



UNITED NATIONS
MOLDOVA



COMMON COUNTRY ANALYSIS

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

2021



Common Country Analysis

Republic of Moldova

2021

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UNITED NATIONS MOLDOVA COUNTRY TEAM

FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization	www.fao.org
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development	www.ifad.org
ILO	International Labour Organization	www.ilo.org
IMF	International Monetary Fund	www.imf.org
IOM	International Organization for Migration	www.iom.int
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights	www.ohchr.org
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women	www.unwomen.org
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS	www.unaids.org
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme	www.undp.org
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund	www.unfpa.org
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund	www.unicef.org
WHO	World Health Organization	www.who.int
ITC	International Trade Centre	www.intracen.org
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	https://unctad.org/
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe	www.unece.org
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme	www.unep.org
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization	www.unido.org
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	www.unhcr.org
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime	www.unodc.org
ITU	International Telecommunication Union	www.itu.int
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services	www.unops.org
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	www.unesco.org
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction	www.undrr.org

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BMA	Bureau for Migration and Asylum
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEDAW	Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CRC	Committee on the Rights of the Child
CRI	Centre for Reform Implementation
CRPD	Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CVD	Cardiovascular Disease
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FEZ	Free Economic Zone
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSB	Gender Sensitive Budgeting
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GII	Global Innovation Index
HDI	Human Development Index
IFI	International Financial Institution
LED	Low Emissions Development
LFP	Labour-Force Participation
LGBTI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MDL	Moldovan Leu
MDR TB	Multidrug-Resistant Tuberculosis
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics

NCD	Non-Communicable Disease
NCES	National Commission for Emergency Situations
NDC2	Second Nationally Determined Contribution
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSGE	National Strategy on Gender Equality
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OOP	Out-of-Pocket
PAR	Public Administration Reform
PAS	Party of Action and Solidarity
PES	Public Providers of Employment Services
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
PWID	People Who Inject Drugs
R&D	Research and Development
RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
SCORE	Social Cohesion and Reconciliation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEEHN	South-Eastern European Health Network
SEN	Special Educational Needs
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TAC	Temporary Accommodation Centre
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UN CCA	United Nations Common Country Analysis for the Republic of Moldova
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VNR	Voluntary National Review

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The analytical work has been completed with the engagement of 23 United Nations agencies. The hard work of their staff has provided evidence-based impartial analysis, a desk review of available literature and engagement in surveys and focus group consultations to validate key findings of the CCA and to identify areas of intervention.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Republic of Moldova is a small landlocked country of 2.59¹ million people that lies between Romania and Ukraine, at the cultural, geographical and economic crossroads between Europe's East and West. Almost 14.9 per cent of the whole population are people aged over 65.

Moldova is a diverse and multi-ethnic country: at least 25 per cent of its population belong to mostly Russian-speaking minorities. The country's administrative-territorial structure encompasses 898 municipalities, 32 raions and two regions with special status. Such fragmentation poses high administrative costs related to public administration, but also leads to less efficient delivery of health care and social assistance services.

Overall **social cohesion in the country is fragile**, according to the United Nations Moldova Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index.² High rates of migration and the resultant brain drain, repressive attitudes towards women and poor social tolerance continue to impact on overall social cohesion, as does the protracted Transnistria Region conflict.

Moldova is facing significant challenges from large-scale outmigration, decreased fertility rates and an increased share of older people. It is projected that the population of Moldova will continue to decline by at least 21.5 per cent by 2040.

Deterioration of human capital has become a major concern for the country's competitiveness. The key challenges refer to population ageing, brain drain, labour-market skills mismatch and an inefficient education system and the suboptimal quality of education. As a result, labour productivity is low and there is little incentive for workers to re-skill and/or upskill. Similarly, there is a lack of stimulus for employers to invest in upgrading the skills of their employees, ultimately limiting the country's long-term competitiveness.

