

**Update of the situation of children and youth
in the Republic of Moldova
2016-2019**



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Light Situation Analysis addressing social inclusion of vulnerable groups,
violence against children and youth empowerment and participation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE OF THE ANALYSIS

The primary purpose of the present light Situational Analysis (SitAn) is to provide recent evidence on the situation of children and youth in Moldova by analysing the implementation of child rights within the country context, with the focus on three inter-related and mutually reinforcing topics:

- Social Inclusion of vulnerable groups
- Violence against children
- Youth empowerment and participation

The situational analysis is based on UNICEF's 2016 SitAn¹ and builds on the extensive information already documented in various reports and studies and aims to present them in a concise and structured manner. The analysis will support UNICEF in its future programming in the country.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

As part of the analysis, the most relevant literature in documents on children's rights in Moldova have been reviewed and analysed, including existing internal and external data, research and analysis. No primary data have been collected. This limits the Situational Analysis to the topics and issues highlighted and recognised in other documents, without necessarily allowing for the full overview of the selected issues. Skype interviews have been conducted with a limited number of UNICEF professionals to triangulate the information and fill any knowledge gaps, particularly in relation to the recent progress that might not be captured in available resources. The list of consulted documents is included in **Annex 2**.

This analysis was limited by **the weaknesses and inefficiencies of existing monitoring and reporting mechanisms in the field of children's rights in Moldova**, which include general lack of disaggregated data (i.e., sex, disability, geographic location, ethnic and national origin, migration status and socioeconomic background). This limits insights into the well-being of the most vulnerable group of children. The data on children with disabilities, family in a situation of risk, migration-related data, etc. are particularly limited or inconsistent, limiting the ability of the Government to develop necessary interventions in this field.

Furthermore, although one of the tasks of the analysis was to review implementation of child rights against key child-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and indicators, this was not feasible **as child-related SDGs are not available and SDG nationalization Agenda is limited**² with no clear monitoring mechanism established at the country level to ensure proper monitoring of disaggregated data.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

The **demography in the Republic of Moldova is characterised by reduced** fertility rate, rather low life expectancy and intense outmigration. The population is rapidly decreasing, including a number of children. Increasingly ageing society, coupled with intense outmigration and brain drain associated with that, is creating pressures on the public finance system, particularly pension and

¹ UNICEF Moldova, Children in the Republic of Moldova <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/en/reports/children-republic-moldova>

² See available reports at United Nations in Moldova, <http://md.one.un.org/content/unct/moldova/en/home/publications/sustainable-development-goals.html>

health, negatively affecting the competitiveness of the country. There are wide rural-urban inequalities affecting all aspects of life and access to services.

The country is **faced with pertaining political instability**, with the latest crisis fall of Government over the appointment of the public prosecutor in November 2019, while the deteriorated state of democracy and crises of the rule of law have been continuously questioned. Although tackling corruption has been placed high on the agenda of Government, the corruption remains ingrained in politics and society. The implementation of the planned reforms, including child-related reforms, as part of the EU integration, remains slow.

The 2017 reform of the Government reduced the number of ministries from 16 to 9 via absorption some of the key ministries. Political instability, and weak institutional human and financial resources and frequent staff turnover, affects efficient work of most of the governmental institutions responsible for provision of children's rights.

The fragmented territorial-administrative structure and the incomplete decentralization process continue to result in the very low capacity of local governments to invest in social development and, consequently, to ensure adequate provision of social services at the local level. There is high deficiency and high turnaround of professionals in all social sectors, devaluing invested resources. The breakaway region of Transnistria, with about half of million inhabitants, remains out of control of Moldovan constitutional authorities.

Moldova's gross domestic product (GDP) growth, predominantly driven by consumption and fuelled by remittances, has averaged around 4.5 per cent, but is expected to decelerate below historical values in 2019-2021. Despite the progress achieved, Moldova remains one of the poorest countries in Europe; poverty is particularly affecting households with children. **Income, spatial and intergroup social and income inequalities persist and are highly exacerbated by the rural-urban division.**

The very large informal economy, dependency on remittances and vulnerability for external shocks limit the fiscal space for investment in social services for children and families, with fiscal space decreasing in 2019 due to tax cuts and increase sector wages and social packages. In 2017, the **Government allocated 64 per cent of its budget to social sectors**, 35 per cent to social assistance (mostly age-related). However, there is a **lack of efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditure, including due to fragmentation of public administration, incomplete decentralisation and other inefficiencies in public finance management.** The development assistance to middle-income Moldova is in decline and EU budget support was strained, while investments in social sectors are not priority for donors.

Gender stereotypes, patriarchal attitudes and associated gender-based discrimination and violence are prevalent throughout Moldova and gender gap persists. Families and upbringing tend to reinforce gender stereotypes.

The SDG nationalisation process has been started, however the analysis of **child-related SDGs** is challenging as there is no monitoring mechanism in place, data disaggregation is very limited, and no targets have been agreed at the country level.

SOCIAL INCLUSION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

Poverty rates, although decreasing, **remain high, particularly affecting children and households with children**, especially in rural areas. In addition to monetary inequalities, the most vulnerable groups of children, including children with disabilities, Roma children and those without parental care, are additionally exposed to social inequalities in the fields of education, health, access to quality services and participation. The unequal access to basic services and opportunities feeds a vicious cycle of disadvantage and exclusion.

There is a lack of integration of laws and policies comprehensively addressing the poverty and social exclusion in the country, while the financial mechanisms to reach ambitious goals and targets set in policy framework are weak and insufficient. Budget allocations for social-assistance are mostly not a child- or poverty-focused. Cash-based social benefits are low and fragmented and **largely ineffective in preventing, reducing and eliminating economic and social vulnerabilities** and are lacking direct link to specific children focused outcomes, while their equity is not ensured. Current offer of social services at the local level significantly fails to meet the needs and to respond effectively to the vulnerabilities among children, while also faced with challenges of the low availability of local specialists and high turnover of staff.

Recommendations

Consider setting in motion a comprehensive restructuring of the current social protection system to better respond to multiple vulnerabilities children are facing. This would entail revising and aligning relevant legislation and consolidating necessary programmes and social protection package that goes beyond merely addressing families' basic needs. At some time, continue working toward improved coverage and targeting, including by using and extending cost analysis models already developed, and harmonise existing inequalities in cash-benefits. Adopt a multidimensional poverty index as a basis for planning social protection responses.

Continue to work towards strengthening the mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the efficiency, adequacy and equitability of the distribution of resources allocated for social protection, including by carrying out relevant in-depth needs assessments, costing mechanisms, strengthening procurement mechanisms, followed by the necessary capacity building programmes.

Continue providing training, guidance and continuous support to public authorities on all levels in public finance management, including on child- and youth-sensitive strategic planning, community mobilization processes and local revenue enhancement. Promotion of community ownership over newly developed and existing services and benefits should be ensured through the whole process, coupled with strengthening the understanding of the aim of decentralisation as an opportunity for the enhanced local development.

Continue strengthening early identification of children and youth in need, taking into account multiple deprivations, and ensuring faster access to benefits and supporting social services, if needed. Integration of benefits and improved cooperation in this field is required, including through implementation of 2018 instructions for mapping of children at risk of wellbeing.

Take steps to offset the current negative trends in capacity deficit among key professionals working with vulnerable children in all sectors, including address the root causes of their high turnaround and challenging working conditions. This should include the development of robust, sector-specific human resource strategies (including salary adjustments).

Enhance the structure and organization of the information management system to improve monitoring, transparency and accountability and integration of the necessary databases across the sector, allowing for improved monitoring of different deprivations, addressing existing inefficiencies and ensuring it's enhanced used for monitoring. At some time, the level of disaggregation of the information based on key parameters needs to be improved; and conceptualisation of poverty needs to be extended to measure multiple deprivations as a basis for developing necessary policy and intervention planning.

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Children in Moldova suffer from high rates of sexual, physical and emotional violence and limited progress has been achieved in this field. Recent surveys show that practices of tackling violence

through discipline remain widely accepted, while the reports of sexual violence are increasing, and bullying and other types of violence are common among peers. Corporal punishment, sexual, and other abuse committed by teachers or other school employees remain a commonplace. 2018 VAC survey also associated violence with significant health problems and violence perpetration, documenting the cycle of violence that often occurs in families and communities.

Fairly comprehensive legislative and framework in the field of child protection it is characterised by **fragmentation, lack of preventive approach and lack of overall vision to addressing the VAC across all sectors**. The cooperation and referrals between system are weak and implementation of in-sectorial mechanisms and guidelines incomplete and reporting mechanism not fully functional. The capacities and response of local guardianship authorities and professionals in all sectors are characterised by a high turnaround, unfavourable working conditions and capacity gaps. Programmes and policies for the prevention, recovery and social reintegration of child victims of violence, particularly sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as child perpetrator of violence, are largely missing.

Recommendations

Advocate for the adoption of the 2019-2025 VAC Roadmap by the National Council for Child Rights Protection or by another Government Decision to support its implementation and monitoring. Streamline efforts to implement the Roadmap and its provisions in a coherent and consistent manner.

Perform comprehensive mapping of the whole sector/system/institution-wide resources and gaps, both within each sector and across the child protection system as a whole. This should entail addressing existing bureaucratic inefficiencies of the system and also provide an estimation on the resources spent on child protection as well as provide costing for the needed services.

Develop a new 2021-2025 Child Protection strategy, supported by fully costed Action Plan with a clear theory of change, targets and measurable indicators, which will build on the findings of the evaluation of the implementation of the 2014-2020 strategy, findings of 2018 VAC study and should be aligned with the 2019-2025 VAC Roadmap. Also, ensure active participation of civil society organisation and children, including most vulnerable in its development. Integrate attention to implications of violence across all policies and programming, while sector-specific recommendations should be mainstreamed in the existing and/or newly developed sector-specific strategies, including in health and education.

Develop administrative data collection and management system that would track cases of violence against children, monitor institutional and professional practices, and document sector-specific expenditures needs and, which would be integrated within the existing databases, allowing for the cross-sectional support and overview of the interventions for children.

Intensify efforts to address the root and structural causes of violence against children, including harmful gender norms and stereotypes, including by developing a costed National Communication for Behaviour Change Action Plan. This should contain information campaigns and trainings using innovative, targeted techniques and tools using adjusted to various media platforms and adjusted to different target groups.

Map and specify evidence-based violence prevention initiatives for each sector, including streamlined in the curriculum and general operationalisation of the schools. Operationalise Strategy on parental education and roll out positive parenting programmes for mothers, fathers and other caregivers across the child life cycle, reinforced by communication for development strategies, including to prevent violent disciplining.

Address the gaps in the juvenile justice sector, including capacity deficits, gaps in criminal procedures and inefficient sentences for violent crimes. This includes establishing integrated assistance for child victims involved in criminal proceedings of “Barnahus” type.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

In 2018, 27.7 per cent people of Moldova were between 14-34 years and the percentage is declining. The rate of inactive young people is high (NEET 29 per cent), indicating a **high unrealised economic and social potential of young people**. The mismatch between acquired skills and labour market demands and small wages favour the emigration of young people. The participation and interest of young people in politics are low, coupled with low youth voter turnout and low confidence in the voting process and a glaring lack of trust in public institutions. Involvement of youth in policy-making processes remains low, while there are weaknesses in existing participatory mechanisms aimed to involve young people. Participation of young people from vulnerable groups is missing.

Moldova lacks an effective and operative coordination mechanism for youth legislation, policies and interventions across different sectors and organisations, while the share of youth expenditures on all levels is largely insignificant. **The youth sector is underappreciated and misunderstood** by the influential actors outside the sector. Local participatory structures (youth councils, pupils’ councils, youth CSOs or youth wings of political parties) are not present or accessible in all districts or to most vulnerable adolescents and have limited resources. The local framework for the provision of youth services is underdeveloped, and capacities for provision of youth services are limited, while accreditation and efficiency mechanisms are currently lacking. Adolescent’s parent’s parental abilities are limited. There is low awareness of existing youth services and opportunities.

Recommendations

Raise the efficiency and quality of the process of participation of children, adolescents and young people in decision-making processes, including by strengthening the participatory mechanisms at all levels of decision-making and paying special attention to feedback and outreach mechanisms to youth with diverse backgrounds, including through affirmative actions. At the same time, also strengthen the tools for monitoring, evaluation and protection of the young people in the participation process.

Support young people’s greater access to decent work and productive employment, including by stimulating the youth labour demand and prompt improvements in skills development systems, with the objective of easing the school-to-work transition and reducing the youth NEET rate. This would require closer cooperation between the education system and the labour market. At the same time, continue to develop programmes targeting most difficult to reach youth and inactive youth, including NEETs and continue supporting and encouraging social entrepreneurship, small business development and social projects of their interests.

Revise and strengthen the budgeting for youth activities at the local level, including by introducing specific guidelines, strengthening youth councils, and at the same time build capacities and incentivise local authorities to mainstream youth in their local developments strategies and programs.

Strengthen youth electoral participation at the local, regional and national level, including by exploring and developing incentives for their increased engagement as well as develop training programmes to support participatory processes as an electoral candidate in local and national election campaigns. This should be coupled with information and education programs to foster proactive and positive attitudes towards political engagement.

Raise-awareness among the young people and the adults on the importance of youth participation in all spheres and sectors and continue building capacities of professionals working with children and young people. This would also require developing textbooks and technology in the field of participation. Also promote democratic, participatory tools that use selection patterns based on open and transparent voting and ensure the youth rotation. Develop effective programmes targeting adolescent's parents, including incorporate necessary modules on encouraging civic and other forms of participation of young people in society.

Continue strengthening capacities of key youth national organizations to contribute to the policy-making of central executive authorities, the Government and the Parliament alongside with strengthening advocacy and leadership skills to promote topics on the public and institutional agenda in the interests of the young people.

Expanding the youth infrastructures, such as youth centre, with a sustainability component in mind, including exploring the integration of centres with existing infrastructure (i.e., schools, NGOs, etc.), including exploring the possibility of the public-private partnership. Strengthen quality assurance of youth services, including by developing/strengthening clear regulations, procurement practices and system of accreditation of youth services.

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Acronyms

| | |
|---------|--|
| APL1 | Local Public Administration (first tier - locality level) |
| APL2 | Local Public Administration (second tier - rayon level) |
| APSCF | The Alliance of Active NGOs in the field of Child and Family Social Protection (APSCF) |
| NBS | National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova |
| CES | Special Educational Needs |
| CPS MD | Child Protection Strategy 2014-2020 of the Republic of Moldova |
| KAP | Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MAI | Ministry of Internal Affairs |
| MCFB | Cross-sectoral Mechanism for Child and Family Welfare |
| MEcon | Ministry of Economy |
| MECR | Ministry of Education, Culture and Research |
| MF | Ministry of Finance |
| MJ | Ministry of Justice |
| MSMPS | Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection |
| NCPRC | National Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) |
| OSCs | Civil Society Organisations |
| SAIS | Social Assistance Integrated System |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| STAS | Territorial Structure of Social Assistance (APL2) |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| UN GII | The United Nations Gender Inequality Index |
| UN HDI | The United Nations Human Development Index |
| UN IHDI | Inequality-adjusted UN HDI |
| UN MDGs | The United Nations Millennium Development Goals |
| UN SDGs | The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals |
| UNCRC | United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child |
| UNICEF | United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund |
| VAC | Violence Against Children |
| WB | The World Bank |

Country overview

Demographic profile

The Republic of Moldova is going through a demographic transition characterised by reduced fertility rate, rather low life expectancy, increasing ageing population and intense outmigration. In 2019, the resident population of the country was 3,5 million persons, a decrease for 4,8 thousand in the least year.³ If current trends continue the population of the country may decrease by 28.4 per cent in 2035.⁴

The number of children is decreasing. In 2018, 18.9 per cent of the population, or 669,6 thousand were children. This is 0,5 percentage points decline in comparison to 2015 (19.4 per cent).⁵ Relatively high mortality rate, low life expectancy and the low birth rate contribute to population ageing.⁶ Child dependency ration in 2018 was 28 per cent.⁷ Ageing has essential social and economic consequences, placing pressure on pension and health systems, and limiting the country's work-age population and its long-term competitiveness.

