services is affected by an estimated one third of the work force being employed informally. Children are the most affected by challenges faced by the social assistance system.

Also as the financial accountabilities attributed to Local Public Authorities (LPAs) do not fully match available capacity to prioritize, finance and plan, social services for children and youth in health, education, child protection, social protection remain underfunded.

Some 20,000 children, of which 90 per cent are children left behind by both or the only migrant parent were separated from their family in 2018 alone. While the number of institutionalized children decreased six-fold over the past decade, a quarter of those still in institutions are children with disabilities.

Formal education does not fully provide the skills that young people need to transition to gainful adulthood. Moldovan students registered better results in PISA 2018 compared to 2015, however these results were still much below the OECD average, with about half of 15 year-old students not being proficient in reading, mathematics or sciences.

In 2018, youth unemployment (15-24 years old) doubled the national average and youth inactivity is affecting about 60 per cent of young people. More than a quarter of unemployed youth is not in education, training nor have a job (NEET), whereas young women are the largest cohort in this category (NBS, 2019). The lack of awareness and opportunities, the exclusion of disadvantaged groups and insufficient funding for Youth Councils and Resource Centres undermine the participation of children and youth.

Moldova continued to face a worrying trend of mistrust in vaccines and it is the highest in the region (2018 Vaccine Confidence Project, LSHTM). Even though in 2018 the national coverage reached 93 per cent for DTP3 and 93 per cent for MMR1 (2018 JRF WHO-UNICEF), the national target of 95 per cent was not met.

Despite a significant progress in reducing infant and under five mortality rates, both indicators remain twice higher than in other countries in the region (IMR 10 per 1,000 livebirths and U5MR 11.8 per 1,000 livebirths, NBS, 2018). Around 20 per cent of infant and under five mortalities occurred at home due to preventable causes (MHLSP, 2018).

Notwithstanding the turmoil in the political context and a certain slowdown of the implementation of the Country Programme, still tangible achievements were made in relation to the child rights agenda.

The advancement of inclusive education remained at the forefront of the programme. A Joint Evaluation of the Implementation of the Programme for Development of Inclusive Education in the Republic of Moldova for 2011-2020 was conducted with UNICEF support resulting in recommendations regarding system strengthening and change of social norms towards enrollment of children with disabilities and those with special educational needs in regular schools. The year saw also inclusion of Roma children in selected Roma densely populated communities in education through UNICEF's support for extensive work with all involved stakeholders.

During the year, the Government successfully adopted a Decree on Regional Services for Children Victims and Witnesses of Crimes, while also specific legislation on cyber protection of children was enacted. Furthermore, the Secretariat of the Parliament of Moldova accepted to include legislative work on bullying on the Parliament's 2020 agenda by initiating four regional consultations and a national policy dialogue.

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UNICEF continued to advocate with LPAs to establish community level support services involving day care, family support and family-based placement services, including a minimum social services package.

A number of successful events were organized to celebrate CRC@30, including further intensified support for the successful inclusive choir La La Play Voices promoting opportunities for youth, including those from remote rural areas, Roma and children with special needs. In partnership with the EU Delegation the choir gave a concert in the central square of Chisinau on EU Day, featuring also the GenU initiative. The choir also participated in a grand concert late 2019, dedicated to CRC@30, while performing together with the National Youth Orchestra and famous Moldovan singers. The 2019 RAVAC International Film Festival, which brought 50 movies from all over the world to Chisinau, was also dedicated to child rights and CRC@30. Furthermore, Ion Lazarenco, a famous open water swimmer and the Moldova Nominee for the Nobel prize for Peace swam 30 km along the Nistru River to promote CRC@30. During the year the Facebook fan base doubled from 27,500 to 55,100, and office's website became available in three languages.