Access to good-quality health care is challenging, particularly for vulnerable groups and those living in rural areas. This negatively affects health outcomes

for the population and contributes to lower life expectancy for Moldovans compared to their European peers. Access to mandatory health insurance has been continuously improving in recent years. The informal sector continues to make up a high share of the economy, meaning that full insurance coverage remains a challenge, notably for the poorest population groups. The COVID-19 pandemic increased mortality rates and negatively affected life expectancy, but also restricted access to health care, notably by older people and vulnerable population groups.

Moldova has achieved good progress in terms of advancing human development over the last decades.

Between 1990 and 2019, the Human Development Index (HDI) value of Moldova increased from 0.690 to 0.750, an increase of 8.7 per cent. Life expectancy at birth has increased by an annual average of 1.6 years over the last six years, primarily due to decline in infant mortality rates. The gross national income of Moldova *per capita* decreased by about 3.6 per cent between 1990 and 2019.³

As an upper-middle-income country and a resource-limited economy, Moldova is the poorest country in Eastern Europe. Although inequality decreased in the last few years, social transfers still make up a significant share of household income. The middle-class layer is still very thin, and many households remain vulnerable to economic shocks that could push them back into poverty. In addition, the impact of the increase in the inflation rate (13.94 per cent), producer's prices (over 16 per cent) and energy prices (over 60 per cent) in 2021 will likely push more people into poverty.

The economy of Moldova is dependent on remittances that spur consumption. Foreign direct investment (FDI) is steadily growing, and government investment in infrastructure is becoming more significant. The private sector is still largely dominated by agriculture, with low productivity and underinvestment in innovation and technology. The IT sector and construction have emerged as high value added and dynamically developing sectors, however.

1 NBS, [Population and Demographic Processes](#) (2020).

2 United Nations Moldova, [Moldova Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index](#) (2018).

3 UNDP, [Briefing Note for Countries on the 2020 Human Development Report](#) (2020).

Climate change is having a significant impact on agriculture in Moldova, affecting people's livelihoods.

While the cost of climate adaptation measures is quite high, the cost of inaction would be double that. Besides the negative effects linked to global warming that are difficult to mitigate, Moldova is facing challenges related to unsustainable use of resources: deforestation and soil erosion as a result of unsustainable agricultural practices; inefficient waste management and land pollution; and increasing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

The COVID-19 related crisis exacerbated existing inequalities and highlighted challenges in terms of climate adaptation, pandemic preparedness and disaster risk reduction, but also identified the need for digitalization, upgrading skills and innovations and technology transfer.

In the future, **the development trajectory of Moldova is likely to be further shaped by the European Union integration agenda**, but also conditioned by the population ageing, high emigration, low total factor productivity with an attempt to engage in smart specialization, energy dependency and the protracted conflict in Transnistria.

A full description of social and economic development in the country is provided in the following sections.

Photo: UN/Mark Garten

A blue-tinted photograph of a park fountain. The fountain is a multi-tiered structure with several jets of water spraying upwards. In the foreground, several people are walking across a paved area. The background is filled with dense, leafy trees. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations common country analysis (UN CCA) for the Republic of Moldova analyses the country's socioeconomic development and political context, along with critical challenges and root causes, and has been conducted jointly by United Nations organizations working in the Republic of Moldova. It is intended to serve as the basis for the next United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023–2027. The UN CCA 2021 builds on available data and recent evidence and has involved civil society organizations (CSOs) in the identification of key challenges and opportunities for change.

The **UN CCA Moldova** represents an evidence-based, independent and impartial assessment of the current situation of Moldova, the challenges faced and its future prospects. This collective analysis, which engaged technical expertise from 23 specialized United Nations agencies, started in 2020 with the first *iteration* and a comprehensive update and restructure of the document in 2021.

The paper focuses on analysing the challenges related to demographic and socioeconomic situations while maintaining focus on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), leaving no one behind (LNOB), addressing human rights and considering the strategic priorities of the Government of Moldova. The process goes beyond an analysis of the country-specific context and integrates regional and global dimensions. The principles of human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women, resilience and sustainability, accountability, LNOB, economic transformations and growth and development-humanitarian-peace collaboration guide the overall development of the UN CCA and are mainstreamed into the analysis.