Table 1: Key demographic indicators

| | 2015 | 2018 |
|--|-------|-------|
| Number of children | 690,9 | 669,6 |
| Share of children in the total population | 19.4% | 18.9% |
| Child dependency ratio | 21.1% | 28% |
| Fertility rate | 1.82 | 1.82 |
| Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) | 9.0 | 9.1 |

Source: National Bureau of Statistics

There are vast rural-urban inequalities affecting all aspects of life and access to services. 56.9 per cent of Moldova's population lives in a rural area, while 68.8 per cent of the total migrants come from rural areas.⁸ 16.3 per cent of the rural population lives below the national poverty line, compared to 5 per cent in urban areas. Children living in rural areas are lagging behind most of the socio-economic indicators, while also facing unequal access to quality services. There are very large differences in the level of infrastructure, with only 43 per cent of the rural population having access to drinking water.⁹ There are inequalities in access in education, as highlighted by rural-urban parity index.¹⁰

Intense age-specific outmigration, related to work or family reunification, is significantly affecting Moldovan demographics and economy.¹¹ In 2018, 352,7 thousand Moldavians were working abroad, 15.4 per cent (54,2 thousand) were between 15-24 years of age and 38,6 per cent (136,2 thousand) between 24-34 years of age.¹² The unofficial number of those who left the country is believed to be much higher, due to poor capturing of the migration flows. Labour migration is largely determined by the lack of employment opportunities and low wages in the domestic market and is

³ National Bureau of statistics. 2018. Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova, <http://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?l=en&idc=263&id=2193>

⁴ UNFPA, 2016. Population Situation Analysis, <https://moldova.unfpa.org/en/publications/population-situation-analysis-0>

⁵ National Bureau of Statistics, 2018. The situation of children in the Republic of Moldova in 2018, <http://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=en&idc=168&id=6379>

⁶ UNFPA, 2016. Population Situation Analysis, <https://moldova.unfpa.org/en/publications/population-situation-analysis-0>

⁷ National Bureau of Statistics, 2018. The situation of children in the Republic of Moldova in 2018, <http://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=en&idc=168&id=6379>

⁸ The Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2018. Sixth Periodic Report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Moldova, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/cedaw_6_state_report_eng.pdf

⁹ World Bank Group, 2016. Poverty Reduction and Shared Prosperity in Moldova: Progress and Prospects, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/715861467989513808/pdf/105722-WP-P151472-PUBLIC-ROMANIAN-MoldovaPoverty-Assessment-2016.pdf>

¹⁰ 0.68 for pre-school education and primary education (2008/9: 0.68) and 0.75 for gymnasium (2008/9: 0.91) (UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished])

¹¹ UNFPA, 2017. Demography matters. How population dynamics impacts the economy of the Republic of Moldova?, <https://moldova.unfpa.org/en/publications/demography-matters-how-population-dynamics-impacts-economy-republic-moldova-0>

¹² National Bureau of Statistics, 2018. Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova, <http://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?l=en&idc=263&id=2193>

particularly affecting the rural area. This situation has left significant children with one or both migrating parents abroad (14.5 per cent of the total number in 2012).¹³ The numbers are also indicating increasing second generation of the diaspora of Moldovan emigrants and rising, although still relatively small level of reintegration of Moldovan migrant families abroad (5 per cent of long-term migrants), especially by joining children with parents abroad. This may have important demographic consequences, as the intention to return is lower among the respective category of migrants.¹⁴ In 2016, 4,080 foreign citizens received residence permit (permanent and temporary) – 21.3 per cent for education and 35.3 per cent for family immigration.¹⁵

Political Economy and Governance

Political instability, multiple central government reforms and continuous changes in government and, as consequence preparations for new elections, affect the robust advancement of child-related reforms and the introduction of quality programmes and services for children at the local level.¹⁶ After the crisis in early 2019 after parliamentary elections, that was characterised by three months non-conclusive attempts to form a government,¹⁷ Moldova's fragile coalition government collapsed in November 2019 over the dispute over the method of appointment of the nation's top prosecutor, setting the process of a forming a new coalition.¹⁸

Despite that European Integration continues to be a political priority for all the successive government, the implementation of widespread reform agendas (public financial management, pension system, salary reform, employment reform, reform in the area of disability, etc.) lacks behind. A weak economy, polarized society, volatile political environment, and vested interests severely slowed down these process and related investments.¹⁹ This also affects the implementation of Chapter 27 of the EU – Moldova Association Agreement, dedicated to children's rights.

The state of democracy in the country is being criticised on several occasions, particularly highlighting the crisis of the rule of law, characterised by selective and non-transparent justice.²⁰ There is general distrust in politicians and political structures. Although tackling corruption has been placed on the agenda of pervious Government,²¹ the corruption remains ingrained in politics and society, affecting the quality of life for ordinary Moldovans, depleting resources for sectors, such as education and health. Moldova scored low 33 out of 100, taking the 117 out of 180 places in the Corruption Perception Index in 2018 (an improvement from 123rd place in 2018).²² The corruption, lack of trust in the judiciary and incoherent policies are also affecting the overall business environment and investment climate.

The 2017 reform of the Government reduced the number of ministries from 16 to 9 via absorption, aiming to decrease expenditure on staff and logistics. It also modified resource allocations and

¹³ The Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2018. Sixth Periodic Report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Moldova, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/cedaw_6_state_report_eng.pdf

¹⁴ IOM. Migration Governance Snapshot: The Republic of Moldova, <https://migrationdataportal.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/MGI%20report%20Moldova.pdf>

¹⁵ The Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2018. Sixth Periodic Report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Moldova, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/cedaw_6_state_report_eng.pdf

¹⁶ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018. <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

¹⁷ European Commission, 2018. Association Implementation Report on Moldova, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/swd_2019_325_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v10_p1_1045191.pdf

¹⁸ Financial Times. Moldovan government collapses after appointment dispute, <https://www.ft.com/content/8b08eafc-0548-11ea-9afa-d9e2401fa7ca>

¹⁹ The World Bank. Moldova Economic Update, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/298561557681989788/Moldova-Economic-Update-Spring-2019-final-EN.pdf>

²⁰ European Commission, 2018. Association Implementation Report on Moldova, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/swd_2019_325_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v10_p1_1045191.pdf

²¹ European Commission, 2018. Association Implementation Report on Moldova, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/swd_2019_325_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v10_p1_1045191.pdf

²² Transparency International. Moldova, <https://www.transparency.org/country/MDA>

ministry staff and led to the merging of the ministry responsible for social and health and ministry responsible for youth and education.²³ **Mergers require sufficed time for readjusting the roles and responsibilities on all levels.**

The fragmented territorial-administrative structure and the incomplete decentralization process continue to result in the very low capacity of local governments to invest in social development. There are 982 administrative constituencies (first-level settlements) with their own mayor and 32 second-level districts and three municipalities (Balti, Bender and Chisinau), one autonomous territorial unit (Gagauzia) and the breakaway region of Transnistria.²⁴ The decentralization reform, which began in 2013, aimed to strengthen the capacity of local public authorities to improve the management and quality of public services provided to citizens. The reform also brought responsibility for most primary and specialized social protection services to the local level. Nevertheless, the process remains incomplete and provision of services at the local level inadequate, including due to severely insufficient funding and modest financial autonomy of local authorities, an unclear delegation of roles and responsibilities from the central to the local level and lack of ownership for the service. Furthermore, the alienation of local governments from decision-making processes, various misconceptions about the decentralization process and limited understanding by local public authorities of public finance mechanisms is posing additional constraints to the process. This affects services linked to early childhood education, child and social protection services and youth programmes.²⁵

Moldova's gross domestic product (GDP) growth, predominantly driven by consumption and fuelled by remittances, has averaged around 4.5 per cent a year since 2010 and has slowed to 4 per cent in 2018.²⁶ Remittances present a very significant support system for poor families in Moldova – in 2018 constituted 16.2 per cent of the GDP (middle-income countries average is 5.8 per cent). This is a significant decrease since 2013 (23,1 per cent).²⁷ Against the background of lower remittances, projected weaker foreign and domestic demand, economic growth is also expected to decelerate below historical values in 2019-2021.²⁸ The agricultural sector currently generates around 15 per cent of the Moldovan GDP, 50 per cent is the market sector. Dependency on remittances and pensions are posing significant and growing risks to sustainable progress. Besides, the poorest are increasingly vulnerable to climate shocks.²⁹

Economic growth has not led to an equal increase in informal job opportunities, especially for young people and women with children, but rather growth of informal employment or stimulated migration.³⁰ Despite the progress achieved in reducing poverty, the Republic of Moldova remains one of the poorest countries in Europe. Poverty among children (11.5 per cent) continued to be higher than the general poverty rate of 9.6 per cent.³¹ Larger household with three or more children are particularly more vulnerable to poverty (23 per cent in 2015), especially those in rural areas and among Roma. The incomes of households with children are substantially lower than the incomes of households without children.³² Demographic trends and economic situation have affected the traditional family structure, the rise of multi-generational households where young families and the

²³ European Commission, 2018. Association Implementation Report on Moldova, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/swd_2019_325_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v10_p1_1045191.pdf

²⁴ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

²⁵ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

²⁶ European Commission, 2018. Association Implementation Report on Moldova, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/swd_2019_325_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v10_p1_1045191.pdf

²⁷ World Bank Data, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=MD&most_recent_value_desc=false

²⁸ World Bank. Moldova Economic Update. <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/298561557681989788/Moldova-Economic-Update-Spring-2019-final-EN.pdf>

²⁹ UNPFA, 2017. Demography matters. How population dynamics impacts the economy of the Republic of Moldova?

³⁰ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis of 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

³¹ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

³² National Bureau of Statistics, 2018. The situation of children in the Republic of Moldova in 2018, <http://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=en&idc=168&id=6379>

elderly are living together sharing resources. These trends place the current reform of the pension system as an increasingly important pillar for child poverty reduction.³³

Income, spatial and intergroup social and income inequalities persist, especially in relation to unequal access to goods and services, particularly affecting children in rural areas, ethnic minorities and with disability. Nevertheless, the degree of income inequality registered by Gini coefficient is registering an unstable tendency of slow decline. The Human Development Index (HDI) value for Moldova in 2017 is 0.700, positioning the country at 112 out of 189 countries and territories and classifying it in a high human development category. Despite the slight increase, the country still lags behind the average for Europe and Central Asia.³⁴

The breakaway region of Transnistria, with about half of million inhabitants, remains out of control of Moldovan constitutional authorities, which also impedes the implementation of the UNCRC. The region's de facto administration accepted humanitarian and social support from the EU but avoided serious engagement with the Republic of Moldova's EU association process, promoting the rhetoric of the Eurasian Union integration.³⁵ In recent years, slow progress has been achieved implementing the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) negotiated 'package of eight' confidence-building measures related to transit, education, agriculture and telecommunications.³⁶ Nevertheless, political instability and related forthcoming presidential elections, are creating a risk for a further slowdown of important reforms.³⁷ Equally, human rights and the rule of law in the Transnistrian region remain of serious concern for the international community.

Public finance

The very large informal economy, combined with the predominance of agriculture and dependency on remittances from abroad, makes the Moldovan economy vulnerable to external shocks and limits the fiscal space for investment in social services for children and their families.³⁸ The public revenues and expenditures registered increases in recent years, including for 8.6 per cent compared to 2017 on the back of solid growth and tax administration reforms. Nevertheless, the fiscal situation has deteriorated significantly in 2019 following cuts to personal income tax rates and the increase in public sector wages and social packages.³⁹

The national budget is not designed in a way to allow for easy tracking of the resources spent of children youth and gender. In 2017, the **Government allocated 64 per cent of its budget to social services**: 34 per cent on social protection (12 per cent of the GDP), 17 per cent on education (6 per cent of the GDP), and 13 per cent on health (4 per cent of the GDP).⁴⁰ Allocations for youth and culture remains minimal at 2 per cent.⁴¹ Social protection, mainly due to high old age-related expenditure, is taking up a high share of the GDP. The percentage of GDP for social services has remained at a similar level as 2015.

³³ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Cash-Based Social Protection for Children in the Republic of Moldova. Chisinau. 2018.

³⁴ UNDP. Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update. Republic of Moldova, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/MDA.pdf

³⁵ UNPFA. 2017. Demography matters. How population dynamics impacts the economy of the Republic of Moldova?

³⁶ European Commission 2018. Association Implementation Report on Moldova, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/swd_2019_325_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v10_p1_1045191.pdf, https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Moldova_2018_COAR.pdf

³⁷ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

³⁸ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

³⁹ European Commission 2018. Association Implementation Report on Moldova, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/swd_2019_325_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v10_p1_1045191.pdf

⁴⁰ The data provided by UNICEF

⁴¹ Authors' calculations in the UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis

However, there is a **lack of efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditures**, as there is a continuing increase of disparities between rural and urban areas. This is partially due to the extreme **fragmentation of Moldova's administrative-territorial organization**, which creates large inefficiencies in public expenditures at the local level.⁴² There is an absence of a strategy for ensuring the efficient and effective use of resources,⁴³ with efficiency mechanisms, financial and costing and procurement instruments lacking in most sectors.⁴⁴ There is a continuous need for public spending optimisation efforts, including in education, coupled with **efforts to improve** also the quality of provided services.

Moldova's score of 7 out of 100 in public participation in budgetary processes (average score is 12) on budget transparency index, providing few opportunities for the public to engage in the budget process,⁴⁵ as also confirmed by other existing studies.⁴⁶

This challenging socio-economic and political environment additionally reduced development assistance to Moldova,⁴⁷ additionally to already declining trend ODA to countries operating in the middle-income context. In 2018, European Union recalibrate and reduce its financial assistance placing EU budget support programmes on hold in 2018.⁴⁸ Although donors are engaged, social and child protection spending is not priority of most of the donors, compared to measures to activate population, aiming to reverse high emigration trend.⁴⁹

Stakeholders

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection is the central authority mandated to develop, promote and monitor the realization of state policy in the area of child protection.⁵⁰ In June 2019, there were five people working in the Family and Child Protection Department. In 2014, **Children's Advisory Council** had been established as a children's consultative body to the ministry but had not held any meetings in 2018.⁵¹ Furthermore, the effective work of the ministry is affected by frequent staff turnover, political instability, and weak institutional human and financial resources.⁵²

The National Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (CNPDC), since 2015 under the prime minister's office, is the principal body responsible for ensuring the development and implementation of policies of children's rights and ensuring cross-sectoral coordination at both national and local levels.⁵³ The Council has a consultative mandate for policymaking and works based on annual plans, the latest being developed for 2018-2019, after a gap of three years.⁵⁴ There are no representatives of local authorities in the CNPDC, while children participate indirectly through NGOs.

⁴² UNICEF Moldova. Internal briefing document.

⁴³ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Cash-Based Social Protection for Children in the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018.

⁴⁴ Centru de Resurse Pentru Drapturile Omului, 2018. Mid-term review of the implementation of the National Strategy for Development of the Youth Sector 2020 [unpublished]

⁴⁵ International Budget. Open budget survey 2017. Republic of Moldova, <https://www.internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/moldova-open-budget-survey-2017-summary.pdf>

⁴⁶ Assessment of the effect of decentralisation on participation

⁴⁷ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

⁴⁸ European Commission 2018. Association Implementation Report on Moldova, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/swd_2019_325_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v10_p1_1045191.pdf

⁴⁹ Interview with UNICEF

⁵⁰ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Feasibility Study. on the opportunities and concerns related to accession by the Republic of Moldova to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure. Chisinau, 2018.

⁵¹ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Bottlenecks and barriers for youth and adolescents' engagement in the decision-making process, Chisinau, 2018

⁵² Academia Română & Cerme Research, 2019. Mid-term Evaluation of Implementation of the Child Protection Strategy 2014-2020 and its Action Plan for 2016-2020 [2nd draft report]

⁵³ The Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2018. Sixth Periodic Report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Moldova, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/cedaw_6_state_report_eng.pdf

⁵⁴ Consiliul Național pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului. Planul de activitate al Consiliului Național pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului pentru anii 2018-2019, https://cnpdc.gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/plan_20182019_vfinal_semnat_0.pdf

Capacities of the CNPCD, as well as status, are in need of strengthening. **District, Municipal and local for the Protection of the Rights of the Child** are responsible for local coordination and implementation and monitoring of the policies. According to activity report 2018, councils had from 2 to 6 meetings per year in 2018,⁵⁵ including some of them have elaborated local programs and action plans regarding the protection of the rights of the child and the family. Eleven territorial guardianship authorities in setting up **Consultative Councils of Children to monitor the** quality of social services provided at the local level by means of consulting with children who were beneficiaries of such services.⁵⁶

Local public authorities are responsible for provision of social housing and of other facilities for vulnerable members of the population (level I) and for coordinating and managing social assistance institutions at the district level and developing and monitoring community social services (local authorities at the level II). The cases of violation of the rights of the children are solved to a great extent through the **guardianship authorities that operate in each district/municipality** and at the local level. Nevertheless, only a limited number of local guardianship authorities have employed the child rights protection specialists, limiting the implementation of the laws, while existing staff working in social protection are lacking necessary skills and capacities.⁵⁷

The governing structure at district and local level, that are relevant for children, includes several committees (Protection of Children in Difficulty, Protection of Vulnerable and At-risk Children, Disability Assessment, District and Local Committees for Financial Support of Socially Vulnerable Families), which are often represented by some members, while the direct representation of beneficiaries, including children, is limited. There is a need to coordinate the functioning of existing committees, both at central and local levels, as well as there is a room for clarifying their roles and responsibilities.⁵⁸

People's Advocate for the Rights of the Child⁵⁹ was finally appointed in the spring of 2016 after a three-year gap. The Child Rights Advocate has the right to act *ex officio* to assist the child who is in difficulty or in a situation of risk, without requesting the agreement of the parent or his legal representative, but cannot directly represent persons before the public authorities or before the courts. In 2016, the Child Rights Advocate received 96 complaints on alleged violations of child rights, 65 were investigated, only 7 per cent from children.⁶⁰ Its child line is not accessible from mobile phones. The continues to operate with limited resources, while granting institutional and financial independence and align its funding, mandate and immunities with Paris Principles, as recommended by the UNCRC, might increase the efficiency of the office.⁶¹

About 90 CSOs working for children are organized in a national coalition called the Alliance of Non-Governmental Organizations Active in the Field of Social Protection of Children and their Family (APSCF). Nevertheless, child-focused CSOs are mostly active in service provision and less so in advocacy and high-level policy dialogue. There is a sense of competition for limited resources among the NGOs.⁶² Local NGOs are mostly active in Chisinau and its suburbs, being primarily involved in small-scale social services projects co-financed by the local public administration. Both current

⁵⁵ Consiliul Național pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului. Notă informativă cu privire la activitățile realizate de către Consiliile Raionale pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului pe parcursul anului 2018, https://cnpdc.gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/nota_activitatea_crpdc2018_final.pdf

⁵⁶ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Bottlenecks and barriers for youth and adolescents' engagement in the decision-making process, Chisinau, 2018

⁵⁷ Law no. 140 from 14.06.2013 on Special Protection of Children at Risk and Children Separated from their Parents, Article 6.

⁵⁸ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Cash-Based Social Protection for Children in the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018.

⁵⁹ The Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2018. Sixth Periodic Report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Moldova, https://msmgs.gov.md/sites/default/files/cedaw_6_state_report_eng.pdf

⁶⁰ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Feasibility Study on the opportunities and concerns related to accession by the Republic of Moldova to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure. Chisinau, 2018.

⁶¹ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

⁶² USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last ten years – Executive Summary. September 2017

research and other studies on CSOs show that only 1/4 of CSOs registered in the Republic of Moldova are active.⁶³ A Strategy for Civil Society Development covering the years 2018 to 2020 was adopted by the Parliament in March 2018.