UNICEF Moldova further intensified its engagement with key development partners, and saw several successful fundraising efforts during the year, including a multi-year strategic partnership with the European Union (EU) Delegation focused on inclusive and sustainable development of the Cahul and Ungheni regions, implemented by UNDP, UN Women and UNICEF, as well as a One UN Joint Action to Strengthen Human Rights in the Transnistrian Region, funded by Sweden.

### Major contributions and drivers of results

Results were delivered in line with the Joint 2018-2019 Rolling Workplans and UNICEF Moldova's Annual Management Plan. A related synopsis of key results achieved and their linkages to national development priorities and goals is provided below.

#### Every Child Survives and Thrives

UNICEF Moldova continued to ensure available stocks of vaccines through liaison between UNICEF Supply Division and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Policy (MHLSP), with almost 1.5 million doses of vaccines procured and distributed nationwide. An assessment of root causes of low coverage with immunization was conducted in three of the most underperforming districts with UNICEF ECARO support. Findings, such as low capacities in interpersonal communication, contra-indications, population mobility, vaccine scares on social media informed the development of costed action plans to reverse the negative immunization trends.

Three local action plans were developed, budgeted and validated with local and national stakeholders. National and local commitment to implement the local plans will contribute to reversing the immunization trends in three targeted districts (Ciadir Lunga, Donduseni and Balti). To further improve knowledge of families with young children on vaccination, a Live Stream during the European Week of Immunization was organized at the UNICEF premises together with WHO, representatives from National Agency for Public Health, Medical University and civil society reaching more than 10,000 people.

About 300 staff members of perinatal centres, service providers involved in antenatal and intra-natal care, laboratory and managerial staff improved their capacity to implement the National Protocol addressing the transmission of HIV/AIDS from Mother to Child. New information materials for service providers and families affected by HIV were developed. UNICEF supported MHLSP and Coordination Unit of the National Programme on HIV and STI Prevention and Control to develop the National Report on Elimination of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV (EMTCT). Unfortunately, Moldova did not apply yet for regional validation of EMTCT report, as the share of transmission of HIV/AIDS from mother to child increased from 1% in 2018 to 3% in 2019 (preliminary data). Implementation of PMTCT supportive supervision will be carried in 2020 to further improve the system's capacity to identify HIV affected pregnant women and ensure their continuum of care.

The Child Care and Development Standards approved by the MHLSP include a key component provision of universal progressive Home Visiting for children aged 0-3, developed with UNICEF support. To ensure sustainability related curricula were developed, approved and implemented for the Medical University and Medical College, as well as for the National Centre for Continuous Medical Education of Nurses, including pre- and in-service home-visiting modules. About 470 nurses of family doctors acquired skills and competencies in delivering home-visiting services for children under 3 and their families. Guidelines for nurses on applying universal-progressive home-visiting were also developed.

To address geographical discrepancies in provision of health care to pregnant women and new born children, new Antenatal Care Standards and neonatal protocols were validated and endorsed for the Transnistrian region. Thereby pregnant women and newborns from Transnistrian region benefit from evidence based antenatal and neonatal care aligned to the latest WHO Guidelines and international protocols. Furthermore, a Breastfeeding Caravan organized jointly with MHLSP and WHO

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reached about 676 pregnant women, parents, medical staff in nine communities on both banks of the Nistru River.

### Every Child Learns

UNICEF Moldova supported the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (MECR) with conduct of a comprehensive Education Sector Analysis (ESA) funded by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which was endorsed by the Local Education Group in 2019. The ESA includes also a review of the country's education evaluation and assessment system as well as of its' inclusive education programme. The ESA provides insights for development of a new 10-year strategy in the education sector. The experiences gained and methodology used for the ESA were also used for Youth Sector Analysis. Both analyses provide the base for the development of the education and youth policy with focus on quality and inclusion.

Social inclusion rose on the agenda of the Government and support was provided for the development of a funding scheme for pre-school education that allows for inclusion of the most marginalized, which was approved by MECR and Ministry of Finance (MoF). The piloting of the funding scheme will be done jointly with WB support.