The **central and transformative premise** of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is **LNOB**. Adopting the LNOB approach not only entails reaching the poorest of the poor, but also seeks to combat discrimination, violence, factors limiting access to justice and rising inequalities within the country. It includes an analysis of the determinants of inequality to understand all the barriers faced by different groups. The UN CCA begins with an overview of the overall national political, human rights and regional development context in **Chapter I**. This is followed by an identification and analysis of the barriers faced by groups left behind in Moldova in **Chapter II**. This chapter includes an overview of the determinants for inequality, as well as an analysis for each identified group. More detailed analysis and assessment of development challenges and progress towards SDG Agenda implementation is contained in **Chapter III**, which describes the demographic situation, poverty and social assistance, as well as analysing the health care and education sectors. The economic development subsection covers macroeconomic issues and includes a detailed analysis of economic sectors along with industry productivity, innovations and the labour-market. The analysis in the environmental section streamlines the impact of climate change, while the part on governance and rule of law looks at transparency, accountability, human rights and gender issues. A description of risks and externalities appears in **Chapter IV**, while **Chapter V** contains the conclusions and recommendations for the formulation of the next United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

The annex contains additional remarks on human rights commitments and a detailed analysis of SDGs 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 16.

Photo: UN Moldova



METHODOLOGY

The UN CCA is based on the contribution and expertise of 23 United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, with the leadership and coordination of the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) in Moldova. For this process, a new Task Force was created in order to ensure coordinated work with all the United Nations country team (UNCT) members.

The analysis was developed around the principle of *LNOB*. The UN CCA analysis is also aligned with the Moldova 2030 National Development Strategy and largely builds on the findings of the recent Voluntary National Review (VNR)⁴ for Moldova regarding the implementation of the SDG Agenda. Furthermore, principles of human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women, resilience and sustainability, accountability, LNOB, economic transformations and growth and development-humanitarian-peace collaboration were mainstreamed throughout the document to highlight often-neglected yet important development aspects. In addition, the analysis integrates data from more than 25 COVID-19 impact assessments carried out by UNCT in 2020–2021.

Most of the time, people who are left behind in development are not counted in official data and they are invisible in the development of policies and programmes. During the process of developing the UN CCA, a **lack of disaggregated data at the country and subnational levels was identified** in different areas and for different groups. Therefore, the UN CCA 2021 analysis is not limited to a desk review and analytical work; it also

collects data from polls and surveys with the general population, persons left behind, migrants and young people, as well as a situation analysis.

Desk research was complemented by a consultative process with CSOs, which provided insights into the key challenges faced by disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. The UN CCA process in 2021 encompassed very detailed and comprehensive consultations with people in Moldova and the diaspora, including vulnerable groups such as Roma, people living with HIV, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI+) persons, unemployed persons, youth and rural women. The following consultations were conducted by the RCO in collaboration with UNCT.⁵

- A general population survey: the survey included 2,082 respondents, with 50 per cent representation from vulnerable groups and 20 per cent from the Transnistria Region. Results from the survey will also contribute to the formulation of priorities of the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework;
- U-Report: 2,339 young people (68 per cent women) were consulted in August 2021;
- Online survey with diaspora and migrants: the survey covered 326 people (67 per cent women) through a self-administered survey with worldwide coverage. The majority of participants were long-term migrants (92 per cent);



4 United Nations Moldova, [Republic of Moldova Voluntary National Review Progress Report](#) (2020).

5 With the special support of IOM, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNODC, UNAIDS, ILO and OHCHR.

- Focus group discussions with vulnerable groups: Roma, persons living and affected by HIV, LGBTI+ persons, persons in or released from detention and unemployed persons. In addition, a focus group discussion with the United Nations Adolescent and Youth Advisory Panel was conducted.

In addition, in 2021, UNCT (in collaboration with the World Bank) elaborated a gender assessment with the objective of having an integral and comprehensive understanding of the root causes and impact

of gender inequality in Moldova. This assessment is considered as complementary to the UN CCA and provides additional details and information on the state of equality between women and men in Moldova in education, health, economic opportunities and voice and agency.