Gender Profile

Gender stereotypes, patriarchal attitudes and associated gender-based discrimination and violence are prevalent throughout Moldova hindering the development of the country and restricting its ability to fully realize its available human capabilities. Traditional gender roles typically assign women and girls to the private, unpaid domestic sphere, and men and boys to the public paid working sphere.⁶⁴ The 2017 Gender Barometer Study conducted in Moldova found that only 20.5% of survey participants lacked gender stereotypes related to family decision-making roles and perceptions on men's role as primary breadwinners,⁶⁵ with very slow progress achieved over time. Families and upbringing tend to reinforce gender stereotypes, with revealed communication gaps and habits reinforcing gender stereotypes in families.⁶⁶ Those remain prevalent among adolescent girls and boys, as found by the recent studies.⁶⁷ Diminished status in the society and family life often leads to such negative phenomena as violence against women, domestic violence, sexual harassment, etc., which remains widespread in Moldova, with both women and children as primary victims. Early experiences in the home influence the future behaviour of both boys and girls, normalize gender-based violence, and encourage a culture of toxic masculinity,⁶⁸ while it also perpetuated vicious circle of violence.

The legislative and policy framework in the field of gender equality has been strengthened. The Istanbul Convention in 2017 still awaits the ratification of the Parliament. In 2016, a total of 15 legal acts were amended and supplemented to improve alignment with international standards in the field of gender equality.⁶⁹ Additionally, Strategy for ensuring equality between women and men for the years 2017-2021, have been adopted and institutional mechanism structured in the field of gender equality (from Coordinating Governmental Commission to gender units in local public authorities.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the laws and policies are implemented only partially or with substantial delays largely due to bureaucratic inefficiencies of public institutions, deep-seated patriarchal norms, resistance to change, insufficient understanding and commitment by responsible authorities, weak monitoring and accountability mechanisms, the emigration of potential agents of change, budgetary constraints and over-reliance on donors.⁷¹

The position of the country on global indexes is marginally improving, 2017 GII of 0.226 ranked Moldova 48 out of 160 countries (2014: 0.248), while **Gender Equality Index** that measures six impact areas (labour market, policy, education, access to resources, perceptions and stereotypes, and health), as ranked in 2009, 2015, 2016, and 2017 shows that, overall, gender equality has improved by a single point.⁷²

Legal amendments (Broadcasting Code, Law on Press, Law on Advertising, Contravention Code)

⁶³ Ludmila Ciocan, 2018. Baseline study on social services for people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities and for vulnerable children

⁶⁴ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

⁶⁵ 'Partnership for Development' Center. 2017, Gender Barometer. How women and men participate in politics and in the decisional processes? UN Women / PNUD

⁶⁶ OECD, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

⁶⁷ OECD, 2018, Youth Well-Being Policy Review of Moldova, p. 87;

⁶⁸ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

⁶⁹ Council of Europe. Country Gender Equality Profile. Republic of Moldova, <https://rm.coe.int/090000168092d121>

⁷⁰ The Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2018. Sixth Periodic Report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Moldova, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/cedaw_6_state_report_eng.pdf

⁷¹ Council of Europe. Country Gender Equality Profile, <https://rm.coe.int/090000168092d121>; Government of the Republic of Moldova. CEDAW State Party Report, UNFPA. 2017. Demography matters. How population dynamics impacts the economy of the Republic of Moldova?

⁷² UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

and awareness-raising campaign, aimed to change the general public's beliefs and attitudes towards the role of women and men in the society were carried out, nevertheless sexist advertising persists⁷³ and media continue to play important role in reinforcing gender stereotypes. **Gender parity in Moldova is strong across all education levels., nevertheless, the boys considerably outnumber girls in vocational education and training; gender stereotypes seem to be influencing these disparities.**⁷⁴ Gender is an additional source of vulnerability and discrimination, particularly Roma girls, subject to child marriages, and girls with discrimination. The gender gap is persistent in most of the spheres in society (political, employment).

Table 2: Selected disaggregated indicators with wide gender disparities

| Selected indicators | Boys | Girls |
|--|------|-------|
| The suicide rate in children aged 15-19 (deaths per 100,000 children of that age) [2017] | 10.0 | 3.2 |
| NEET rate 15-17 years (young people not in training or education) [2018] | 7.9 | 5.5 |
| Number of children in prison at the end of the year [2018] | 43 | 3 |
| Number of children aged 0-17 with primary disability (new cases) [2018] | 824 | 414 |

Source: Various sources in NCPRC

Chapter 1: Social Inclusion of Vulnerable Children

Against a backdrop of sharp inequalities and persisting exclusion, inclusiveness has emerged as a major aspiration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, also reflected in its central pledge: that no one will be left behind.⁷⁵

Access to the social protection system is considered as a key element in ensuring non-discriminatory treatment and equal opportunities for all members of the society and a key support from the state to reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion. Social services system plays an important role in complementing the monetary support system, contributing significantly to a more efficient social inclusion. Those measures need to be well integrated with other policy domains, such as health and education, comprehensively addressing and preventing various mutually reinforcing vulnerabilities that can lead to social exclusion.

Although Moldova has made progress on legislative and policy level as well as in reducing monetary poverty levels, the rates remain high, particularly affecting children and households with children. In addition to monetary inequalities, most vulnerable groups of children, namely Roma, children with disabilities, children without parental care, among others, are exposed to social inequalities in education, health, access to quality services and participation. The unequal access to basic services and opportunities feeds a vicious cycle of disadvantage and exclusion. The most vulnerable children are often subject of multiple and intersecting discrimination based on their socio-economic status, disability and type of impairment, ethnic origin or other factors. Many of those tend to be of a systematic nature.⁷⁶

⁷³ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

⁷⁴ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

⁷⁵ United Nations, 2019. Report on the World Social Situation 2018, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2018/07/1-1.pdf>

⁷⁶ See, for example, report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities - Mission to the Republic of Moldova (A/HRC/31/62/Add.2)

The national poverty rate fell from 26 per cent in 2007 to 11.4 per cent in 2014. Children constituted 28 per cent of the poor in 2014.⁷⁷ In 2018, **15.6 per cent of children below the age of 16 (2010: 24.3, 2015: 17.6), and 14.7 per cent of young people between the age of 14-24 (2010: 19.5; 2015: 14.2) were at the risk of poverty.**⁷⁸ In 2015, the poverty rate for households with three or more children was almost three times the national average. There are pronounced rural-urban inequalities.⁷⁹ The progress in poverty reduction has been determined mainly by pensions and remittances, raising the concerns over the past achievements.⁸⁰ There are no recent studies of the effects of disability and ethnicity on poverty levels. Nevertheless, existing evidence points towards higher degrees of poverty among children with disabilities, despite various periodic and categorical disability allowances, while incidence and depth of poverty among Roma children is assessed as twice as high as non-Roma children.⁸¹ Poverty strikes children in many aspects of their lives, not only in terms of income security. Poverty affects the health and education of children living in poor households and leads to institutionalization and domestic violence. Poor children are more likely to be malnourished or die at home from preventable causes.⁸²

Disability presents another factor contributing to social exclusion. Children with disabilities constitute 1.9 per cent of the total number of children in the Republic of Moldova.⁸³ In 2017, 12,437 children were recognised with a disability, which presents a decrease from 2012 (14,706).⁸⁴ The actual number is believed to be much higher, including due to still predominately medical-based disability determination as well as limited outreach.⁸⁵ 60 per cent of children with disabilities are not in pre-school education.⁸⁶

In 2014, 0.3 per cent of the population declared themselves as Roma⁸⁷; a number that cannot be regarded as representative given the reluctance among Roma to self-identify as such due to strong stigma. There is no accurate data on Roma children. **And the situation of Roma children is of particular concern.** Roma children are most likely to be out of school and access to education also has a strong gender dimension - child marriages among adolescent Roma girls results in them often abandoning school and take a subservient role in the family. A child from a Roma community is less likely to have access to health services and more likely to die young, with a stark difference in access to health care between Roma and non-Roma groups. Roma children are less immunized.⁸⁸ A disproportionately large number of Roma children with disabilities live in extreme poverty and exclusion; those are also a particularly high risk of human trafficking for begging purposes.⁸⁹ The

⁷⁷ World Bank Group, 2016. Poverty Reduction and Shared Prosperity in Moldova: Progress and Prospects, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/715861467989513808/pdf/105722-WP-P151472-PUBLIC-ROMANIAN-MoldovaPoverty-Assessment-2016.pdf>

⁷⁸ National Bureau of Statistics in National Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child. Children of Moldova Indicators and Trends. <https://cnpdc.gov.md/ro/content/copiii-moldovei-indicatori-de-baza>

⁷⁹ Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure, 2017 in UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Annual Report, https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Moldova_2018_COAR.pdf

⁸⁰ World Bank Group, 2016. Poverty Reduction and Shared Prosperity in Moldova: Progress and Prospects, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/715861467989513808/pdf/105722-WP-P151472-PUBLIC-ROMANIAN-MoldovaPoverty-Assessment-2016.pdf>

⁸¹ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

⁸² United Nations, 2018. Promoting Inclusion Through Social Protection. Report on the World Social Situation 2018, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2018/07/1-1.pdf>

⁸³ The Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2018. Sixth Periodic Report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Moldova, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/cedaw_6_state_report_eng.pdf

⁸⁴ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

⁸⁵ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities - Mission to the Republic of Moldova (A/HRC/31/62/Add.2)

⁸⁶ United Nations, Republic of Moldova—United Nations Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development 2018–2022, <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/moldova/docs/pub/strateg/UNDAF%20Moldova%20EN.pdf>

⁸⁷ National Bureau of Statistics, 2014 Housing and Population Census results, <https://recensamant.statistica.md/ro/dissemination/person/831665b12c97364750a2cef831604d80>

⁸⁸ UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues. Mission to the Republic of Moldova, https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/34/53/Add.2

⁸⁹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities - Mission to the Republic of Moldova (A/HRC/31/62/Add.2)

incidences of statelessness,⁹⁰ lack of registration and lack of identity documents, additionally contributes to the limited ability of Roma communities to exercise their rights.⁹¹

In 2018, 1,484 children were in **residential institutions**, out of those, 338 were with disabilities.⁹² This is a strong decrease since 2015 (2,214),⁹³ owing to the intensified efforts of the alternative care reform.⁹⁴ Living in an institution has proven long-term negative impacts and causes profound delays in nearly all areas of development, including on children's cognitive and emotional development. Studies found that poverty is the most important reason for child institutionalization, while disability prolongs the stay in institutions.⁹⁵ Stigmatisation, discrimination and gender roles also continue to have an influence on the decision to place a child in institutional care.

There is a high number of children left without parental care due to emigration of one or both parents. In 2018 out of the total number of households with children, 23.7 per cent were households with migrants, and the share of those from rural areas was twice as high as in the urban areas (68.7 per cent compared to 31.3 per cent).⁹⁶ 2018 Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice (KAP) 2018 study found that one in four children (22.8 per cent) under the age of seven have at least one or both parent abroad (a level similar to the 2009 survey, but higher than the one recorded in 2003).⁹⁷ While 2018 VAC study highlighted two out of five youth experienced fathers who migrated when at a young age (females, 43.5 per cent; males, 40.7 per cent).⁹⁸ The labour migration of parents, can be, on the one hand, beneficial in economic and financial terms. Nevertheless, the children left behind by migrant parents are deprived of parental care and emotional development and are more likely to adopt risky behaviour. They have a higher risk of school dropout and are at higher risk of becoming victims of violence, neglect and exploitation.⁹⁹

The United National Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) expressed concerns over a large number of **children in street situation, particularly in Chisinau**, and recommended state to take measures to address their situation.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, there is limited information and services dedicated to this group of children, and the responsiveness of the system to their needs is low resulting in children consistently running away from placement centres and their families.¹⁰¹ Other groups of children vulnerable for social exclusion are children of parents with HIV/AIDS, facing discrimination in the education system, and LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) children. Moldova does not have a framework for eliminating discrimination against LGBTI people.¹⁰²

⁹⁰ IOM Moldova. Victims of Trafficking: Statistical Profile 2018,

https://www.iom.md/sites/default/files/publications/Prevention%20and%20protection/pdf/VoT%20Profile%202018_MD_En.pdf

⁹¹ UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues. Mission to the Republic of Moldova,

https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/34/53/Add.2

⁹² Data provided by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection and the Ministry of Culture, Education and Research as of 31 December 2017 in Opening Doors for Europe's Children. 2018 Country fact sheet,

<https://www.openingdoors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/country-fiche-Moldova-2018.pdf>

⁹³ National Bureau of Statistics, 2018. The situation of children in the Republic of Moldova in 2018,

<http://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=en&idc=168&id=6379>

⁹⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities - Mission to the Republic of Moldova (A/HRC/31/62/Add.2)

⁹⁵ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis of 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

⁹⁶ National Bureau of Statistics, 2018. The situation of children in the Republic of Moldova in 2018,

<http://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=en&idc=168&id=6379>

⁹⁷ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Knowledge, attitudes and practices in early childhood development and care, Chisinau, 2018.

⁹⁸ The Violence Against Children Surveys, 2019. Executive Summary [unpublished]

⁹⁹ The Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2018. Sixth Periodic Report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Moldova,

https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/cedaw_6_state_report_eng.pdf

¹⁰⁰ Committee on the Rights of the Child. Concluding Observation for Moldova,

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARRegion/Pages/MDIndex.aspx>

¹⁰¹ Terres des Hommes, 2018. Children in Street Situations in the Republic of Moldova, <https://tdh-europe.org/library/children-in-street-situations-in-the-republic-of-moldova/7276>

¹⁰² UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

Legislative and policy framework

Multiple pieces of legislation have been developed directly or in-directly aiming to reduce poverty and social exclusion in Moldova. This ranges from the overreaching social protection legislative and policy framework regulated by more than 60 laws and government decisions to legislation targeting specific groups, most vulnerable for social inclusion (Roma, persons with a disability, children without parental care). The progress has been achieved in mainstreaming of social inclusion in some of the sectorial policies (i.e., education); **nevertheless, overall, the sectorial policies and programmes have yet to systematically incorporate inclusiveness in their design and implementation.**¹⁰³

Furthermore, although, the existing framework is rather comprehensive, covering different age groups and situations, **there is a lack of integration of laws and policies comprehensively addressing the poverty and social exclusion in the country.** The links between social protection and education, early child development, health and active labour market policies remain weak. Special situations, are dealt with in silos and do not adequately integrate all sectors to maximize the use of available resources. The fact, that the social protection of vulnerable children and families from socioeconomic risks has not been clearly articulated as a national priority, including in specifically dedicated multi-sectoral strategy and other operational programmes, contributes to this lack of overall vision to address the social inclusion of most vulnerable children.¹⁰⁴ This is leading to a fragmented approach to vulnerability and loss of support efficiency.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, the existing social protection system in Moldova is, in **addressing particular risks and vulnerabilities focusing predominately on income deprivation, rather than tackling children's poverty from a multidimensional perspective.**¹⁰⁶ This is also reflected in the prevailing methodology of measuring poverty on income and consumption, while the attempts to introduce the multidimensional poverty index have stalled. The poverty is thus treated in a narrow way by various public policies, primarily from the perspective of monetary effects, without considering its multiple causes, which would allow more efficient targeting of resources and comprehensive approach of vulnerability and of vulnerable groups, including children.¹⁰⁷

The socio-economic vulnerabilities also continue to be mostly addressed post-fact as opposed to preventing them or their recurrence. The intended series of benefits and services for families with children mainly aimed at addressing risks once they have already materialized. **Thus the preventive approach to tackle social exclusion of children is largely missing.**¹⁰⁸

Governance and coordination

Inter-sectoral synergies and cooperation remain challenging and coordination of social protection, health, education to promote the social inclusion of vulnerable groups is weak. The lack of policy integration described above, coupled with excessive sector-based fragmentation of measures aiming to address social inclusion and poverty contributes to weakness in governance and coordination. The division of task related to poverty, such as monitoring, evaluation and analysis of poverty being entrusted to the Ministry of Economy and anti-poverty policy formulation belonging to the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family is also affecting the integrated approach of anti-poverty

¹⁰³ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

¹⁰⁴ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Cash-Based Social Protection for Children in the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau

¹⁰⁵ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

¹⁰⁶ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Cash-Based Social Protection for Children in the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018

¹⁰⁷ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

¹⁰⁸ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Cash-Based Social Protection for Children in the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018.

measures.¹⁰⁹ There is also no institutionalized inter-sectoral coordination for monitoring child poverty.¹¹⁰

At the service provision level, in 2014, the Government approved the establishment of territorial multi-disciplinary teams coordinated by community social assistants to promote horizontal coordination in the provision of social assistance and services. However, the coordination remains reactive and on a case-by-case basis.¹¹¹ The social benefits are poorly coordinated with community-based social services.¹¹² With many key services lacking, referral mechanisms cannot also function as intended. In February 2018, Instruction on the intersectoral cooperation mechanism for the primary prevention of risks regarding child welfare had been adopted to strengthen preventive response and address the possible risk of vulnerabilities among children within different sectors. However, this was not followed-up with the necessary trainings for professionals outside of social sector, i.e., for health and education professionals. Many stakeholders at central and local levels remain unaware of this mechanism.

Budgeting and finance

The financial mechanisms to reach ambitious goals and targets set in a broad policy framework are weak and insufficient. The social protection spending in Moldova in 2017 represented 12.6 per cent of GDP, quite high by regional standards, but below EU countries (about 30 per cent), 7.5 per cent is spent on social insurance (mostly pensions) and only 2 per cent on social assistance programmes.¹¹³ Budget projections for 2019, showed an increase in allocations for social protection in nominal terms (for 2 191 million Lei), expecting to reach 11.1 per cent of the GDP (thus, reduction from 2018) and 33.6 per cent of the national budget.¹¹⁴ Allocations for pensions are taking up the biggest share of available resources. Low allocations for social protection, coupled with the relatively low contribution of existing schemes to poverty elevation of children, leads to the conclusion **that the vast majority of social protection spending is allocated to benefits and services that are not a child- or poverty-focused.**¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, the analysis of the State Budget expenditures for social services and social assistance measures targeting children and families with children (Annex 1), indicates an increase of the budget from total of 415,094 MDL in 2014 to 538,412 MDL in 2018 (an increase from 76,218 beneficiaries to 83,265 beneficiaries).¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, this remains far away to address the actual needs on the ground.