The National Conference on Inclusive Education organized in late 2019 under MECR leadership and with joint UNICEF and CSO support, gathered all the newly elected LPAs, school representatives, academia and CSOs. During this forum participants also learned about the results of the UNICEF supported Evaluation of the Implementation of the Programme for Development of Inclusive Education for 2011-2020 and discussed the way forward. New guidelines for cross-sectoral collaboration for inclusion of children with severe disabilities were developed in consultation with MECR, MHLSP, MoF, LPAs in Singerei district. Furthermore, UNICEF supported the development by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education of a new methodology for assessment of Child Friendly School Standards. Moreover, support was provided to children and adolescents in two densely Roma populated communities to enroll, catch-up and learn together with their peers.

On the eve of the Global Parenting month, Special Olympics Moldova in collaboration with the Moldovan Football Federation and UNICEF conducted a series of sporting activities, social activities within the program "Young Athletes and Families". Hundreds of children, including with special needs from different regions of the country, as well as from neighboring Ukraine, participated actively in various demonstration exercises. During a related Family Health Forum experts, teachers, parents and volunteers examined various ways to include young children with disabilities through sports.

### Every Child is Protected from Violence and Exploitation

UNICEF supported MHLSP to conduct an Evaluation of the 2014-2020 National Child Protection Strategy and its Action Plan, which included also participation by LPAs and CSOs. Among key achievements are the deinstitutionalization reform, cross-sectoral mechanism for child victims or potential victims of violence, abuse and neglect, a new regulatory framework, critical capacity development activities, and a wider range of services, such as family placement or family support. Recommendations were made to ensure enhanced participation in policy drafting, human and financial resources, further strengthening MHLSP's institutional capacity in child protection and the development of a functional M&E framework.

A Bullying Study was conducted to reveal the extent to which this phenomenon is prevalent among adolescents and to support development of related prevention and combating measures. About 87 per cent of students of 6th through 12th grades reported to be affected by bullying. Every fifth student indicated that the school he/she attends does not take any measures against bullies.

A first ever assessment of the Chisinau Municipality's Directorate for Child Rights Protection was finalized. Main findings include challenges faced in implementing the legal framework and a policy characterized by reduced availability of financial and human resources for service provision, limited cross-sectoral coordination, and weak accountability mechanisms. Key recommendations made include the development of a child protection strategy and related regulatory framework and procedures, capacitating immediate response mechanisms for children at risk, development of family support services as key in preventing child separation, provision of alternative care for separated children and review of placement to reduce the spent out-of-family time. A detailed roadmap will guide the local authorities in improving service delivery and further developing the Municipal Child Protection Strategy. The results of the exercise prompted the management of the Chisinau Municipality to request also UNICEF's support for further assessments of the health, education, youth and sport, human resources, finance and social protection units. The engagement with Chisinau Municipality is part of UNICEF Moldova's efforts to strengthen LPAs capacities in prioritizing and adequately financing child related services. Chisinau hosts 18 per cent of the child and adolescent population in Moldova.

Capacities of students from 30 schools were built to conduct peer-to-peer activities for preventing bullying. Around 1,500 pupils, 300 parents and 60 teachers from 30 communities acquired skills in preventing, reporting and taking action in bullying and violence related cases.

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In an effort to further strengthen the availability of sex and age disaggregated data on violence, exploitation and abuse of children, UNICEF continued to advocate for adjustments of data collection tools. As of 2019 the following disaggregation has been introduced by MHLSP regarding victims of violence involving: place of residence (rural/urban), sex (girl/boy), age (groups 0-2, 3-6, 7-15, 6-17), and disability.

### Justice for Children

UNICEF commissioned an assessment of the legal framework and practices to further support the Ministry of Justice in improving the special conditions in interviewing child victims and witnesses of crimes. Furthermore, support was provided for an exercise commissioned by UNICEF ECARO to document progress within the region regarding good or promising practices in dealing with child victims and witnesses of crime.