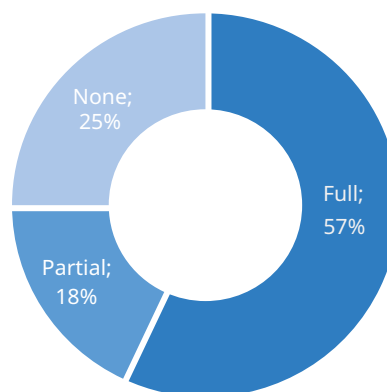
The UN CCA 2021 moves away from a static analysis of the country's socioeconomic situation and towards a dynamic, forward-looking analysis, promoting a joint understanding among the United Nations entities and identifying linkages with key stakeholders.

KNOWLEDGE AND DATA GAPS

Despite its comprehensive nature, the analysis in this UN CCA was limited by a few factors, including some existing data gaps and reduced expertise in several areas. The Republic of Moldova was among the first countries to nationalize the SDGs and to develop nationalized SDG indicators back in 2016. The SDG nationalization process continued with the revision of the nationalized indicators as global metadata for SDGs became increasingly available. In 2019, from an initially defined 226 nationalized SDG indicators, a list of 338 indicators was developed by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) following a rigorous revision process. The revised list was used in the development of the country's first VNR. It also served as a basis for the development of the draft national SDG monitoring framework, which is in the process of being reviewed and approved by relevant authorities.

The nationalization and revision process allowed for identification of the main gaps in relation to SDG data availability. Out of the 338 indicators defined following the revision process, data were fully or partially available for 77 per cent of the total and not available for 23 per cent. At the same time, full disaggregation of the SDG data in line with the global metadata was possible for 57 per cent of the nationalized indicators, partially possible for 18 per cent and not possible (because of the unavailability of data) for 25 per cent. The lack of data, especially disaggregated data, affects the situation analysis across all SDGs to different extents. Efforts are therefore required to increase the availability of data to advance the implementation of SDGs in the country, a fact also acknowledged in the VNR.

Nationalized SDG indicators by extent to which disaggregation is possible



The lack of disaggregated data for certain SDG indicators and beyond limited the analysis in this UN CCA in relation to a few disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in particular. The environmental impact on women is insufficiently covered in the document, as national statistics do not collect such data. Data on persons with disabilities are also limited⁶ and have not allowed for the mainstreaming of disability inclusion across all relevant sections. The same can be said for data on ethnic and religious minorities, which have been analysed to the extent available but remain far from sufficient and up-to-date to allow for a comprehensive review. Data on children – particularly children with disability, Roma children and street children – are scarce,⁷ and data on violence against women can be improved. A scarcity of

6 The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities expressed its concern that data collection on persons with disabilities in the Republic of Moldova is based on a medical approach and fragmented. For this, the committee recommended that the Republic of Moldova should collect, analyse and disseminate disaggregated data of its population with disabilities, including disaggregation by sex, age, ethnicity, type of impairment, socioeconomic status, employment and place of residence, as well as data on the barriers that persons with disabilities face in society.

7 The Committee on the Rights of the Child underlined in its latest concluding observations for Moldova the scarcity of data on children and urged the country to improve its data collection system in this regard.



data has also been identified in relation to LGBTI+ persons – a community generally known to be subject to stigmatization and discrimination.

Some of the identified data gaps were addressed through the development and implementation of targeted surveys and focus group discussions in the course of developing this UN CCA. However, systematic collection of representative data on various groups is required, as scarcity of data and limited sample sizes in existing data sets pose significant challenges for identifying and monitoring the status of those left furthest behind.

Data gaps have also been identified in relation to the population number at the raion level. Although the resident population number has been available for some time, raion-level data still remain to be released. Two

additional limitations have constrained the analysis, including limited data on the Transnistria Region (which, although some data were available in part, raises reliability and comparability concerns) and limited data on the migrant population residing abroad.

Limited expertise in a few areas has also constrained the analysis. The document does not fully or entirely cover social insurance and social assistance issues, where specific and additional expertise is needed. A solid financial landscape analysis is also required. Interconnectedness across SDGs could be explored in a more targeted manner. Forecasting and projections could also be more extensively used where relevant, with the engagement of additional expertise to provide a better understanding of the different scenarios for development in the country in support of strategic planning efforts.