Although recent studies found a slight increase in local authority's budgets for social services, they continue to depend heavily on the national budget, while the current level of spending is anaemic and unable to cover demand. Most of the budget increases for social services are coming from a national budget, **while only 10 out of 35 local authorities invested in the new services,** or their expansion between 2015-2017. The opportunities to raise their own funds are not exploited by all LPAs, especially of the first level (localities), while fiscal decentralization has failed to ensure that LPAs have clear mechanisms (fees they can impose, taxes they can collect, etc.) through which to increase their own revenues. **The analysis of local budget data shows that the competencies attributed to LPAs are far greater than the latter's financial capabilities.**¹¹⁷ Coupled with other challenges with the decentralisation processes (misconceptions around the processes, unclear rules,

¹⁰⁹ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

¹¹⁰ USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last ten years – Executive Summary. September 2017

¹¹¹ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

¹¹² UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Cash-Based Social Protection for Children in the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018.

¹¹³ International Labour Organization, 2017 in UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Annual Report,

https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Moldova_2018_COAR.pdf

¹¹⁴ Bugetul Republicii Moldova. Pentru Anul 2019, http://mf.gov.md/sites/default/files/bugetul_pentru_cetateni_2019_0.pdf

¹¹⁵ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

¹¹⁶ Academia Română & Cerme Research, 2019. Mid-term Evaluation of Implementation of the Child Protection Strategy 2014-2020 and its Action Plan for 2016-2020 [2nd draft report]

¹¹⁷ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Assessment study. The impact of fiscal decentralisation on local public authorities' planning and budgeting of services for children and youth. Chisinau, 2018.

lack of ownership, etc.), existing studies indicate that decentralisation so far has not yet contributed significantly to the improved service provision and response to children in risk .

In order to improve the financial sustainability of social services at the local level, in 2018, the Government adopted a minimum package of four social services in the total amount of 70,019 thousand MDL¹¹⁸ transferred from the State Budget to the budget of the administrative-territorial units. The minimum package includes monetary support for disadvantaged people, family support (including money support) for family-type homes and foster care and personal assistance for people with severe disabilities. Despite this progress, the finances for the minimum service package are not part of the regular state budget and their height not ensured, the funds are not sufficient and waiting lists for some services being reported in most districts.¹¹⁹

There is no coherent method in place for social services costing and gap analysis to inform decision-making and planning, and there is reduced capacity of local authorities, implicitly, community social assistance services, in estimating the need for social services of target groups. In the recent study, 42 per cent of local authorities were not able to estimate service coverage for vulnerable children, based on the number of current service beneficiaries and the number of potential beneficiaries.¹²⁰ The lack of unit cost for social assistance services is perceived as an obstacle for the implementation of the social contracting mechanism and procurements.¹²¹ There are different approaches in the allocation of resources from the State budget in different ministries.¹²² The capacities of local authorities in the field of public financial management have been recognised as very low. Work to develop a funding formula for pre-schools and improve access to quality services, especially in rural areas, is under way.¹²³

An action plan focusing on effective and efficient financing of child protection services was developed, with support of UNICEF in Chisinau Municipality's in 2019, following by planned review of Municipality's education, health, social protection and youth sectors planned in near future. This should strengthen the financial allocation within the biggest municipality in Moldova. The budget planning and monitoring skill module for local authorities has been developed and rolled out;¹²⁴ nevertheless continuous efforts are needed to enhance capacities in public finance management of most of the local authorities.

Citizens participation in budget planning and approving of local budgets is weak or non-existent, with general information on budget's, where exists, not being presented in an accessible way. This reflects the general timid participatory and top-down nature of Moldovan – heavily centralised - public administration.¹²⁵

Data collection and use

Partial disaggregation of key information on vulnerable groups, including poverty-related data, undermines effective policymaking, including planning integrated services to reach most vulnerable and excluded. Most of the collected data are lacking disaggregation, including by age, sex, disability, geographic location, ethnic and national origin, migration status and socioeconomic

¹¹⁸ Ministerul Sănătății, Muncii și Protecției Sociale, 2018. Raport cu privire la realizarea în anul 2018 a Planului de acțiuni privind implementarea Programului național de incluziune socială a persoanelor cu dizabilități pentru anii 2017-2022, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/raportul_cu_privire_la_implementarea_in_anul_2018_a_programului_national_de_incluziune_sociala_a_persoanelor_cu_dizabilitati_0.pdf

¹¹⁹ Academia Română & Cerme Research, 2019. Mid-term Evaluation of Implementation of the Child Protection Strategy 2014-2020 and its Action Plan for 2016-2020 [2nd draft report]

¹²⁰ Ludmila Ciocan, 2018. Baseline study on social services for people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities and for vulnerable children

¹²¹ USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us USAID investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

¹²² UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Assessment study. The impact of fiscal decentralisation on local public authorities' planning and budgeting of services for children and youth. Chisinau, 2018.

¹²³ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018. <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

¹²⁴ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018. <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

¹²⁵ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Cash-Based Social Protection for Children in the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018.

background. This was also a gap highlighted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Moldovan's Concluding Observation. There are glaring data gaps on children with disability, Roma children and street children, and very limited information to understand their socioeconomic situation, specific conditions, family context as well as of the barriers they face in society.¹²⁶ There is a limited data collection on at-risk families.

The calculation of the poverty rates is measured using a basic needs approach and relies on consumption expenditure as an indicator of living standards,¹²⁷ with methodological weaknesses. **Although the methodology for calculating a multi-dimensional poverty index has been developed,**¹²⁸ this is unlikely to be applied in the near future. The poverty rates are calculated by the National Bureau of Statistics on an annual basis and used by the Ministry of Economy, which plays a coordinating role in poverty monitoring and further analysis. The line ministries are not involved in the analysis of the impact of poverty in their respective domains (i.e., health, education, social protection, etc.), although they are requested to validate the ones made by the Ministry of Economy. Although slight methodological correction has been done, routine and public poverty estimates are calculated with the head of the household as a base and not for individuals, such as children. Besides the overall poverty rates, calculations are made for various vulnerable groups, such as households with children, pensioners and farmers. However, no routine disaggregated estimations are yet available for individual headcount poverty rates, nor are there any officially published poverty rates for various age groups, including for children. Child poverty rates are currently calculated only upon special request, hindering the development and routine monitoring of effective policies for child poverty alleviation.¹²⁹ The last comprehensive data on poverty rates are available for 2015.

Moreover, there are no functional and institutionalized inter-sectoral mechanisms for the calculation and utilization of data and reports for policymaking on poverty alleviation and social inclusion in general, or for children in particular. Therefore, to date, the available information is not optimally used for policymaking, implementation and monitoring.¹³⁰ Monitoring and evaluation frameworks exist at the policy and institutional levels for various sectoral policies; however, those are in general focusing on reporting on the measures of certain policies and NAPs, while less time and resources are dedicated to analysing qualitative aspects of the implemented programmes.

There is no common database to support optimal coordination of services for each child, and/or for provision of comprehensive information on the vulnerable children across the policy domains. The electronic information system Social Assistance Integrated System (SAIS), designed to determine eligibility for social assistance benefits, is not being used as an instrument to fine-tune social protection policies and make them more focused on vulnerable children and their families.¹³¹ Although new modules were prescribed in legislation to include the Social inspectorate and National council for determination of disability and working capacity, the attempted module on child protection, which could possibly be also used for tracking deprivation profiles of specific districts, has not been materialized. Furthermore, the existing modules of SAIS, including on social assistance, are generally not being used to its maximum potential as a performance monitoring tool for evidence-based policy. The current functions of the system are prone to duplication, bureaucracy,

¹²⁶ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities - Mission to the Republic of Moldova (A/HRC/31/62/Add.2), UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues. Mission to the Republic of Moldova, https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/34/53/Add.2

¹²⁷ World Bank Group, 2016. Poverty Reduction and Shared Prosperity in Moldova: Progress and Prospects, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/715861467989513808/pdf/105722-WP-P151472-PUBLIC-ROMANIAN-MoldovaPoverty-Assessment-2016.pdf>

¹²⁸ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018. <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

¹²⁹ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

¹³⁰ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

¹³¹ USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last ten years – Executive Summary. September 2017

lack of coordination and fragmentation, impacting effective implementation of cash-based programmes and the granularity of reporting (for example, data on the number of cash-based programmes granted to an individual/family to determine their aggregate impact on poverty). SAAIS is also not being used for performance monitoring of local social assistance offices, while there is a need to build capacity for interpreting the limited generated data.¹³² **Thus, there is a room for improvement to utilize ICT solutions to support the integration of social services and cash transfers and provide an improvement on the oversight of the risks and deprivations children are facing.**

Harmful socio-cultural norms, practices and beliefs

The persistence of entrenched stereotypes, stigmatisation, prejudice and discrimination against children from certain groups, particularly Roma and children with disabilities, is reported as one of the main drivers contributing to social exclusion. The economic vulnerability is perceived as discrimination and element of humiliation. There are widespread negative perceptions of Roma, and acceptance of Roma people is low and decreasing, with only 12 per cent respondents in 2014 survey stating that they would accept Roma as neighbours, colleagues, friends or family members. A quarter of the respondents thought that Roma should be forced to live in segregated areas because of the perception that they did not integrate.¹³³

The stigmatization and exclusion of persons with disabilities continue to affect their ability to enjoy their human rights fully. Although a slight change in public perceptions with recent developments on inclusive education and shifting away from the medical model of disability determination has been noted, persons with disabilities still continue to be perceived as being devoid of agency and unable to make a positive contribution to society. Children with disabilities are often perceived as being abnormal or unhealthy and are reportedly at times seen as a burden to their family.¹³⁴ In 2018 knowledge, attitudes and practice study (KAP) study two-thirds of respondents believed that children with disability should be cared for at home or in residential institutions, while 24.5 per cent supported inclusive education (increase, compared to 5.2 per cent in 2009 and 5.6 per cent in 2003).¹³⁵ Children and people with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities are even more stigmatised, including owing to a deeply rooted social stigma that sees these persons as either sick or misfits. These stigmatizing views are interlinked with and are mutually reinforced by a lack of community support services, limiting the opportunities of children with disabilities to interact in society and thus to challenge stereotypes and stigma.¹³⁶

The economic vulnerability is perceived as a discrimination and humiliating element among adolescents. Parents revealed a different attitude of some teachers towards the pupils that are from families with the socio-vulnerable statuses and believe that professors marginalize them.¹³⁷

Availability, accessibility and quality of the services

Despite the gradual increase in the amount of allowances for children, the **low level of social benefits makes them largely ineffective in preventing, reducing and eliminating economic and social vulnerabilities, while their equity is not ensured.** Moldova social protection system provides for more than 60 different social schemes, which cause fragmentation and inefficiency since some population categories are entitled to multiple category-based benefits, while others are insufficiently covered or not covered at all. Apart from Ajutor Social, which is the main means-tested social

¹³² UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Cash-Based Social Protection for Children in the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018.

¹³³ UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues. Mission to the Republic of Moldova, https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/34/53/Add.2

¹³⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities - Mission to the Republic of Moldova (A/HRC/31/62/Add.2)

¹³⁵ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Knowledge, attitudes and practices in early childhood development and care, Chisinau, 2018.

¹³⁶ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities - Mission to the Republic of Moldova (A/HRC/31/62/Add.2)

¹³⁷ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Opinions and perceptions regarding parental education for parents/caregivers of adolescents from the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018.

benefits scheme¹³⁸ designed to guarantee a minimum living income for vulnerable families, other grants include child grant allowances, allowances for different categories of children deprived of parental care and allowance for children with disabilities.

The amount for all schemes, although marginally increasing in recent years, remains very low, and having little impact on a beneficiary's well-being. The majority of the cash-benefits do not reach a majority of the poorest income quintile.¹³⁹ The impact of Ajutor Social in 2014, was only a reduction of one percentage point for rural families, less than one percentage point in smaller towns and nil in big cities.¹⁴⁰ The increase of allowances was marginal since 2014 (the size of the allowance for children with disabilities increased for 1.7 times and for children without parental care on average 3.4 times; the child allowance for non-insured persons increased only for 140 lei, compared to an increase of 464,5 lei for insured persons).¹⁴¹ The average allocation for all above-described allowances, apart from the child allowances for insured persons, remain below the minimum income, which was in 2018 1,801 Lei for all children (an increase for 16.4 per cent in the last five years).¹⁴² There are discrepancies between the amount given to uninsured families, **indicating a lack of focus on reducing inequalities. Furthermore, the system denotes the existence of deficiencies of process, procedure and administration, while there is no clear method of establishing the amounts of benefits.**¹⁴³ **Cash-based programmes do not have a direct link to specific children focused outcomes** (health, child protection, education, leisure) and do not have comprehensive evaluation frameworks. For example, childcare allowances are not fully linked to early child development needs, as evidenced by the length of the benefit (2 years for uninsured and three years for insured families). In the absence of effective monitoring mechanisms, it remains challenging to determine to what extent, for example, is Ajutor Social used for enduring child's best interested.¹⁴⁴

The Government ambitious reform still needs to address the low performance of the various grants and transform the category-based social assistance into a more efficient poverty targeting system.¹⁴⁵

The analysis of the costing models aiming to fine-tune Moldova's main cash-based social assistance programme "Ajutor Social" was carried out in 2018, with the aim of achieving improved coverage for three priority sub-groups: households with three or more children, with a disabled child and single-parent households.¹⁴⁶ The findings of the exercise indicated relatively adequate targeting of the scheme, while they confirmed limited impact of the amount given on the poverty reduction.

Table 3: Data on child-related benefits [2017]

| Type of grants | Number of beneficiaries | Average amount |
|--|--|-----------------------|
| Social aid | 90,757 families (208,741 persons) [2017] | 827 lei per family |
| Child allowance – insured | 45.3 thousand beneficiaries | 1561.5 lei per person |
| Child allowance – uninsured | 6.8 thousand beneficiaries | 540.0 lei per person |
| Allowance for children with disabilities | 10.6 thousand children | 702.2 lei per child |
| Allowance for children without parental care | 5.4 thousand children | 577.4 lei |

Sources: MDDSD, [NBS](#)

¹³⁸ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

¹³⁹ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Cash-Based Social Protection for Children in the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018.

¹⁴⁰ Ministerul Sănătății, Muncii și Protecției Sociale, 2018. Raport Social Anual 2017, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_social_anual_2017_1.pdf

¹⁴¹ National Bureau of Statistics, 2018. The situation of children in the Republic of Moldova in 2018, <http://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?!=en&idc=168&id=6379>

¹⁴² UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

¹⁴³ Ministerul Sănătății, Muncii și Protecției Sociale, 2018. Raport Social Anual 2017, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_social_anual_2017_1.pdf

¹⁴⁴ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Cash-Based Social Protection for Children in the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018.

¹⁴⁵ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

¹⁴⁶ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

There are large discrepancies between social services aimed at the most vulnerable children stipulated in the legislation and those provided the facto. Current offer of social services at the local level does not meet the needs and fails to respond effectively to the vulnerable-increasing trend among children and people. The integration between social benefits and social services remain weak. Recent mapping of social services for children and families at the local level, reveals an uneven and insufficient development of these services. Although at least 2-3 types of services for vulnerable children were found in each district, development of new services has been severely lagging behind.¹⁴⁷ The minimum package of services that have been agreed in 2018 to be financed from the local budget, has allegedly ensured improved access to some extent, while the concerns over the sustainability of funding remain.

There are several gaps in the provision of specialised services, including for some vulnerable groups of children (conflict with the law, children with deviant behaviour, children/young adults after leaving alternative care) or/and ensuring the referral of these beneficiaries to services at the national level.¹⁴⁸ There is an **acute gap in services for street children**, particularly in Chisinau, while a recent study found that systems and professionals are not responsible for their needs, resulting in children consistently running away from placement centres and or their families, where they are taken by representatives of social services and/or police.¹⁴⁹

Only 12 per cent of children under the age of three with developmental delays benefit from early intervention services,¹⁵⁰ while the coverage is low and characterised with the unequal distribution. Although measures have been taken (trainings for specialists, plans for District Intervention Center for Laloveni and Floresti hospitals are on the way, approval of the university-level training curriculum)¹⁵¹ the funding mechanism for integrating social services and medical services has not been yet developed, creating additional delays,¹⁵² and slowing early intervention service provisions. The support services for persons with insufficient disabilities are distributed unevenly in the territory.¹⁵³ Children without recognised disability cannot access the services.

Challenges in the low availability of local specialists and high turnover of staff in the social provision of social protection include system in all child-related sectors (education, primary health care, youth and social assistance). In social assistance sectors, the social animators remain overburdened, lacking adequate skills and facing high-turnaround. Other challenges in provision of adequate services, include lack of the transport and necessary equipment, poor cooperation with other institutions, difficulties in implementing the legal framework and newly approved methodologies, etc. Although the system for accreditation has been established, the studies found that there is only partial **accreditation of social services for vulnerable children.**¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁷ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Cash-Based Social Protection for Children in the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018.

