

# A Cooperation that Counts to Vulnerable Adolescents of Moldova

In order to support the Republic of Moldova in addressing the challenges posed to the health and well-being of the most vulnerable young people, the European Union and UNICEF launched a regional project entitled “*Strengthening capacity of non-state actors for HIV testing and counselling of most-at-risk adolescents and young people*”.

## OVERVIEW

Adolescence is an age of opportunities, but also of risks. Adolescents are more likely to make mistakes that could affect their entire lives. At this age, both boys and girls are tempted to experience something new: alcohol, smoking, sexual relations, and drugs which put them at risk of contracting HIV. These risks are even greater for most-at-risk (MARA)\* and especially vulnerable adolescents (EVA)\*\* groups. Studies show that the most vulnerable adolescents who inject drugs use non sterile injecting equipment, thus being directly exposed to HIV and other infections.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, only a third of young people in Moldova, 15-24 years of age, has comprehensive knowledge about HIV transmission and prevention.<sup>2</sup>

Even though in Moldova there are many youth friendly health centres (YFHC) working with young people, they are mostly inaccessible to the MARA and EVA groups. Children at risk need specific interventions, such as prolonged monitoring, a high degree of trust, and confidentiality which is acquired over time. Non-governmental organizations working in the field of HIV prevention have a general approach, they lack experience and specific tools for targeting the most-at-risk and vulnerable adolescents.

Therefore, UNICEF and the European Union joined efforts to support these children and adolescents and launched a special project to address their needs. The current project is carried out in five countries: Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

## Project Card

**Duration:** January 2012  
– December 2014;

**Total budget (Moldova):**  
520,000 USD;

**Focus areas:** Adolescents,  
Health, HIV;

**Beneficiaries:** Most-at-risk  
adolescents and especially  
vulnerable adolescents and  
young people;

**Targeted areas:** Balti, Orhei,  
Ungheni, Donduseni, Ribnita;

**Donors:** European Union,  
UNICEF;

**Main implementer:** “Youth for  
the Right to Live” NGO from  
Balti (“TDV”, Balti);

**Partners:** Ministry of Health,  
public health institutions, local  
public authorities, NGOs, youth  
friendly health centres, volunteers.

The project has a comprehensive approach and works in three directions: Policy change, Capacity building and community mobilization.

The three-year regional project started in 2012 and will be implemented by the end of 2014. Many important activities have been undertaken so far, leading to a friendlier and more responsive environment for the most vulnerable children and adolescents in Moldova and increasing their chances to a better and healthier life.

\***Most-at-risk adolescents (MARA):** Injecting drug users who use non sterile injecting equipment; males who have unprotected anal sex with males; sex workers.

\*\***Especially vulnerable adolescents (EVA):** Adolescent females and males who are/have: children/parents who inject drugs; friends/peers who inject drugs/have unsafe sex; living in institutional care, especially juvenile detention; living/working on the street; migrant populations; minority or socially excluded groups.

1 Assessment of the situation of Youth in the Republic of Moldova, 2009

2 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2012



# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Policy change

- A number of health laws, including the Law on HIV, the Law on Patients' Rights, and the Law on Health are being revised and UNICEF is advocating for decreasing the age limit for compulsory parental consent to HIV testing of adolescents to 14 years old;
- The Ministry of Health approved the standards allowing NGOs to provide HIV testing and counselling (HTC) for most-at-risk groups of population. Previously the service was provided only by public health institutions in the country. This is an important achievement for combating HIV/AIDS in Moldova and reaching the most-at-risk adolescents.

## Capacity building

- 77 professionals from NGOs and Youth Friendly Health Centres have strengthened their capacities in provision of HTC services for most-at-risk and especially vulnerable adolescents;
- Ukrainian representatives from NGOs, public sector, and UNICEF participated in a study visit to Moldova and exchanged experience with Moldovan professionals;
- Specialists from Moldovan NGOs ("TDV", Balti and "Healthy Life", Tiraspol) attended a professional training course in Odessa;
- Moldovan representatives participated in the *Regional Working Meeting on Scaling up HIV Testing and Counselling in Azerbaijan* in November 2012 and learned how to improve access of the most-at-risk and vulnerable adolescents to HTC and HIV prevention, protection, care and support services.

## Community mobilization

- 20 public raising awareness events and one outreach event was organized in a local disco club and around 2000 adolescents were involved and informed about HIV prevention, counselling, and testing;
- 155 adolescents and young people from Balti were tested for HIV during local raising awareness events;
- Partnerships were established with civil society organisations to empower communities and support adolescents express their views on blogs about issues affecting their lives. Additionally, UNICEF involved young people in press-clubs and high-level meetings, giving them the opportunity to be heard and advocate for their rights.

## NEXT STEPS

- UNICEF will continue to advocate for removing age barriers and ensuring adolescents' access to HIV testing and counselling services;
- Standards on voluntary counselling and testing for adolescents will be developed and approved;
- UNICEF will continue to play a convening role between government and non-government stakeholders on ensuring access to services for most-at-risk adolescents, especially for HIV testing and counselling;
- An important learning tool will be adjusted to Moldova context and will be used for on-line capacity building of outreach workers in provision of HTC services for MARA and EVA;
- Outreach activities among adolescents will be further organized to generate demand for HIV testing and counselling;
- A case-study on best practices in HTC programming for MARA in Moldova will be developed.



"TDV" Balti volunteers raise awareness and inform their adolescent peers about HIV testing and counselling.

### For details, please visit:

[www.unicef.md](http://www.unicef.md); [www.tdvbalti.wordpress.com](http://www.tdvbalti.wordpress.com);  
<https://www.facebook.com/UNICEFMoldova>