Photo: ILO Moldova

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COUNTRY
CONTEXT



POLITICAL CONTEXT

Moldova is a diverse and multi-ethnic country, with at least 17.9 per cent of its population represented by the following ethnic minorities: Ukrainians (6.6 per cent); Gagauz (4.6 per cent); Russians (4.1 per cent); Bulgarians (1.9 per cent); and others. The young democracy faces many challenges, including political instability, corruption and low social cohesion, as per the SCORE Index carried out by the United Nations in 2018. High migration, brain drain, repressive attitudes towards women and low social tolerance towards “other” groups, along with the unsettled Transnistria Region conflict, continue to impact the overall cohesion and potential of the country.

The 2020 presidential elections were won by Maia Sandu, the former leader of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) who had been prime minister under the coalition government between the Socialists and PAS in 2019. The diaspora (15.2 per cent of the total number votes) and the high presence of the electorate (52.78 per cent) played a critical role in this election, with Sandu scoring 57.75 per cent against the incumbent president, Igor Dodon, who got 42.25 per cent. Soon after (by mid-December 2020), PAS, the Democratic Party and the DA Platform filed a motion of no confidence in parliament to dissolve the government and call for early elections. However, Ion Chicu, the former prime minister, resigned before parliament could discuss the motion. This left an acting government that was hobbled and unable to act decisively during a time of pandemic crisis.

The political situation in Moldova at the beginning of 2021 was a stalemate, with an acting government. After much back-and-forth, parliament was dissolved and snap parliamentary elections were organized on 11 July

2021. PAS won 63 out of 101 seats thanks to popular support and a large diaspora vote, which accounted for 14 seats in parliament. The obtained majority was sufficient to pass critical laws, but not to make changes to the Constitution. This was the first time a relative gender balance was achieved in parliament, with 40 of 101 Members of Parliament being women, the highest proportion in the history of the country. The Gavrilita government, comprising of 13 ministries, was inaugurated on 6 August. PAS now effectively controlled the presidency, parliament and the government, which gave it all administrative and political leverage and potentially enabling it to implement consistent reforms without having to compromise. Anticorruption measures and justice system reforms have been the focus of the Gavrilita government since August 2021. The energy crisis triggered by the expiration of the contract with Gazprom in October 2021 and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have, however, disrupted the government’s agenda. Considerable efforts and financial resources have been spent on minimizing the impact of inflation and the continuously increasing energy prices.

The protracted and unresolved Transnistria Region conflict remains a challenge. In 2019, the Transnistria Region settlement process regained momentum, with renewed hope for implementing additional confidence-building measures. However, previous progress did not translate into new agreements on additional outstanding areas. Political tensions rose in 2020 due to the restrictions imposed by de facto authorities on freedom of movement to and from the Transnistria Region, as well as to the 37 checking points newly installed by the de facto authorities, which impacted human rights and the effectiveness of local-level response to COVID-19 on both banks of the Nistru River.

Official talks were at an impasse, with only occasional contacts between the sides, leading to moments of uncertainty and belated solutions for topics like the banking issue and the prohibition on Transnistria Region-plated vehicles crossing the border into Ukraine imposed on 1 September 2021. At the end of 2021, de facto leadership elections in the Transnistria Region saw Vladimir Krasnoselsky maintain his position.

In November 2021, the Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration left his post, resulting in the postponement of further formal negotiations in 5+2 format.

The elections for the Popular Assembly of Gagauzia were organized on 19 of September, after having been postponed several times since 2020. PAS did not participate. After the second round of voting in October

2021, the Block of Communists and Socialists received 9 mandates, PACE received 1 mandate and independent candidates received 25 mandates. Due to this fragmentation, the members of the Popular Assembly were not able to elect a speaker during more than 10 sessions organized in 2021.

Since 2015, the relationship between Gagauzia and the national government has improved, followed by negotiations within the permanent Joint Working Group between the Parliament of Moldova and the Peoples' Assembly of Gagauzia. However, the Bashkan of Gagauzia, Irina Vlah, has reduced communication with the new government, while the relationship with President Sandu has gone cold due to the tough messages spread by both actors during the election period.