¹⁴⁸ USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last ten years – Executive Summary. September 2017

¹⁴⁹ Terres des Hommes, 2018. Children in Street Situations in the Republic of Moldova. <https://tdh-europe.org/library/children-in-street-situations-in-the-republic-of-moldova/7276>

¹⁵⁰ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Country Office Annual Report 2017, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

¹⁵¹ Ministerul Sănătății, Muncii și Protecției Sociale, 2018. Raport cu privire la realizarea în anul 2018 a Planului de acțiuni privind implementarea Programului național de incluziune socială a persoanelor cu dizabilități pentru anii 2017-2022, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/raportul_cu_privire_la_implementarea_in_anul_2018_a_programului_national_de_incluziune_sociala_a_persoanelor_cu_dizabilitati_0.pdf

¹⁵² USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

¹⁵³ The Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2018. Sixth Periodic Report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Moldova, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/cedaw_6_state_report_eng.pdf

¹⁵⁴ Ludmila Ciocan, 2018. Baseline study on social services for people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities and for vulnerable children.

The positive steps have been taken to ensure education is inclusive for all independent of disability or special educational need.¹⁵⁵ More kindergartens are adapted to the needs of children with disabilities. In 2018 there were 224 children with disabilities, who attended general institutions of early education (36.6 per cent increase in comparison to 2017).¹⁵⁶ The share of children with special educational needs and disabilities, who attend general-purpose educational institutions increased over the last five years by about 9.8 per cent and constituted 93.1 per cent in 2018. In 2018/19 school year 9,560 children with special educational needs were enrolled in general-education institutions, and 709 students continue to attend schools for children with intellectual or physical development deficiencies, two times less compared to the 2014/15. Most students (61.8 per cent) from these institutions (13 units) are deficient in intellectual development.¹⁵⁷ The trainings for relevant professionals were carried out, and methodological guidance were developed to support inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classes.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, only one-third of children with disabilities graduate from school,⁹¹¹⁵⁹ and several barriers remain. Those include, absence of needs-specific information, methodological and didactic approaches, and infrastructure. **There is also an absence of trained and qualified teachers to work with children with special educational needs, lack of adapted teaching materials, and resistance to change manifested by some school managers, teachers and parents.**¹⁶⁰ **The enrolment of Roma children continues to remain low.**

Demand for services

Limited knowledge and awareness of social benefits by the eligible population is an impediment to the increase in coverage and the improvement in service quality.¹⁶¹ Benefits aimed at children are provided upon request, instead of by default (childbirth grant, allowances for childcare and disability), thereby limiting access for some children. Despite progress towards e-governance, **potential beneficiaries, particularly those without internet and remotely located, highlighted that they are** not sufficiently aware of the existence of different social assistance programmes, their entitlements, criteria and application procedures. The process is perceived as problematic and time-consuming. Administrative requirements are further hardening the process of collecting documents, while collecting necessary documents is also often associated with costs.¹⁶² Lack of identity documents and registration documents, which particularly affect Roma, present an additional barrier.¹⁶³

Beneficiaries are also facing several barriers in accessing social services, including, as highlighted by them in recent study, due the discrepancy between the beneficiary's needs and the service offered; the long waiting time between service demand and service offer, bureaucratic process of preparing the documents for accessing certain services, the limited number of places available in services due to their poor funding, the lack of information on the availability of services, lack of confidence in the possibility of benefiting from any service, due to previous refusal, etc. The access of beneficiaries to services is also limited due to large distances, the lack of transport to reach beneficiaries and / or to ease the access of beneficiaries, particularly from rural areas and adapted to children with disabilities. The unfavourable and inaccessible locations of the buildings where social services are provided (in suburban areas, away from the city centre) contribute to this identified barrier.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁵ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

¹⁵⁶ National Bureau of Statistics, 2018 Early childhood institutions <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=6342>

¹⁵⁷ National Bureau of Statistics. 2018. The situation of children in the Republic of Moldova in 2018, <http://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=en&idc=168&id=6379>

¹⁵⁸ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

¹⁵⁹ United Nations. Republic of Moldova–United Nations Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development 2018–2022, <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/moldova/docs/pub/strateg/UNDAF%20Moldova%20EN.pdf>

¹⁶⁰ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

¹⁶¹ UNICEF Moldova. 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

¹⁶² UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Cash-Based Social Protection for Children in the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018.

¹⁶³ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

¹⁶⁴ Ludmila Ciocan, 2018, Baseline study on social services for people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities and for vulnerable

Recommendations

Consider setting in motion a comprehensive restructuring of the current social protection system to better respond to multiple vulnerabilities children are facing. This would entail revising and aligning relevant legislation and consolidating necessary programmes and social protection package that goes beyond merely addressing families' basic needs. At some time, continue working toward improved coverage and targeting, including by using and extending cost analysis models already developed, and harmonise existing inequalities in cash-benefits. Adopt a multidimensional poverty index as a basis for planning social protection responses.

Continue to work towards strengthening the mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the efficiency, adequacy and equitability of the distribution of resources allocated for social protection, including by carrying out relevant in-depth needs assessments, costing mechanisms, strengthening procurement mechanisms, followed by the necessary capacity building programmes.

Continue providing training, guidance and continuous support to public authorities on all levels in public finance management, including on child- and youth-sensitive strategic planning, community mobilization processes and local revenue enhancement. Promotion of community ownership over newly developed and existing services and benefits should be ensured through the whole process, coupled with strengthening the understanding of the aim of decentralisation as an opportunity for the enhanced local development.

Continue strengthening early identification of children and youth in need, taking into account multiple deprivations, and ensuring faster access to benefits and supporting social services, if needed. Integration of benefits and improved cooperation in this field is required, including through implementation of 2018 instructions for mapping of children at risk of wellbeing.

Take steps to offset the current negative trends in capacity deficit among key professionals working with vulnerable children in all sectors, including address the root causes of their high turnaround and challenging working conditions. This should include the development of robust, sector-specific human resource strategies (including salary adjustments).

Enhance the structure and organization of the information management system to improve monitoring, transparency and accountability and integration of the necessary databases across the sector, allowing for improved monitoring of different deprivations, addressing existing inefficiencies and ensuring it's enhanced used for monitoring. At some time, the level of disaggregation of the information based on key parameters needs to be improved; and conceptualisation of poverty needs to be extended to measure multiple deprivations as a basis for developing necessary policy and intervention planning.

Chapter 2: Violence Against Children

Violence against children has several negative short-term and long-term physical, mental and reproductive health consequences¹⁶⁵ that threaten children's well-being and can persist into adulthood, often supporting the perpetuation of a vicious cycle of violence. The immediate and long-term public health impact and economic costs also undermine investments in education, health and child well-being.

There is limited progress in addressing violence against children (VAC) in Moldova. Information from the 2018 VAC Survey indicates that children suffer from substantial rates of sexual, physical and emotional violence, with two out of **five surveyed females (36.8 per cent) and males (37.8 per cent) reporting experiencing any type of violence**. One in nine females (10.6 per cent) and one in eleven males (8.9 per cent) experienced emotional violence by a parent, adult caregiver, or adult relative before age 18.¹⁶⁶ More detailed data of the VAC survey are provided in **Annex 1**.

From January 2018 till the end of the first semester of 2019 educational staff reported 9,317 cases of violence against the child in the family, school or other places (47 per cent physical violence, 27 per cent emotional abuse and 24 per cent neglect, 57 were suspected cases of suspected sexual abuse). Less than 18 per cent of the cases were referred to bodies with responsibilities in the protection of the rights of the child, being suspected or identified as serious cases of abuse.¹⁶⁷ For comparison, a total of 13,230 cases of child abuse or violence were reported by teaching staff, parents and children during the academic year 2014– 2015.¹⁶⁸

2018 Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice (KAP) study also revealed a high level of exposure of children to violence and a high incidence of family quarrels, with one-third of the child under the age of seven being subjected to occasional or systematic emotional abuse as a witness to family quarrels.¹⁶⁹ 2018 VAC Survey found out that 35.2 per cent females and 22.9 per cent males witnessed physical violence in the home in childhood, while 59.9 female and 73.3. males witnessed

¹⁶⁵ UNICEF, https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/UNICEF_VAC_ToC_WEB_271117.pdf, A Roadmap to Accelerate Ending Violence Against Children in the Republic of Moldova, 2019-2025. April 2019 [unpublished]

¹⁶⁶ The Violence Against Children Surveys, 2019. Executive Summary. [unpublished]

¹⁶⁷ Authors own calculation for two years based on the data provided in Ministerul sănătății, Muncii și protecției sociale, Raportul pentru anul 2018 cu privire la violența în familie și violența față de femei, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_vf_2018_pdf.pdf

¹⁶⁸ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. Chisinau

¹⁶⁹ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Opinions and perceptions regarding parental education for parents/caregivers of adolescents from the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018

physical violence in the community in childhood.¹⁷⁰ The developed cross-sectoral Strategy and Action plan on positive parenting address the issues related to knowledge, attitudes and practices of parents/caregivers and future parents as well including non-violent methods of disciplining.

Practices of tackling violence through discipline remain widely accepted. 2018 KAP study revealed that one-third of children are subjected to physical violence, and every tenth caregiver believes that physical punishment is necessary for raising or educating a child properly, although 75 per cent of caregivers acknowledge that beating a child doesn't solve the problem.¹⁷¹ 14.1 per cent of female and 14.5 per cent of male participating in 2018 VAC survey were affected by the childhood physical violence by a parent or other adult relative.¹⁷² Perceptions justifying physical punishment are more common for people from rural areas with a low or medium level of education and a low socio-economic level.¹⁷³ The study on the adolescent parenting from 2017, on the other hand, found that the majority of parents were aware that that physical punishment is not desirable in the society, but most of them mentioned that they had situations when they were physically punished by parents in early adolescence (10-13 years).¹⁷⁴ Widespread and culturally acceptable corporal punishment as a means of discipline has also been highlighted as a challenge affecting children's rights by the UNCRRC.¹⁷⁵

About one in seven females (14.4 per cent) and one in twenty males (5.3 per cent) experienced sexual violence before the age 18 (2018), with many victims of sexual violence did not tell anyone about their experiences.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the number of reported sexual offences involving children in the Republic of Moldova is increasing in recent years. In 2018, 30 per cent of the crimes against children were of a sexual nature (139 cases of sexual abuse (2014: 76 cases), 109 incidences of rape (2014: 81) and 67 actions classified as perverse (2014: 24). This represents an increase of almost 50 per cent compared to 2014 (183 cases).¹⁷⁷ **The increase of incidence of sexual abuse and exploitation of children, including within the family, and in particular involving girls, was also raised as a great concern by the UNCRRC.**¹⁷⁸

Bullying and other types of violence are common in schools and among their peers. 2018 VAC survey highlighted that 27.3 males and 15.4 females experienced childhood physical violence by a peer. While one out of four males (23.9 per cent) had been in a physical fight in the past 30 days, among 18-24-year-olds, and three out of five youth experienced injury as a result of physical violence in the past 12 months among 18-24-year-olds (females, 60.9 per cent; males, 59.5 per cent).¹⁷⁹ Discrimination is a common form of school-related gender-based and other violence, bullying, affirmations, comments, jokes, odious and humiliating.¹⁸⁰ 2019 survey on bullying found out that 86,8 per cent of the total number of students of 6th through 12th grades were affected by bullying, with 70.8 per cent were affected by bullying, and bullies representing 41.1 per cent of the total number of students.¹⁸¹ In comparison, in 2014 survey, every three out of ten respondents stated that they were intimidated / mocked / aggressed in school during the last two months, with

¹⁷⁰ The Violence Against Children Surveys, 2019. Executive Summary [unpublished]

¹⁷¹ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Knowledge, attitudes and practices in early childhood development and care, Chisinau, 2018.

¹⁷² The Violence Against Children Surveys, 2019. Executive Summary [unpublished]

¹⁷³ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Knowledge, attitudes and practices in early childhood development and care, Chisinau, 2018.

¹⁷⁴ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Opinions and perceptions regarding parental education for parents/caregivers of adolescents from the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018

¹⁷⁵ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observation for Moldova,

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARegion/Pages/MDIndex.aspx>

¹⁷⁶ The Violence Against Children Surveys, 2019. Executive Summary [unpublished]

¹⁷⁷ Ministry of Internal Affairs, <https://cnpdc.gov.md/ro/content/copiii-moldovei-indicatori-de-baza>

¹⁷⁸ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observation for Moldova,

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARegion/Pages/MDIndex.aspx>

¹⁷⁹ The Violence Against Children Surveys, 2019. Executive Summary [unpublished]

¹⁸⁰ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

¹⁸¹ UNICEF Moldova & Centre of Investigations and Consultation „SocioPolis, 2019. Bullying among adolescents from the Republic of Moldova. Chisinau

written messages being the most often forms of harassment.¹⁸² Children of parents with HIV/AIDS, LGBTI individuals and children from low-income families, children with special education needs and disabilities and boys and girls based on gender-specific reasons are particularly exposed to this type of violence.¹⁸³

Although data on violence against children perpetrated by teachers and other educational staff are not reported, available studies indicate that corporal punishment, sexual, and other abuse committed by teachers or other school employees is commonplace. The indicators of a recent study on sexual harassment in the workplace reported a worrying level of sexual harassment by teachers.¹⁸⁴

Nine children were murdered in 2018, with the number of children remaining below 10 cases throughout the year.¹⁸⁵

2018 VAC survey also associated violence with significant health problems, including mental distress, suicidal ideation, binge drinking, and smoking as well as with violence perpetration, documenting the cycle of violence that often occurs in families and communities.¹⁸⁶

Legislative and policy framework

A number of national laws and policies have been adopted and implemented, which are forming the basis of the child protection system in Moldova. These include Law on Special Protection of Children at Risk and Children Separated from Parents (2013) and the Guidelines on the inter-sector cooperation mechanism to identify, assess, refer, assist and monitor child victims and potential victims of neglect, exploitation and human trafficking (2014). **The Strategy for Child Protection for 2014-2020 (SCP 2014-2020) and its Action Plan for 2016-2020 (AP 2016-2020)** recognise the need for an adequate protection system that can protect and safeguard children from violence, neglect, exploitation and institutionalisation. Nevertheless, by June 2019 only one quarter of the AP actions (31 out of the 124 total) were completed, most of them related to the changes in the regulatory framework, while 40 per cent (or 49) of the actions were in progress and 35 per cent were either postponed to 2020, or cancelled, suspended or with unclear status. The delayed actions are distributed among all institutions with responsibilities in implementing the Action Plan.¹⁸⁷

Other relevant strategies that includes the aspects of addressing violence against children are **The National Gender Equality Strategy 2017-2021** and **The National Education Strategy 2020**, which also includes a specific objective dedicated to mitigating violence in school environment (although, it does not include specific provisions for how gender-based violence will be addressed).¹⁸⁸ The developed cross-sectoral **Strategy and Action plan on positive parenting** have specific objectives and interventions to prevent violence within the family and against children.

The legal framework on preventing and combating domestic violence was amended and supplemented in 2015 and extended the list of domestic violence subjects. The first strategic document – **2018–2023 National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and the 2018-2020 Action Plan** were approved, which contains a range of action

¹⁸² Health behavior in school-aged children (HBSC) study in the Republic of Moldova, Summary Report, <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/moldova/docs/pub/HBSC%20report%20Moldova%20en.pdf>

¹⁸³ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

¹⁸⁴ Requirement to have sexual relations for reward: 20.2 per cent; threats in order to have sexual intercourse: 18.9 per cent; embrace without permission: 12.9 per cent; invitations to amorous meeting in exchange for some type of advantage: 9.1 per cent; cocky gestures: 5.5 per cent; inappropriate looks: 4.4 per cent.

¹⁸⁵ National Bureau of Statistics, 2018. The situation of children in the Republic of Moldova in 2018, <http://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=en&idc=168&id=6379>

¹⁸⁶ The Violence Against Children Surveys, 2019. Executive Summary [unpublished]

¹⁸⁷ Academia Română & Cerme Research, 2019. Mid-term Evaluation of Implementation of the Child Protection Strategy 2014-2020 and its Action Plan for 2016-2020 [2nd draft report]

¹⁸⁸ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

aiming to prevent and respond to the violence against women, and domestic violence has been developed.