A mandatory probation program for children in conflict with law was piloted in five districts. This diversion mechanism for judges and prosecutors, is used by probation counsellors to support rehabilitation and social reintegration of child offenders. Eight (out of 170) probation councilors will further multiply the positive experiences gained beyond project conclusion as they have been accredited as competent trainers following several TOT interventions and formalization of the program by the National Probation Inspectorate in December 2019.

The assessment of the modus operandi and compliance of the educational institution for children in conflict with the law in Tiraspol with international standards on children in conflict with the law, became an entry point to further review the justice system for children in the Transnistrian region. This initiative is part of the 2019-2022 Joint UN Project to Strengthen Human Rights in the Transnistrian Region, supported by Sweden.

### Every Child has an Equitable Chance in Life

UNICEF and Overseas Development Institute concluded the ongoing micro-simulation exercise with MHLSP to increase coverage of the national Social Assistance programme (Ajutor Social) for households with three or more children, households with disabled persons and single parent households. The results were presented to several development partners, including WB. The next step will require further changes in the way the entitlement is calculated. Additional simulations will also need to be ran prior the finalization of concrete policy options.

Training modules on Public Finance Management developed with UNICEF support were used to train 155 representatives of LPAs from 50 municipalities from three districts: Chisinau, Nisporeni and Singerei. These trainings targeted key local decision makers, staff from the financial departments, and directors of pre-schools, and focused on financing for pre-schools, being also linked to UNICEF's support at the central level for the development of a funding scheme for pre-schools. Seven options of funding formulas, based on a different set of variables, were presented to the MECR, the Ministry of Finance and LPAs, and the selected formula will be piloted with WB support in 2020-2021.

UNICEF strengthened its partnership with the Chisinau Municipality. A budgetary analysis was conducted focused on how Chisinau Municipality can more effectively and efficiently deliver social services for children and adolescents. The main findings of this analysis highlighted the scope for local public authorities to be more connected to the Mid-Term Budgetary Framework process, which is the foundation of annual budget laws. The results of this analysis were presented to Chisinau's Mayor and his team and further technical assistance for the implementation of the recommendations will be provided in 2020, especially regarding support for development of a multi-year strategic investment plan.

### Adolescent Awareness and Participation

As also reflected above, UNICEF supported MECR with both an Education and a Youth Sector Analysis, including related gender mainstreaming components supported by UN Women. The Youth Sector Analysis, which is conducted also together with UNFPA, is expected to provide recommendations for further modernization of the youth sector, including analytical grounds for development of the upcoming National Youth Strategy.

Under the new partnership between UNICEF and the Organization for Small and Medium Business Development (ODIMM) of the Ministry of Economy, piloting of the social innovation program UPSHIFT took place in Singerei district. The program implementation was carried out by the local network of youth centres with support of ODIMM's network of business incubators. Participants, including vulnerable and NEET youth, were trained on 21st century skills and were supported with the development of social impact projects in their communities. The resulting youth social impact projects were evaluated by Singerei City Hall, Youth Centre and the Local Business Incubator ODIMM. Six out of seven proposals were selected for seed-funding.

U-report increased its presence in five more districts reaching a total of 32, thereby nationwide boosting its membership to 5,100 members. Five youth-led organizations benefited also of UPSHIFT's features and possibilities such as thematic polls,

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live chats and direct messages. Consequently, in total 30 polls were shared, including direct engagement with young people seeking professional support and guidance. As a result, specialists were able to provide services to 400 requests, including on IT careers and social entrepreneurship.

About 900 vulnerable adolescent boys and girls were supported by outreach volunteers from Youth Friendly Health Centres (YFHCs) in four localities. More than 10,000 youth and adolescents in the targeted areas were involved in awareness raising activities on promotion of healthy behaviors through activities organized by YFHCs volunteers. About 120 school psychologists, teachers and deputy directors of schools improved their abilities to provide programmes on addressing aggressive behavior, while parents were informed about available services.