NATIONAL VISION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In 2018 Moldova drafted the **Moldova 2030 National Development Strategy**, which provides a strategic vision for the country's socioeconomic development in the coming years based on a set of priority dimensions that measure the quality of life for its population.⁸ The strategy has been approved by the government, but is pending approval from parliament. This document serves as a strategic benchmark and framework strategy for all national, regional and local policy papers and aims at achieving the SDGs and ensuring that no one is left behind in the process. The **10 priority areas** covered in the Moldova 2030 strategy address:

- Sustainable increase in incomes and reduction of economic inequalities;
- Improvement in public infrastructure, utilities and housing;
- Enhancement of working conditions and reduction in unemployment;
- Ensuring quality of education and promotion of lifelong learning;
- Ensuring fundamental rights to physical and mental health;
- Development of a solid and inclusive social protection system;
- Ensuring work-life balance;
- Establishment of efficient and inclusive governance and rule of law;

- Promotion of a peaceful, safe and inclusive society;
- Ensuring the fundamental right to a healthy and safe environment.

Meanwhile, many sectoral policies guiding the development of specific areas of the economic and social development expired, while others are at the midterm review stage. In this context, and given that the COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis have had a substantial footprint on the economic and social development of Moldova, the revision and adaptation of the Moldova 2030 strategy is foreseen.

In October 2021, the **Government of Moldova** approved the **Action Plan for 2021–2022**, which sets priorities for investment in human capital, competitiveness of domestic goods and services, digital transformation, efficient public finance management, poverty reduction, climate change and environmental protection.

In addition, a three-year National Development Plan 2023–2025 will be developed based on the revised and updated Moldova 2030 strategy, aligned with the Medium-Term Budgetary Framework.

8 Government of the Republic of Moldova, [The National Development Strategy Moldova 2030](#) (2018).



Photo: OHCHR Moldova

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE COMMITMENTS OF MOLDOVA

Moldova has ratified seven of the nine core United Nations human rights treaties. The two conventions that remain unratified are the Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.⁹ Moldova actively engages with international human rights monitoring mechanisms and is up-to-date in its reporting to them.

In 2021 Moldova ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the so-called “Istanbul Convention”) signed in 2017, which allows it to address the high prevalence of gender-based violence against women – including domestic, economic and psychosocial violence – while contributing to fulfilling its commitments on the protection of human rights. The process of ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is at the final stage of law promulgation by the President of Moldova, with further publica-

tion in the Official Gazette. Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities aims at strengthening the implementation and monitoring of the Convention and focusing advocacy efforts towards the CSOs.

The Government of Moldova established and operationalized the National Human Rights Council, supported by the Permanent Human Rights Secretariat, a function performed by the Human Rights and Social Dialogue Department under the State Chancellery.

Moldova continues to be a partially free country. It ranks sixty-first out of 100 countries (it was sixtieth in the previous year)¹⁰ in the Freedom in the World Index 2021,¹¹ with political rights scoring 26 points (similar for previous year) out of 40 and civil liberties 36 (34 for previous year) out of 60. Decision-making in the country is mainly centralized, and local authorities are not usually consulted prior to decisions made at the central level.¹²

9 For more information on the status of ratification by the Republic of Moldova, see the [United Nations Treaty Body Database](#) – Ratification Status for the Republic of Moldova.

10 Freedom House, Freedom in the World Report (2020).

11 Freedom House, Freedom in the World Report (2021), available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>.

12 Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, [Local and Regional Democracy in the Republic of Moldova](#) (2019).

The rights to health, social protection and a fair trial are among the three least respected rights in Moldova according to respondents of the human rights perception study. Furthermore, there is a relatively low level of information regarding the human rights of the population, with a slightly positive increase of 7 per-

centage points over the 2016 level. Notably, according to the human right perception study of 2020, 56.5 per cent of respondents declared that they were informed about human rights.