To strengthen and manage cyber and online security for children, a **National Cyber Security Program for 2016–2020, an Action Plan Promoting Children’s and Adolescents’ Internet Security for 2017–2020** were developed and approved in 2017.¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the Council of Europe Lanzarote Committee highlighted that it is lacking financial or other types of backup by the state, with measures and activities being predominantly carried out by the NGOs and donors.¹⁹⁰

Furthermore, child protection laws and policies are being described as heavily reactive and lacking prevention approach; thus, providing with a range of multi-disciplinary interventions only after the child happened to be at risk. The provisions to tackle the root causes violence, abuse and neglect are limited. Harmonization between national and international legislation is missing, including it is not aligned with the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention), while related procedures, indicators and monitoring framework and the relevant reporting mechanism are weak or not developed.¹⁹¹

Fragmentation and the lack of overall vision to addressing the VAC across sectors have also been highlighted.¹⁹² This is aimed to be addressed with **2019-2025 VAC Roadmap developed** based on the INSPIRE framework.¹⁹³ The roadmap has been agreed by 65 representatives of public authorities, civil society organizations and development partners and aims to present an overarching strategic framework aspiring to guide concerted national efforts in this field. The advocacy efforts for the roadmap to be adopted by the decision of the **National Council for Child Rights Protection** or other government decision, are underway, which would consequently strengthen monitoring of its implementation by central and local authorities.¹⁹⁴

Governance and coordination

There is a serious need to improve the coordination between ministries in the implementation of child protection services, especially in the field of violence,¹⁹⁵ and strengthen the engagement of actors in all fields. As a result of the establishment of the mechanism for cross-sectoral cooperation for identification, evaluation, referral, assistance and monitoring child victims and potential victims of violence, neglect, exploitation and trafficking in 2014, the number of reported cases has been assessed as increasing. Nevertheless, the cooperation and referrals between systems (e.g., from education to social assistance) remains weak, and not all cases are systematically reported for registration and action.¹⁹⁶ The need for strengthening mechanisms for reporting of child abuse and neglect was also a concern raised by the Committee on the Rights of the child.¹⁹⁷

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research adopted the procedure for the institutional organization and intervention of workers in educational institutions in cases of abuse, neglect,

189 Government of the Republic of Moldova, National Level Review on the Fulfilment of Commitments Taken Under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Beijing+25, https://www.unecf.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/Beijing_20/Moldova.pdf

190 Council of Europe. Lanzarote Convention. 2nd thematic monitoring round, <https://rm.coe.int/comments-on-the-replies-to-the-thematic-questionnaire-republic-of-mold/16807b5035>

191 USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last ten years – Executive Summary. September 2017

192 USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

193 WHO, UNICEF, US Center for Disease Control, World Bank, USAID, UNODC, the Global Coalition to End Violence Against Children, the Pan American Health Organization, PEPFAR/USA, Together for girls

194 A Roadmap to Accelerate Ending Violence Against Children in the Republic of Moldova, 2019-2025. April 2019 [draft/unpublished]

195 USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

196 UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children’s Fund

197 Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observation for Moldova, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARRegion/Pages/MDIndex.aspx>

exploitation and child trafficking and the corresponding methodology.¹⁹⁸ These normative acts provide for the establishment of complaints mechanisms in schools, including for complaints boxes in each school.¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless, UNICEF-supported Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis of 2018 found out several gaps in the mechanism to prevent, address and report violence against children in schools, including lack of familiarity of education personnel with identification and referral procedures and the absence of tools to monitor the situation by the school management. Most of the schools have also not formed legally-mandated 'Ethics Committees' to receive reports of abuse and violence between students and by teachers, making the monitoring and reporting system essentially non-functioning at the school level.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, a functional referral mechanism for children exposed to VAC to services provided by NGOs is missing,²⁰¹ while there were several indices of the weak cooperation with the health sector.²⁰²

To strengthen the system, in February 2018, Instruction on the intersectoral cooperation mechanism for the primary prevention of risks regarding child welfare has been adopted. However, this was not followed with necessary trainings, particularly for the health and education staff. Additionally, sectorial instructions on how to prevent and combat cases of domestic violence have been developed for territorial social assistance structures, public health care facilities and the police, and were piloted in five districts in 2018.²⁰³ Interaction of the bodies responsible for the protection of children against violence and gender based violence is not clear. The adverse effects on the weak coordination among various service providers on the implementation of legislation has also been noted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.²⁰⁴ Protocols and codes of conduct could for all professionals could be continuously strengthened.

The local guardianship authorities, responsible for cases of child protection and children in risk, including children affected by violence, are lacking capacities. In 2017, only 17 of them employed child rights protection specialist, whose appointment would also reduce the workload of the community social assistant. Now, the social assistants remain the only ones implementing most child protection tasks.²⁰⁵ Their work is characterized by burnout, overload and frequent changes, while only a few of them have social work degrees and needed capacities in child protection.²⁰⁶ The need for revision of the trusteeship and guardianship bodies and other initiatives to strengthen the child protection system has also been suggested by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.²⁰⁷

The Ministries responsible for social affairs has proposed a revision of the gatekeeping regulatory framework to include children exposed to all risks (violence, abuse, neglect, children in contact with the law²⁰⁸) as part of the work of Commission for the protection of children in difficulty, currently

¹⁹⁸ Ministerul Educației, Metodologia de aplicare a Procedurii de organizare instituțională și de intervenție a lucrătorilor instituțiilor de învățământ preuniversitar în cazurile de abuz, neglijare, exploatare, trafic al copilului, http://spc.psihologie.md/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/8_metodologie_de_aplicare_a_procedurii_educatie_ro.pdf

¹⁹⁹ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Feasibility Study on the opportunities and concerns related to accession by the Republic of Moldova to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure. Chisinau, 2018.

²⁰⁰ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

²⁰¹ USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

²⁰² Ludmila Ciocan, 2018. Baseline study on social services for people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities and for vulnerable children, Chisinau

²⁰³ Ministerul sănătății, Muncii și protecției sociale, Raportul pentru anul 2018 cu privire la violența în familie și violența față de femei, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_vf_2018_pdf.pdf

²⁰⁴ Committee on the Rights of the Child. Concluding Observation for Moldova, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARRegion/Pages/MDIndex.aspx>

²⁰⁵ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Children in the Republic of Moldova. Situation Analysis 2016. United Nations Children's Fund

²⁰⁶ USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

²⁰⁷ Committee on the Rights of the Child. Concluding Observation for Moldova, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARRegion/Pages/MDIndex.aspx>

²⁰⁸ USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

mandated on preventing separation of the child from the family, as well as protection measures of the child separated from the parents.

Even though CP is not a priority for the large majority of global development partners, a significant number of donors has nonetheless invested in selected activities that fall under the CP Action Plan. With the aim to address recognised gaps in donor coordination that are affecting the fragmentation of the CP system in Moldova, a child protection donor technical coordination group was established.²⁰⁹ Implementation of the 2019-2015 VAC Road map offers an opportunity for strengthening cross-sectoral and vertical cooperation in the child protection sector.

Budgeting and finance

It is not clear how much the State spends for the child protection sector or violence against children, while there is a general agreement as well as assessment of the mid-term evaluation of the Child Protection Strategy (the Strategy/CPS)²¹⁰ that the resources for preventing and addressing VAC is missing on all levels. Furthermore, the Strategy has been planned without the estimation of the necessary human, financial, material resources, while the mid-term evaluation of the Strategy also found that only a part of the activities/ services from the AP are included/clearly marked in the State Budget funding lines.²¹¹

The inefficiencies related to the fragmented policies, unsuccessful decentralisation, missing quality assurance mechanisms for social and child protection services, also effects the non-optional use of the resources within the sector.

Data collection and use

The data collection and monitoring mechanisms in the field of violence against children are beset by many data inefficiencies. Each respective ministry has its own data collection mechanisms, with inconsistent data reported by different ministries and several weaknesses of sectorial data collection and management mechanisms. Disaggregation of relevant data is weak. There is inadequate interoperability of databases, with an absence of inter-connected Information and Communication Technology (ICT) database to support the cooperation among the sectors. The planned extension of the Social Assistance Integrated System (SAIS) with a child protection module has not materialised. The data are still collected (sometimes paper-based) through line ministries, and reported individually, creating high chances of human and other errors.²¹² Nevertheless, there has been some progress on the use of monitoring tools and their disaggregation.²¹³ MECR does not collect data on violence in schools in general or specific data on SRGBV,²¹⁴ while the 2019 research on bullying found that only 25 per cent²¹⁵ of schools keep records of the bullying cases.²¹⁶

The monitoring and evaluation framework of the implementation of laws, regulations and policies addressing all forms of VAC needs to be strengthened. The reports on the implementation of the AP on the Child Protection Strategy consist of three pages, mostly listing measures taken, without any insights in impacts and outcomes of the measures on children. The mid-term evaluation of the Strategy found several inefficiencies in the programming phase of the Strategy, including a partial

²⁰⁹ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Country Office Annual Report 2017, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

²¹⁰ Academia Română & Cerme Research, 2019. Mid-term Evaluation of Implementation of the Child Protection Strategy 2014-2020 and its Action Plan for 2016-2020 [2nd draft report]

²¹¹ Academia Română & Cerme Research, 2019. Mid-term Evaluation of Implementation of the Child Protection Strategy 2014-2020 and its Action Plan for 2016-2020 [2nd draft report]

²¹² USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

²¹³ Academia Română & Cerme Research, 2019. Mid-term Evaluation of Implementation of the Child Protection Strategy 2014-2020 and its Action Plan for 2016-2020 [2nd draft report]

²¹⁴ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

²¹⁵ Out of 36 schools participating in the survey.

²¹⁶ UNICEF Moldova & Centre of Investigations and Consultation „SocioPolis, 2019. Bullying among adolescents from the Republic of Moldova.

use of the participatory approach and the failure in undertaking the systems approach, while the documents also lacks the vital components of strategic planning (i.e., lack of monitoring and reporting mechanism, no baseline data have been provided, no measurable intermediary and final targets for outcome indicators at general and specific objective levels, no coordinating body and well developed theory of change, lack of priority areas for strategic intervention, lack of estimation of the necessary human, financial, material resources, etc.). These shortcomings have significantly negatively affected accountability mechanisms, tracking progress and making necessary adjustments along the way.²¹⁷

Availability, accessibility and quality of the services

Programmes and policies for the prevention, recovery and social reintegration of child victims of violence, particularly sexual abuse and exploitation, are largely missing. In 2018, about 70 million Lei were allocated for financing the minimum social services package, including family support services.²¹⁸ The government also approved an action plan for the implementation of a home visiting programme and began to apply the guidelines in early 2018, although their rolling out was delayed due to misconception and fear of medical staff that this will impose an additional workload for them.²¹⁹ A shelter for children victims of violence, abuse and exploitation opened in Chisinau in 2016 with support from UNICEF Moldova and IOM, targeting primarily victims of trafficking.²²⁰ Furthermore, Moldova has around seven state-funded centres providing services to victims of domestic violence and three donor-funded centres.²²¹ In 2018, 68 children (41 victims of domestic violence) and 329 adults sought assistance in those centres.²²²

Nevertheless, there is a wide gap in services provided for children victims of violent crimes, including lack of placement in a secure environment (emergency foster care, temporary placement) and rehabilitation services (psychological crisis support, counselling, psychotherapy, social assistance, emergency medical assistance, communication, and support services). Acute lack of psychological help and adequately trained specialists has been particularly highlighted. Services provided by the State offer a small part of the needed package of support.²²³ There is no emergency medical care for violence-related injuries and clinical care for victims of sexual violence.²²⁴ The service uptake by children, as disclosed in the 2018 VAC survey, is very low, while a lack of available services also affects the effective implementation of the referral system.

Equally, minimum quality standards on social services provided to victims of violence as well as a necessary mechanism for accreditation of social service providers are lacking. Nevertheless, they are reported of currently being in the process of strengthening.²²⁵

Capacities of professional working in child protection on all levels and sectors are weak and characterised by high turnaround and unfavourable working conditions. Although certain trainings and modules on VAC are incorporated in pre- and in-service curricula and relevant training for

²¹⁷ Academia Română & Cerme Research, 2019. Mid-term Evaluation of Implementation of the Child Protection Strategy 2014-2020 and its Action Plan for 2016-2020 [2nd draft report]

²¹⁸ Ministerul Sănătății, Muncii și Protecției Sociale, Raportul pentru anul 2018 cu privire la violența în familie și violența față de femei, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_vf_2018_pdf.pdf

²¹⁹ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

²²⁰ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Country Office Annual Report 2017, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

²²¹ Ministerul Sănătății, Muncii și Protecției Sociale. Servicii specializate pentru victimele violenței în familie <http://antiviolența.gov.md/servicii-specializate-pentru-subiectii-violentei-in-familie/>

²²² Ministerul Sănătății, Muncii și Protecției Sociale, Raportul pentru anul 2018 cu privire la violența în familie și violența față de femei, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_vf_2018_pdf.pdf

²²³ USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

²²⁴ A Roadmap to Accelerate Ending Violence Against Children in the Republic of Moldova, 2019-2025. April 2019 [draft/unpublished].

²²⁵ Ministerul Sănătății, Muncii și Protecției Sociale, Raportul pentru anul 2018 cu privire la violența în familie și violența față de femei, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_vf_2018_pdf.pdf

professionals were carried out (for example, by the National Institute of Justice mostly targeting prosecutors and judges), there is a continuous need to strengthen skills and knowledge of all professionals in a more comprehensive, multi-disciplinary way. Special expertise is needed by police for the prevention of cyber-crimes against children.²²⁶ To strengthen the response and trainings to all professionals on VAC in particular in rural areas and the southern region, to prevent and monitor domestic violence, and receive and investigate complaints in a child-sensitive manner²²⁷ were also recommendations made by UNCRC.

Non-enforcement of violence protection ordinances remains challenging, with the uneven practice of submitting and executing the orders by law enforcement professionals. In 2017, 155 protection orders were issued by courts for children victims of domestic violence (141 for female and child victims, and 14 for only child victims). Investigating domestic violence, including the application of some provisions of the Penal Code remains challenging.²²⁸

Despite attempted reform of juvenile justice system,²²⁹ children in contact and conflict with the law remain largely neglected group within CP, and there is near absence of services for those children.²³⁰ Some progress in legal proceedings has been noted, such as the introduction of the child-friendly interviewing procedures and granted access to free legal aid for children victims of crime through the amendments of the Penal Code. The quality standards for legal aid provided to children were approved.²³¹ 41 children victims of violence in family and 928 were adults were reported to receive legal assistance.²³² Nevertheless, the support for children during criminal proceedings is primarily provided by the NGOs and is missing in rural areas,²³³ and there is a lack of adequately equipped rooms for hearing children victims of violence.²³⁴ The court procedures place the burden of proof on the child victim, while the psychologist's case file is not admitted as evidence in court.²³⁵

There continues to be a serious staff deficit within the justice sector and services needed for the proper functioning of a specialized system of justice for children. The lack of psychological expertise within the court system for children exposed to abuse or violence has been highlighted as one of the critical gaps. The professionals are insufficiently trained, there is a lack of necessary criteria, including for professionals interviewing child victims;²³⁶ high workload and low salaries, are also impacting their performance.²³⁷ The government's plan to develop a centre of integrated assistance for child victims involved in criminal proceedings, of "Barnahus" type in Southern region

²²⁶ USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

²²⁷ Committee on the Rights of the Child. Concluding Observation for Moldova, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARRegion/Pages/MDIndex.aspx>

²²⁸ Ministerul sănătății, Muncii și protecției sociale, Raportul pentru anul 2018 cu privire la violența în familie și violența față de femei, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_vf_2018_pdf.pdf

²²⁹ The Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2018. Sixth Periodic Report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Moldova, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/cedaw_6_state_report_eng.pdf

²³⁰ USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

²³¹ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Country Office Annual Report 2017, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

²³² Ministerul sănătății, Muncii și protecției sociale, Raportul pentru anul 2018 cu privire la violența în familie și violența față de femei, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_vf_2018_pdf.pdf

²³³ Council of Europe. Lanzarote Convention. 2nd thematic monitoring round, <https://rm.coe.int/comments-on-the-replies-to-the-thematic-questionnaire-republic-of-mold/16807b5035>

²³⁴ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. The perceptions of the general population and specialists on children offenders and children victims and witnesses of crimes. Providing quantitative and qualitative information to serve as a baseline for the 2018-2022 country programme indicators. Final report. August 2019

²³⁵ USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

²³⁶ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. The perceptions of the general population and specialists on children offenders and children victims and witnesses of crimes. Providing quantitative and qualitative information to serve as a baseline for the 2018-2022 country programme indicators. Final report. Chisinau, August 2019

²³⁷ USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

of Moldova, which will be financed by the budget and operated by the NGO might partly address this situation.

The VAC Survey 2018 closely associated violence against children in childhood with violence perpetration, exposing the cycle of violence that often occurs in families and communities²³⁸ and also **highlighting the need to intensify the work for perpetrators of violence, including child perpetrators of crimes.** Four centers for aggressors/perpetrators of violence, who provide anti-violence programmes exist in Moldova.²³⁹ Nevertheless, the specialized assistance and counselling programmes in this field remain inadequate,²⁴⁰ including psycho-social support programmes and specialised probation programmes for children perpetrators of violent crimes.²⁴¹ The current sanctions for the offences of violence's against children are inefficient, calling for amendments of the Misdemeanours Code and Penal Code to address this.²⁴²

Cross-Sectoral Strategy for the development of parental skills and competences for the years 2016-2022 remains largely not implemented. In 2015, the Cross-Sectoral Strategy for the development of parental skills and competences for the years 2016-2022 was elaborated, followed by the development of the budgeted Action Plan in 2018 (pending approval). Selected initiatives have been piloted targeting parents, such as developing methodological support We communicate efficiently with the family.²⁴³ The study on adolescents' parents conducted with the support of UNICEF has resulted in the preparation of didactical material to be carried out in cooperation with youth health facilities, offering another avenue to reach parents and address their positive child-rearing practices.²⁴⁴ Expanding parenting education programmes and training for professionals working with and for children, in order to promote positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing and discipline are also one of the recommendations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.²⁴⁵

The overall response and integration of measures and topics on gender equality and child protection in the school environment can be strengthened. There is also a lack of a comprehensive approach to sexual education targeting children and youngsters, while the current (segmented and narrow approach) does not cover the risks children face online related to communication or sexualized behaviour on the internet.²⁴⁶ The legally mandated **Comprehensive Sexual Education**, although passed in 2012 Reproductive Health Law, is not being implemented. However, that provision is not part yet of any of the education-specific legal, policy, or action frameworks.²⁴⁷ In 2018, the Curricular Reform was initiated, which determined the correlation of policies curricula with national and international educational standards, integrating the content units with reference to prevention of violence.²⁴⁸

²³⁸ The Violence Against Children Surveys, 2019. Executive Summary [unpublished]

²³⁹ The Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2018. Sixth Periodic Report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Moldova, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/cedaw_6_state_report_eng.pdf

²⁴⁰ USAID, USAID/Moldova review and gaps analysis of us government investments in the social protection sphere in the last 10 years – Executive Summary. September 2017

²⁴¹ A Roadmap to Accelerate Ending Violence Against Children in the Republic of Moldova, 2019-2025. April 2019 [draft/unpublished]

²⁴² Interview with UNICEF staff

²⁴³ The Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2018. Sixth Periodic Report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Moldova, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/cedaw_6_state_report_eng.pdf

²⁴⁴ UNICEF Moldova, 2017. Country Office Annual Report 2017, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

²⁴⁵ Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic report of the Republic of Moldova, para 19 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fMDA%2fCO%2f4-5&Lang=en

²⁴⁶ Council of Europe. Lanzarote Convention. 2nd thematic monitoring round, <https://rm.coe.int/comments-on-the-replies-to-the-thematic-questionnaire-republic-of-mold/16807b5035>

²⁴⁷ UNICEF 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

²⁴⁸ Ministerul sănătății, Muncii și protecției sociale, Raportul pentru anul 2018 cu privire la violența în familie și violența față de femei, https://msmps.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_vf_2018_pdf.pdf

Demand for services

The recent VAC survey showed that very low percentage of children victims violence would tell anyone about their experiences, with less than 50 per cent of children experience physical violence, and less than 28 per cent of victims of sexual violence (27.1 for female and 18 for male) disclosing this to anyone.²⁴⁹ This indicates that more efforts need to be invested in awareness-raising around VAC, as well as institutionalising child-friendly mechanisms for reporting, adjusted for all levels of abilities. This includes strengthening the **free hotline for children**, which was launched in 2014 by the ministry responsible for affairs and operationalised by an NGO. There is potential to improve reporting of the outcomes of the hotline for children, to be considered when reflecting the trends related to the observance of children's rights²⁵⁰ and planning adequate policy responses. Additionally, a free tool line for victims of domestic violence and violence against women is also operated by the NGOs and financed by the Ministry of social affairs, and has, in 2017, recorded 148 calls from children (65 girls and 75 boys) and 778 female adults.²⁵¹ The information on the free hotline among children, adolescents and caregivers needs to be strengthened.