The communication campaign "COOLtivam Sanatatea" to promote healthy behaviors among adolescents was successfully launched, with related wide-spread material distribution also jointly facilitated by the YFHCs, Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and UNICEF.

### Cross-Sectoral

During the year cross-sectoral interventions were pursued as planned, including support to both MECR and MHLSP in assessing existing models of preschools/schools' meal delivery. The analyses of the health, nutrition and food security needs of pre-school/school-age children revealed their sub-optimal health and nutrition status and the presence of moderate and severe risks, including from vulnerabilities related to low socio-economic status of families and poor diet and nutrition practices, with the latter affecting educational and learning performance of preschool and school children. The report and its conclusions were validated by members of the Technical Group representing MECR, MoF, MHLSP, National Agency for Food Security, National Agency for Public Health, Municipal Department for Procurement, and selected managers of preschools and schools, the WB and UNICEF. Based on the findings MECR and MHLSP are designing new menus for preschools and schools.

An Early Childhood Education Brief was developed with support of UNICEF ECARO, ECORYS, Moldova's MoF and MECR, reflecting the analysis of budgetary allocations for the 2012-2018 period and the projection for 2019-2021. Furthermore, about 150 LPAs, accountants, procurement specialists and preschool managers from seven districts enhanced their knowledge and skills on Public Finance Management with a focus on equity and WASH under the ADA supported Project. As UNICEF supported the development of the funding scheme for preschools and enhanced capacities of ECD frontline workers, the training is enabling LPAs in financing services for most disadvantaged children (Roma, children with disabilities and children from rural areas). The funding scheme as reflected above was approved by MECR and MoF, and while preparations for piloting of the funding scheme will take place 2020, the actual pilot will start with also support by the WB in 2021.

Major provisions of the cross-sectoral Strategy on Positive Parenting approved by the Government in 2016 and of key findings of the 2018 ECD KAP Study were used for developing the Modelling of Parental Educators' programmes implemented in five regions of the country, covering 70 preschools. Pre-and end-line surveys undertaken indicated that parents/caregivers managed to gain new knowledge and parental skills favourable for better nurturing, with a significantly higher number of caregivers acknowledging the important role of fathers in rearing children and the importance of reading to children. An amendment to the Code of Education, article 55 to include activities on parental education was developed and the Job Description for preschools' personnel was adjusted.

As part of UNICEF's support to the work of the National Council for Child Rights Protection (NCCRP) chaired by the Prime Minister, its Technical Group reviewed 25 draft legal documents while also three regional roundtables of the District Councils for Child Rights Protection were organized. Child rights professionals from Chisinau and the regions enhanced their knowledge about country progress in CRC implementation and related monitoring. Furthermore, NCCRP's IT structure was also improved.

Within the Joint UN project on Strengthening Statistical System, a comprehensive revision of Nationalized SDG indicators was conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics, covering also child-related SDG indicators and brought the evidence to further advocate for proper planning and conducting a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in the coming years (the last MICS was carried out in Moldova in 2012). Respective advocacy activities are included in the 2020-2021 RWP of the MECR and MHLSP. The revised List of SDG indicators will be ready for Government endorsement in 2020.

During the year UNICEF Moldova also maintained a high level of emergency preparedness. and developed a memorandum of understanding with Moldova's Post Office for provision of emergency cash transfers.

### Gender Dimension

Continued efforts were made to apply a human rights-based approach and effective gender mainstreaming in programme

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delivery. For instance, UNICEF and UN Women ensured preparing both the Education and the Youth Sector Analysis from a gender perspective, with findings informing the development of related new long-term Education and Youth Strategies and accompanying action plans aligned to the Moldova 2030 Development Strategy and the nationalized SDGs. All programmes dealing with Positive Parenting incorporated a special focus on fathers' modelling and engagement in child rearing, thereby addressing gender stereotyping and gender discrimination

During 2019 UNICEF also participated in the UNCT SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard exercise to analyse gender equality mainstreaming in UNDAF outcomes and indicators, in Joint UN Projects, and in related M&E. Gender-responsive indicators were not always followed by gender-responsive outcome statements, thereby only approaching minimum gender equality requirements. In follow up, an action plan was developed and approved by the UNCT to address the identified gaps.