2018 VAC survey also highlighted fairly low awareness of and extremely low uptake of services by children experiencing violence, particularly victims of sexual violence (see the Table in Annex 1). Only three out of five females (61.9 per cent) and two out of five males (43.4 per cent) who experienced sexual violence knew of a place to go for help, service seeking and receipt was rare.²⁵²

Recommendations

Advocate for the adoption of the 2019-2025 VAC Roadmap by the National Council for Child Rights Protection or by another Government Decision to support its implementation and monitoring. Streamline efforts to implement the Roadmap and its provisions in a coherent and consistent manner.

Advocate for the approval of the cross-sectoral Action Plan on Positive Parenting for the implementation of the cross-sectoral Strategy for the development of parental skills and competences for the years 2016-2022.

Perform comprehensive mapping of the whole sector/system/institution-wide resources and gaps, both within each sector and across the child protection system as a whole. This should entail addressing existing bureaucratic inefficiencies of the system and also provide an estimation on the resources spent on child protection as well as provide the costing for the needed services.

Develop a new 2021-2025 Child Protection strategy, supported by fully costed Action Plan with a clear theory of change, targets and measurable indicators, which will build on the findings of the evaluation of the implementation of the 2014-2020 strategy, findings of 2018 VAC survey and should be aligned with the 2019-2025 VAC Roadmap. Also, ensure active participation of civil society organisation and children, including most vulnerable in its development. Integrate attention to implications of violence across all policies and programming, while sector-specific recommendations should be mainstreamed in the existing and/or newly developed sector-specific strategies, including in health and education.

Develop administrative data collection and management system that would track cases of violence against children, monitor institutional and professional practices, and document sector-specific expenditures needs and, which would be integrated within the existing databases, allowing for the cross-sectional support and overview of the interventions for children.

²⁴⁹ The Violence Against Children Surveys, 2019. Executive Summary [unpublished]

²⁵⁰ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Opinions and perceptions regarding parental education for parents/caregivers of adolescents from the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018

²⁵¹ UNICEF Moldova. 2018. Feasibility Study. on the opportunities and concerns related to accession by the Republic of Moldova to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure. Chisinau, 2018.

²⁵² The Violence Against Children Surveys, 2019. Executive Summary [unpublished]

Intensify efforts to address the root and structural causes of violence against children, including harmful gender norms and stereotypes, including by developing a costed National Communication for Behaviour Change Action Plan. This should contain information campaigns and trainings using innovative, targeted techniques and tools using adjusted to various media platforms and adjusted to different target groups.

Map and specify evidence-based violence prevention initiatives for each sector, including streamlined in the curriculum and general operationalisation of the schools. Operationalise Strategy on parental education and roll out positive parenting programmes for mothers, fathers and other caregivers across the child life cycle, reinforced by communication for development strategies, including to prevent violent disciplining.

Address the gaps in the juvenile justice sector, including capacity deficits, gaps in criminal procedures and inefficient sentences for violent crimes. This includes establishing integrated assistance for child victims involved in criminal proceedings of “Barnahus” type.

Ensure confidential counselling, complaints and confidential and safe reporting mechanism/methods for children affected, by violence in all settings, including in the school environment and in response to bullying.

Chapter 3: Youth Participation and Empowerment

Young men and women are key drivers for inclusive growth and sustainable development. When young people are engaged and empowered, societies will be more cohesive and resilient and democracies more vibrant.²⁵³ In the context of aging and declining society, the active involvement of young people in public life and in decision-making process, including in the areas of education, health and social protection, represents a key element in boosting the sustainable development of the society as well as offers an opportunity to harness the demographic dividend and allow young people to reach their full potential.²⁵⁴

The political, economic and social crisis in the Moldovan society has been described as having destabilizing effect for youth, with a current context described as not favorable for good development of the sector. Despite efforts in line with the provisions of the National Youth Strategy 2014–2020, the potential of participation and contribution of young people on all levels remains unexplored.

The youth in Moldova is, since 2016, defined as an age between 14 and 35 years old.²⁵⁵ In January 2018, 27.7 per cent people of Moldova were between 14–34 years, 49.9 per cent were young women and 50.1 per cent men.²⁵⁶ The generation of young people is constantly decreasing, including due to a low fertility rate and high out-migration. Young people in Moldova represent a very dynamic population category of different specific age categories, being intensively involved both in internal migration (rural-urban, small-large cities), as well as in external migration.²⁵⁷

The inactivity of young people measured by the NEET indicator (percentage of young people not in school, employed or in training) is high, with 29 per cent in 2017, double the EU average of 12 per cent.²⁵⁸ This has essential economic losses, unrealized economic potential, and on the other hand, it determines the increase of the expenses in the field of health, justice, social protection. The mismatch between acquired skills and labour market demand, small wages in most economic areas favour the emigration of young people. Thirty-one per cent of young people have an informal job work, particularly seasonal work in agriculture and tourism. This also highlights the inefficiencies of education sector, failing to produce more qualified workers that are linked to real employment opportunities in Moldova.²⁵⁹

The political space in Moldova is dominated by the old age cohort, with low participation and interest of young people in politics, low youth voter turnout and low confidence in the voting process. There is also a glaring lack of trust of youth in public institutions. The data analysis for 2019 elections could not be found. However, in 2015, less than 10 per cent parliamentarians were aged 18–30, and only 30 local public authority representatives were young. In 2016, only 25 per cent of young people expressed interest in politics, with higher interest being by those with higher socioeconomic status and education level. Voter absenteeism remains high, only 10 per cent of youth aged 18–25 voted in the first round, and 11 per cent voted in the second round in presidential

²⁵³ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

²⁵⁴ United National Development Assistance Framework, <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/moldova/docs/pub/strateg/UNDAF%20Moldova%20EN.pdf>

²⁵⁵ Council of Europe. Chapter II: Voluntary Activities, https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262475/YouthWiki_volunteering_Moldova.pdf/ffc3b754-5861-b22a-1a79-f4b10e221153

²⁵⁶ National Bureau of Statistics. 2018. Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova, <http://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?l=en&idc=263&id=2193>

²⁵⁷ Council of Europe. Chapter II: Voluntary Activities, https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262475/YouthWiki_volunteering_Moldova.pdf/ffc3b754-5861-b22a-1a79-f4b10e221153

²⁵⁸ National Bureau of Statistics. 2018. Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova, <http://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?l=en&idc=263&id=2193>

²⁵⁹ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

elections. Turnout was higher for the 2014 parliamentary elections (37 per cent) and the 2015 local elections (39 per cent). There was a higher turnout for local elections by rural youth owing to stronger social ties and community coercion to get involved in electoral processes. Only 26.5 per cent of youth believed voting could influence the way government institutions function. **Such indicators have the potential to undermine the democratic system in the long run.** Less than 10 per cent of young people held a positive opinion of parliament, government, political parties and the judiciary, while the interest in participating in demonstrations or protests is low.²⁶⁰ U-Report showed that only 35 per cent of surveyed youth find communication with the decision-makers as most appropriate for your voice to be heard, followed by the online environment / social networks (27 per cent) and formal mechanisms 22 per cent.²⁶¹

Involvement of youth in policy-making processes remains low, while there are weaknesses in existing participatory mechanisms aimed to involve young people. For example, at the local level, only 5 per cent of young people were involved in consultations on community public budgets. As a result, up to 72 per cent of the total programs designed for adolescents at the community level do not respond to the needs and aspiration of young people.²⁶² Equal participation is also not ensured, and participation of young people from vulnerable groups is particularly weak. The principle of co-management of the Council of Europe aimed to be ensured through the Governmental Commission on Youth Policies is not operative. Involvement of young people in the decision-making process is minimised by several legislative, regulatory, institutional, educational barriers as well as lack of youth infrastructure.²⁶³

Although young people are concerned about societal problems, **civic engagement through volunteering and community involvement remains low**, constituting 18.1 per cent in 2016, and is higher among the urban youth (23.3 per cent vs 14.1 per cent). The need for employment, limiting time for other activities, contributed to low community involvement, coupled with a lack of information on the opportunities available.²⁶⁴

Legislative and policy framework

The National Strategy for Youth Sector Development 2020, adopted in 2014, and the Law on Youth (2016) present a basis for youth sector development. The Strategy was followed by a comprehensive action plan covering several domains: social, health, educational, participatory, leisure, youth services, youth rights, youth policies. At the same time, in 2015, the law on youth have been adopted, which regulates the principles and objectives of youth policies, the areas of intervention of the state in the field of youth, as well as the demands on youth policy actors. This law has generated a series of transformations of the sector, ensuring a legislative update to the needs of young people and youth workers.²⁶⁵ The necessity and the importance of youth participation is also reflected in laws and policy documents in the field of education, including 2020 Strategy for Education Development (2014-2020). The Republic of Moldova does not sufficiently regulate the concept, structure, and organisation of non-formal child/student and adult education.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁰ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

²⁶¹ U-Report, <https://moldova.ureport.in/poll/1246/>

²⁶² National Council of Youth from Moldova. Study on Local Budgets, <https://www.cntm.md/sites/default/files/Bugetele%20publice%20locale.compressed.pdf>

²⁶³ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

²⁶⁴ Council of Europe. Chapter I: Youth Policy Governance, https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262379/MOLDOVA_Youth+Wiki+Chapter+1_final.pdf/2781ad3b-80ac-5a48-ca83-9ee41a14c2b1

²⁶⁵ Expert Group Centru Analitic Independednt. Analiza Bugetului Public Național 2018 prin prisma sectorului de tineret, <http://www.budgetstories.md/wp-content/uploads/Analiza-Bugetului-Public-Na-ional-2018-prin-prisma-sectorului-de-tineret.pdf>

²⁶⁶ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

The mid-term evaluation of the Youth Strategy found out that although all strategy activities are relevant to the needs and priorities of the development of the youth sector, it noted inconsistency in its theory of change, and inability to set goals with foreseen measures. Despite the insufficient financing that created delays in implementation, 75 per cent of activities were being finalized (52 per cent fully implemented on time). Challenges in ensuring continuity of the individual activities, particularly in the field of youth participation, and their scaling up have also been mapped.²⁶⁷

The Youth Law divided the youth category into two distinct age sub-categories - children up to 18 years of age and adults of 18-35 years of age, while the waste age bracket fails to address the preoccupations of diverse people who graduated from an educational institution. Thus, recommendations were raised that youth policies might be more comprehensively streamlined if youth sub-categories were taken into account. The recent study also found that the legislative framework does not address several good principles of participation, while the use of gender-sensitive language in the existing policies and regulations on child participation is reduced.²⁶⁸

Governance and coordination

Despite continuous progress, Moldova lacks an effective and operative coordination mechanism for youth legislation, policies and interventions across different sectors and organisations.

Although the responsibility of youth affairs falls under the mandate of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, different ministries and government entities develop and supervise policies affecting young people from a sectoral perspective. These are complemented by the work of NGOs and international actors. Nevertheless, the government's capacities for co-ordination and monitoring of implementation are reduced, and stakeholders are fragmented and disconnected, reducing potential synergies and multiplier effects.²⁶⁹ The collaboration with NGOs is not institutionalised; nevertheless, the NGOs are regularly consulted, although in an ad-hoc manner.²⁷⁰

In 2017, the Governmental Commission on Youth Policies, headed by the Prime Minister, was established, as official youth policy co-ordination body, following the COE's principle of co-management. It is represented by the based on parity between the representatives of the relevant central public administration bodies and representatives of the nongovernmental youth sector. However, the Commission does not have adequate representation by all stakeholders (i.e., Ministry of Health, Labour, Social Protection) and is de facto not operative.

Other obstacles to coordinating, designing and implementing efficient youth policies across sectors include limited communication channels and platforms, competition in budget allocation and insufficient data.

These limit fine-tuning of policies and ensuring they address youth needs. There is also a room for mainstreaming youth issues in other inter-sectoral programmes and strategies.²⁷¹ This was retreated by the mid-term evaluation of the Youth strategy, which found that insufficient institutional capacity and insufficient human resources are available for an efficient and active interdisciplinary implementation management of the strategy.²⁷²

The law on youth foresees the compulsory establishment of the **National Agency for Programmes Development and Youth Work** to implement youth policies and programmes developed by the ministry and provide logistical and methodological assistance in the implementation of youth

²⁶⁷ Centru de Resurse Pentru Drapturile Omului, 2018. Mid-term review of the implementation of the National Strategy for Development of the Youth Sector 2020 [unpublished]

²⁶⁸ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Bottlenecks and barriers for youth and adolescents' engagement in the decision-making process, Chisinau, 2018

²⁶⁹ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

²⁷⁰ Centru de Resurse Pentru Drapturile Omului, 2018. Mid-term review of the implementation of the National Strategy for Development of the Youth Sector 2020 [unpublished]

²⁷¹ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

²⁷² Centru de Resurse Pentru Drapturile Omului, 2018. Mid-term review of the implementation of the National Strategy for Development of the Youth Sector 2020 [unpublished]

services at the local level.²⁷³ After years of anticipation of the establishment of the agency, the 2018-2020 budgetary framework apparently includes resources for that activity. Nevertheless, given the fiscal reality of Moldova, the questions were raised on how efficient is the creation of the new body, compared with the establishment of a dedicated, well-capacitated unit within the Ministry.

Budgeting and finance

Although a slight increase of allocation of resources is foreseen for the youth sector, the share of youth expenditures in the total budget is largely insignificant, while current reporting does not allow for effective tracking and monitoring of the spending patterns. The Medium-Term Budgetary Framework 2018-2010 foresees the increase of the allocations for the Culture, Sports and Youth budget line. The resources allocated to the youth sector has also been increasing in the past years (2016: 629,6 mil (executed); 2017: 692,5 mil (approved); 2018: 693,8 mil (projected)); while a consistent underspending on average of 7-8 mil MDL per year from the youth budget has been noticed.²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, as also recognised by the OECD, **limited financial resources affect the implementation of the youth policies.**²⁷⁵

The budget planning is lacking the consolidated impact assessment of youth policies or youth budget projects, contributing to the unstructured direction of resources. The resources for youth activities provide by the Ministry of Finance are reported on a single budget line, limiting the possibility to analyse underfunding and spending patterns. Supporting documents for drafting of the budget do not contain a consolidated impact assessment of youth policies or youth budget project. This has been recognised as, on the one hand, complicating the process of implementation of resources by sector, and on the other hand, affecting more structured planning of the interventions.²⁷⁶

The overall budget for the Youth strategy in 2015-2019 period is below 40 million Lei, with the annual budget being eight million Lei. The mid-term evaluation highlighted underfunding for specific measures, including a general trend of planning activity costs under the respective market cost.²⁷⁷

The Annual Grant Programme to support and develop the youth NGO sector is issued annually. The programme value for 2017 was four million Moldovan lei (MDL) (€200,000), and increase compared to the previous year. Grants were allocated on a competitive basis to 28 youth NGOs.²⁷⁸ The mid-term evaluation of the Youth Strategy recommended improved alignment of an annual grant-making program with the priorities of the strategy, while there is a room for improvement of the transparency and available information on the grant making results.²⁷⁹ 1,000,000 MDL is annually allocated to the selected National Youth Capital, presenting an option for local authorities to mobilise external resources for local development.²⁸⁰

²⁷³ Council of Europe. Chapter I: Youth Policy Governance, https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262379/MOLDOVA_Youth+Wiki+Chapter+1_final.pdf/2781ad3b-80ac-5a48-ca83-9ee41a14c2b1

²⁷⁴ Expert Group Centru Analitic Independent. Analiza Bugetului Public Național 2018 prin prisma sectorului de tineret, <http://www.budgetstories.md/wp-content/uploads/Analiza-Bugetului-Public-Na-ional-2018-prin-prisma-sectorului-de-tineret.pdf>

²⁷⁵ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

²⁷⁶ Expert Group Centru Analitic Independent. Analiza Bugetului Public Național 2018 prin prisma sectorului de tineret, <http://www.budgetstories.md/wp-content/uploads/Analiza-Bugetului-Public-Na-ional-2018-prin-prisma-sectorului-de-tineret.pdf>

²⁷⁷ Centru de Resurse Pentru Drapturile Omului, 2018. Mid-term review of the implementation of the National Strategy for Development of the Youth Sector 2020 [unpublished]

²⁷⁸ Council of Europe. Chapter I: Youth Policy Governance, https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262379/MOLDOVA_Youth+Wiki+Chapter+1_final.pdf/2781ad3b-80ac-5a48-ca83-9ee41a14c2b1

²⁷⁹ Centru de Resurse Pentru Drapturile Omului, 2018. Mid-term review of the implementation of the National Strategy for Development of the Youth Sector 2020 [unpublished]

²⁸⁰ Council of Europe. Chapter I: Youth Policy Governance, https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262379/MOLDOVA_Youth+Wiki+Chapter+1_final.pdf/2781ad3b-80ac-5a48-ca83-9ee41a14c2b1

Low expenditure on youth activities at the local level makes less feasible any local youth policy implementation, while it is indicating a lack of political will and the need for youth mainstreaming at the local level. Since passing of the Law on Youth in 2016, the local authorities should spend at least three per cent of their budget to support youth activities and policies. The Study National Youth Council of Moldova found out that most of the local authorities failed to do so in 2013-2016 period, while several authorities have neither approved nor specified financial means for youth activities and that LPA2 spends on average less than 20 MDL per young person for youth activities per year.²⁸¹ Low budget for youth activities was also confirmed by the UNICEF study, which showed that seven out of eight LPAs 1 did not allocate any funds to youth programming, while **data on the budgets for each rayon show significant variations in terms of how LPAs fund youth activities.** The comparison of the budget for youth to sports activities also showed that low spending on youth is primarily an issue of priorities than an issue of budget constraints. In two analysed local authorities, Ialoveni and Gagauzia, the spending on youth was 12 times lower compared to spending on sports.²⁸²

Data collection and use

Despite data collection by Moldova's National Bureau of Statistics, civil society reports stress the lack of a national system of data collection on youth, standards certification and analysis. The NBS collects some data, but little disaggregated evidence is available to benchmark intervention and measures the results of the youth policies undertaken.²⁸³ There is no systematic and reliable research on volunteering and its contributions in Moldova,²⁸⁴ which could present the foundation for the development of this sector.