### Lessons Learned and Innovations

#### The Key Role of Middle Management in Government Partnerships

In a context of high political instability following parliamentary elections and local elections in the year 2019, the country experienced three different governments in less than one year. Though this was a considerable challenge for the country office's programme implementation context with its strong focus on accelerating delivering tangible results for children, many of the planned activities could still progress as set out in the Joint Rolling Work plans for 2018-2019.

For instance, in Education, UNICEF Moldova was able to continue its support for further advancing the implementation of the education reform, including the finalization of the comprehensive Education Sector Analysis funded by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the application for additional funding by GPE for the development of the new Education Sector Development Plan. While some delays in implementation were inevitable, the key role played by the middle management in the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (MECR) and its institutional knowledge were determinant in overcoming the impediments faced due to the political context faced. As a conclusion, more focused and intensified interaction with the government's middle management in time of high political turmoil can substantially mitigate the adverse impact on country office programme implementation, especially when it concerns activities which are less politically sensitive and can generate a form of consensus.

#### Preventing Brand Erosion

The country's middle-income status constrains the availability of Overseas Development Assistance for the Country Programme and thereby to a certain extent also ongoing efforts to make UNICEF's brand more visible among development and multilateral partners. Moreover, both the increased competition for available resources and focus of donors on their own brand's visibility, pose additional challenges. Moreover, the conditionalities of an increased number of donors to predominantly work under a One UN brand within a shared pool of resources, may also further blur the lines between the mandates and expertise among the various UN agencies.

While the 'Communicating as One' Global Guidelines, have been to some extent helpful in this respect, such context may call for a further rethinking of UNICEF's brand strategy, role and engagement with local partners in a middle-income country context. This could entail the identification of innovative ways of communication with development partners, governments, other UN agencies and the general public under a much-required unified UN system, while at the same time preventing brand erosion and the loss of the unique identity that sets UNICEF apart from other UN agencies.

On a different but related note, nurturing and loyalising new and existing Implementing Partners can also be challenging, as well as keeping ownership over the jointly developed products and overseeing both their use and distribution. While trying to access adequate funding and also supporting the implementation of the joint Government of Moldova and UNICEF Country Programme, our various implementing partners are often also interested in building and further strengthening their own brand. Accordingly, they may further recycle and build upon the platforms and products, earlier jointly developed with UNICEF, which can create confusion for the general public, and entail further brand erosion for UNICEF. The extent to which such use and distribution could be considered a fair use is sometimes complicated to assess, especially given a relatively weak related legal framework within the country in case attempts made to apply such concepts in negotiations with partners did not work. Therefore, there is a need for further enhanced guidelines on copyright over the products created within a partnership agreement between UNICEF and Civil Society Organization partners.

#### The Value of Edutainment

Edutainment, a portmanteau of the words "education" and "entertainment" refers to tools and techniques that combine education with entertainment. During this reporting period UNICEF Moldova increasingly worked with its partners on

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various edutainment activities, including several innovative initiatives involving music, theatre and photography, which proved to be very efficient communication tools. As part of a partnership with the MECR, National Theatre "Mihai Eminescu" and Art Centre "Coliseum", children and adolescents learned about online safety. The general public was sensitized about the rights of children in conflict with the law through a photography project involving boys in Goian penitentiary.

Furthermore, during the year 2019, UNICEF Moldova in close partnership with the Parliament of Moldova effectively used an innovative tool – an interactive games platform – to raise awareness about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Sustainable Development Goals, while simultaneously engaging children and young people in related inspiring dialogue with members of the Moldovan Parliament, opinion leaders, media personalities, business people, and other influencers.