The Reference Group to monitor implementation of the National Youth Development Strategy 2014-2020 has been created by the responsible ministry to conduct periodic evaluations of the implementation, fostering advocacy and dialogue with the responsible partners. The mid-term evaluation of the Youth strategy carried out recently highlighted that although the strategy presents a positive step and fairly clear vision of youth, there are barriers to its implementation, while recognised that measuring the linkage between goals and policies requires improved evidence, recording and analysis of the data in the sector.²⁸⁵ The tools for the monitoring and evaluation of the young people's work within designated structures for youth participation are missing, while the focus is mostly put on the establishment of participatory structures, less on their evaluation.²⁸⁶

Harmful Socio-Cultural Norms, Practices and Beliefs

The youth sector is underappreciated and misunderstood by the influential actors outside the sector,²⁸⁷ while the youth participation is not yet fully embedded in all the different settings of Moldovan society. In 2013, the Council of Europe concluded that despite the various existing forums, a change in culture is needed to allow genuine youth participation. It also highlighted that adults and

²⁸¹ Expert Group Centru Analitic Independent. Analiza Bugetului Public Național 2018 prin prisma sectorului de tineret, <http://www.budgetstories.md/wp-content/uploads/Analiza-Bugetului-Public-Na-ional-2018-prin-prisma-sectorului-de-tineret.pdf>

²⁸² UNICEF Moldova. Capacity gap analysis of local public authorities and of local youth councils to promote and implement youth policy at local level, Chisinau

²⁸³ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

²⁸⁴ Council of Europe. Chapter II: Voluntary Activities, https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262475/YouthWiki_volunteering_Moldova.pdf/ffc3b754-5861-b22a-1a79-f4b10e221153

²⁸⁵ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

²⁸⁶ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Bottlenecks and barriers for youth and adolescents' engagement in the decision-making process, Chisinau, 2018

²⁸⁷ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

children are not fully aware of the meaning of the participation principle and of the practical ways to implement this right.²⁸⁸ In schools, civic education and participatory practices face continued resistance from school management, sceptical parents and young people with limited awareness of the benefits of civic participation.²⁸⁹

Availability, accessibility and quality of the services

Local participatory structures (youth councils, pupils' councils, youth CSOs or youth wings of political parties) are not present or accessible in all districts or to most vulnerable adolescents and have limited resources to implement youth-related strategies and programmes. The strength of participatory bodies, outside of largely informing and consulting young people, largely differs among the communities and highly depends on the interests and skills of relevant professionals/schools. The lack of mandatory provisions enforcing participatory mechanisms in schools, communities or at the central level limits young people's opportunities for participation and engagement.²⁹⁰

In the youth sector, local, district and regional youth councils were established to ensure young people's participation in decision-making processes at all levels and organise actions for and with young people. They also have mandates of consulting, identifying and solving the problems facing by youth. Nevertheless, the recent study found that, while the efforts were on the way, only two out of six districts included in the study had set up formal youth participation at the local level. The type and quality of the activities of the youth councils also strongly depend on the qualification and the interest of youth specialists, including their competence in terms of planning the budget for youth and sports activities. The attempts of some LPA's to exercise some degree of influence over these councils and that the councils' activities can be subject to the political will and openness of the local authorities has also been reported in some of the districts.²⁹¹ Nevertheless, the mid-term evaluation of the Youth Strategy suggested increase of the financial support to local councils through framework contracts and highlight them as a mechanism with a high potential for return if they are qualitatively revived, and upgraded with direct elections, financial autonomy, development of appropriate skills and portfolio of activities that are complementary integrated into national-level activities.²⁹² 45 per cent of U-Report survey participants found youth councils as the most effective ways in which young people can participate in making decisions in their city.²⁹³

The most efficient structures in youth participation are those created at the national level.²⁹⁴ In this regard, the Youth Strategy mid-term evaluation suggested that National Youth Council of Moldova, a body consisting of 61 youth organisations that promote the youth rights and represents the interests of youth organisations, requires a long-term institutional grant to institutionalize and develop programs and platforms that interact with the use of modern information technologies.²⁹⁵

The local framework for the provision of youth services is underdeveloped. Youth centres are underused, while studies found very limited awareness, interest and mismatch with needs of youth and services they offer. In 2017, Moldova had 25 publicly financed youth centres.²⁹⁶ However, there is underfunding of the youth centres, with one out of four analysed district having functioning youth centres, and virtually no knowledge of what youth-friendly services entail or of

²⁸⁸ Council of Europe, 2013. Child and Youth Participation in the Republic of Moldova: A Council of Europe policy review'.

²⁸⁹ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

²⁹⁰ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

²⁹¹ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Bottlenecks and barriers for youth and adolescents' engagement in the decision-making process, Chisinau, 2018

²⁹² The Statute and the Action Plan of the NYCM, <https://www.cntm.md/ro/despre-cntm>

²⁹³ U-Report, <https://moldova.ureport.in/poll/1430/>

²⁹⁴ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Bottlenecks and barriers for youth and adolescents' engagement in the decision-making process, Chisinau, 2018

²⁹⁵ Centru de Resurse Pentru Drapturile Omului, 2018. Mid-term review of the implementation of the National Strategy for Development of the Youth Sector 2020 [unpublished]

²⁹⁶ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

how to provide them (outside of punctual events or sports activities).²⁹⁷ OECD study in 2016 also found very low usage of services provided by the youth centres, with 64 per cent of surveyed youth who were aware of the centres highlighting that they don't use them because they do not need their services.²⁹⁸ With the aim to develop and expand youth services territorially, **Programme for the Development of Youth Centres for the years 2017-2022**, efforts of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (MECR) are on the way, aiming to create at least one youth centre in each district.²⁹⁹ Nevertheless, financial sustainability of this efforts can raise concerns, while options need to be analysed how the centers can build, as much as possible, on the existing infrastructure in the local areas (i.e., schools, youth health centres, NGOs, etc.). The examples of public-private partnership between the **civil society and local government** (Youth Resource Center “Dacia” in Soroca),³⁰⁰ have been highlighted as a good practice example in this field.

Youth law extends the category of young people till the age of 35, covering the large group of individuals with very different risk factors and well-being outcomes, which require adequate and targeted responses. The gaps for services for early adults have been noted (25-35 years of age).³⁰¹

The provision of quality youth services requires standardization, accreditation and efficiency mechanism that is currently lacking. The Youth Sector Strategy created two new institutions to certify volunteering and exercise control the quality of youth services.³⁰² However, these institutions appear not be fully operational in enforcing their mandates.

Capacities for provision of youth services at the local level are limited. Experts in the youth field, particularly local-level civil servants, do not always fully comprehend youth needs and youth policies, causing discrepancies between central and local administrations' understanding and prioritisation of policy goals. The youth workers, who play a crucial role in supporting youth at the local level, are not adequately trained or paid, which may affect the quality of services. The profession is also ill defined. The implementation of **youth policies is limited also by frequent institutional and staff changes.**³⁰³

A large share of the teaching staff does not have any professional training and education in the field of youth participation. There are no textbooks, nor methodological guidelines to support schools mastering formal child participation in the decision-making process. The recent UNICEF study also highlighted the gaps in parental abilities of parents of adolescents and the need for support those parents by providing programmes and trainings to address this gap,³⁰⁴ thus tapping into potential of parents as a source and support to empower and boost young people participation.

Currently, there are no public institutions with a clear mandate to work with inactive young people (NEETs), while, apart from selected pilot programmes, such as UNICEF's pilot [UPSHIFT](#) design programmes by youth for youth, there is little or no support services targeting particularly NEET young people.

²⁹⁷ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Assessment study. The impact of fiscal decentralisation on local public authorities' planning and budgeting of services for children and youth. Chisinau, 2018.

²⁹⁸ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

²⁹⁹ Council of Europe. Chapter I: Youth Policy Governance, https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262379/MOLDOVA_Youth+Wiki+Chapter+1_final.pdf/2781ad3b-80ac-5a48-ca83-9ee41a14c2b1

³⁰⁰ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Assessment study. The impact of fiscal decentralisation on local public authorities' planning and budgeting of services for children and youth. Chisinau, 2018.

³⁰¹ Centru de Resource Pentru Drapturilile Omului, 2018. Mid-term review of the implementation of the National Strategy for Development of the Youth Sector 2020 [unpublished]

³⁰² OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

³⁰³ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

³⁰⁴ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Opinions and perceptions regarding parental education for parents/caregivers of adolescents from the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2018

Demand for youth participation

2016 OECD study found low awareness of existing youth services and opportunities and even lesser use. Despite the array of services youth centres offer, only 25.3 per cent of youth were aware of their existence in 2016. Young women were more informed than young men (31.0 per cent vs 18.8 per cent), and awareness was higher among urban youth than rural youth (32.0 per cent vs 20.3 per cent). Students and adolescents aged 14-18 were more aware than non-students and young adults aged 25-29. The latter group of youth remains particularly excluded from existing measures and activities targeting young people. 16.3 per cent of those aware of such centres took their services, 69.6 per cent that were aware of but not using the centres reported not needing the services,³⁰⁵ questioning the relevance of provided services. The integration of outreach services into other youth services, including through youth workers at the local level, is also needed.³⁰⁶ U-report survey found low knowledge of Convention on the Rights of the Child, with 42 per cent did not hear or have heard about the CRC but do not know what it is.³⁰⁷

The low level of information and awareness among young people has also been found as a primary obstacle that restricts youth participation in decision-making processes. A large number of the interviewed young people, who were not participating in existing participatory structures, were found to be unaware of the possibilities for participation which are available at the local and national levels.³⁰⁸ At some time, 2013 COE study on youth participation finds that estimated 42 per cent of youth aged 15–24 are willing to participate but cannot due to "lack of time" or because they "do not know how to get involved".³⁰⁹ The affirmative mechanisms to facilitate participation of vulnerable groups are largely missing.³¹⁰

The education does not adequately prepare young people with the skills allowing them to integrate into professional and social life fully and fully participate as equal members of societies. Overall school performance is weak.³¹¹ The **national and international test scores have steadily, if marginally, improved over the last decade.**³¹² Nevertheless, about half of children come out of school lacking the basic skills to fully integrate in professional and social life. The mismatch between acquired skills and labour market demand is also contributing to the high unemployment among young people,³¹³ as well as highlighting the inefficiencies of the education sector. Career counselling, quality entrepreneurship, volunteer and internship opportunities and vocational training are generally unavailable or severely underfunded and not considered attractive by adolescents.³¹⁴ The number of children and students participating in after-school activities is small and opportunities limited.³¹⁵

Recommendations

Raise the efficiency and quality of the process of participation of children, adolescents and young people in decision-making processes, including by strengthening the participatory mechanisms at all levels of decision-making and paying special attention to feedback and outreach mechanisms to youth with diverse

³⁰⁵ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

³⁰⁶ Centru de Resurse Pentru Drapturile Omului, 2018. Mid-term review of the implementation of the National Strategy for Development of the Youth Sector 2020 [unpublished]

³⁰⁷ U-Report Moldova, <https://moldova.ureport.in/poll/1246/>

³⁰⁸ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Bottlenecks and barriers for youth and adolescents' engagement in the decision-making process, Chisinau, 2018

³⁰⁹ Council of Europe, 2013. Child and Youth Participation in the Republic of Moldova, <https://rm.coe.int/168046c7f9>

³¹⁰ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Bottlenecks and barriers for youth and adolescents' engagement in the decision-making process, Chisinau, 2018

³¹¹ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

³¹² UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

³¹³ UNICEF Moldova, 2018. Country Office Annual Report 2018. <https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/>

³¹⁴ OECD, 2018. Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova, https://www.oecd.org/countries/moldova/Youth_Well-being_Policy_Review_Moldova.pdf

³¹⁵ UNICEF Moldova, 2019. Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis. June 2019 [unpublished]

backgrounds, including through affirmative actions. At the same time, also strengthen the tools for monitoring, evaluation and protection of the young people in the participation process.

Support young people's greater access to decent work and productive employment, including by stimulating the youth labour demand and prompt improvements in skills development systems, with the objective of easing the school-to-work transition and reducing the youth NEET rate. This would require closer cooperation between the education system and the labour market. At the same time, continue to develop programmes targeting most difficult to reach youth and inactive youth, including NEETs and continue supporting and encouraging social entrepreneurship, small business development and social projects of their interests.

Revise and strengthen the budgeting for youth activities at the local level, including by introducing specific guidelines, strengthening youth councils, and at the same time build capacities and incentivise local authorities to mainstream youth in their local developments strategies and programs.

Strengthen youth electoral participation at the local, regional and national level, including by exploring and developing incentives for their increased engagement as well as develop training programmes to support participatory processes as an electoral candidate in local and national election campaigns. This should be coupled with information and education programs to foster proactive and positive attitudes towards political engagement.

Raise-awareness among the young people and the adults on the importance of youth participation in all spheres and sectors and continue building capacities of professionals working with children and young people. This would also require developing textbooks and technology in the field of participation. Also promote democratic, participatory tools that use selection patterns based on open and transparent voting and ensure the youth rotation. Develop effective programmes targeting adolescent's parents, including incorporate necessary modules on encouraging civic and other forms of participation of young people in society.

Continue strengthening capacities of key youth national organizations to contribute to the policy-making of central executive authorities, the Government and the Parliament alongside with strengthening advocacy and leadership skills to promote topics on the public and institutional agenda in the interests of the young people.

Expanding the youth infrastructures, such as youth centre, with a sustainability component in mind, including exploring the integration of centres with existing infrastructure (i.e., schools, NGOs, etc.), including exploring the possibility of the public-private partnership. Strengthen quality assurance of youth services, including by developing/strengthening clear regulations, procurement practices and system of accreditation of youth services.

Annex 1: Selected statistical data

Table 1: Budget allocations for specific sectors per year

| | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|---------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Social protection | 30% | 30% | 33% | 35% | 35% | 33% | 33% | 32% | 34% | 36% | 34% |
| Education | 19% | 20% | 21% | 22% | 21% | 21% | 18% | 18% | 18% | 18% | 17% |
| Culture, Youth | 3% | 3% | 2% | 2% | 2% | 2% | 3% | 3% | 2% | 2% | 2% |
| Health | 12% | 13% | 14% | 14% | 13% | 13% | 14% | 13% | 14% | 13% | 13% |
| Community household | 3% | 2% | 2% | 3% | 2% | 2% | 3% | 3% | 2% | 2% | 3% |
| Environmental Protection | 1% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 0% | 0% |
| Economic Affairs | 13% | 11% | 8% | 8% | 9% | 11% | 12% | 14% | 11% | 10% | 11% |
| Order and public security | 6% | 5% | 6% | 5% | 6% | 6% | 6% | 6% | 7% | 7% | 6% |
| Defence | 1% | 2% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| General state services | 12% | 14% | 13% | 10% | 10% | 10% | 10% | 9% | 10% | 11% | 11% |

Source: Authors' calculations in the UNICEF 2019, *Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis*

Table 2: Findings of Violence Against Children Survey 2018

| Childhood Physical Violence | Females | Males |
|--|----------------|--------------|
| Experienced any physical violence³ in childhood | 25.9 | 35.2 |
| Childhood physical violence by a parent or other adult relative | 14.1 | 14.5 |
| Childhood physical violence by an adult in the community | 3.5* | 7.8 |
| Childhood physical violence by an intimate partner, among those who were ever in a romantic relationship | 2.5* | 0.9* |
| Childhood physical violence by a peer | 15.4 | 27.3 |
| Witnessed Physical Violence in Childhood | Females | Males |
| Witnessed physical violence in the home in childhood | 35.4 | 22.9 |
| Witnessed physical violence in the community in childhood | 59.9 | 73.3 |
| Service Uptake and Disclosure among People who Experienced Physical Violence in Childhood | Females | Males |
| Disclosed to someone about any incident of childhood physical violence | 48.7 | 51.8 |
| Knew of a place to seek help about an experience of physical violence | 63.3 | 72.8 |
| Sought services for any incident of childhood physical violence | 6.2 | 7.5 |
| Received services for any incident of childhood physical violence | 4.3 | 5.2 |
| Service Uptake and Disclosure among People who Experienced Sexual Violence in Childhood | Females | Males |
| Disclosed to someone about any incident of childhood sexual violence | 37.1 | 18.0* |
| Knew of a place to seek help about an experience of sexual violence | 61.9 | 43.4 |
| Sought services for any incident of childhood sexual violence | 4.9* | 3.3* |
| Received services for any incident of childhood sexual violence | 3.6* | 0.7* |

Source: *The Violence Against Children Surveys, 2019. Executive Summary. Unpublished document*

Annex 2: Consulted literature

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