REGIONAL COOPERATION AND CONTEXT

EUROPEAN UNION–MOLDOVA ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT

Since 2014, Moldova has formalized and deepened its commitment to European Union integration, having signed a [European Union–Moldova Association Agreement](#), which provides for (inter alia): (i) a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) Agreement allowing a preferential regime for exports from Moldova to the European single market; and (ii) compliance with the European Union *Acquis Communautaire* in selected policy areas. The DCFTA covers elimination of tariffs on trade in goods, as well as the reduction of non-tariff barriers to trade in goods, services and investment (i.e. facilitation of market access).

Despite some progress reiterated in the [Association Implementation Report 2021](#), Moldova is further required to accelerate stagnating reforms in the justice sector in line with the Strategy for Ensuring the Independence and Integrity of the Justice Sector (2021–2024); to finalize investigating the bank fraud of 2014 and other illicit financial flows; to continue implementing structural reforms; to follow up on its commitments regarding tobacco taxation; and to converge with other requirements of the European Union *Acquis*.

In June 2021, the European Commission announced an [Economic Recovery Plan for Moldova](#), expecting to mobilize up to €600 million over the next three years for promoting investments in sustainable and inclusive

recovery from COVID-19. Furthermore, the European Union has provided Moldova with significant medical and economic support amounting to €127 million for the purpose of mitigating the impact of the pandemic and the economic crisis. In December 2021 the European Union approved the allocation of a €60 million grant to mitigate the consequences of the energy-related and COVID-19-related crises for Moldova.

COOPERATION WITH THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES (CIS)

Moldova became a member of CIS following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and takes part de jure in all CIS structures and initiatives. De facto, Moldova primarily uses the free trade agreement with CIS countries that primarily covers goods; an agreement on free trade with services (and investments) is under development, and it is not yet clear whether it will be endorsed by Moldova.

Furthermore, in 2014, in response to the Government of Moldova signing the DCFTA with no prior consultation regarding its trade implications, Russia introduced Customs duties for several types of [goods](#) (including fruits, vegetables and wines), negatively affecting the exports of agricultural products by Moldova. Since then, the temporary lifting of Customs duties for these strategic export products has turned into a political agenda.

2

POPULATION GROUPS LEFT BEHIND

The inclusion of this section in this UN CCA is in line with the central and transformative premise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to LNOB. In this section, we identify the groups that are being left behind in Moldova and analyse the different layers of vulnerability they face.

In the analysis, we have considered all 13 vulnerable groups¹³ as suffering significant deprivations. As such, we have not listed the groups by order of priority, as we feel they all urgently deserve to be supported.

INTERSECTORAL DEPRIVATION AND DISCRIMINATION

In practice, most vulnerable people face more than one kind of deprivation and/or disadvantage or discrimination. For example, persons with disabilities in Moldova often experience different types of discrimination and stigmatization and have minimal access to public services, information and justice.

Some groups face severe and/or intersecting deprivations and disadvantages or multiple forms of discrimination that make them likely to be the furthest behind. For instance, women with disabilities have more difficulties accessing education and reproductive health.

The LNOB analysis was based on available data to understand how the different levels of deprivation

Five key factors of LNOB: assessing who is left behind



are affecting vulnerable groups. In line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals Operational Guide for UNCTs, the following five key factors were utilized:

1. **Discrimination:** on the basis of assumed or ascribed identity or status
2. **Geography:** isolation, risk or exclusion due to location; includes environmental degradation, transport and technology
3. **Vulnerability to shocks:** includes conflict, climate and environmental
4. **Governance:** laws, policies, institutions, voice and participation (includes informal and traditional governing systems)
5. **Socioeconomic status:** multidimensional poverty, inequalities, access to services and income

The current analysis is based on the latest universal periodic review (UPR) cycle of Moldova, consultations with vulnerable groups conducted during the months of August and September 2021. Focus group discussions were conducted with five left behind persons: Roma, persons affected or living with HIV, unemployed persons, youth and LGBTI+. In addition, more than 20 assessments on the impact of COVID-19 in Moldova, as well as existing data from the NBS, were considered for the following analysis.

Key determinants that are the underlying factors for the existing vulnerabilities are as follows.

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

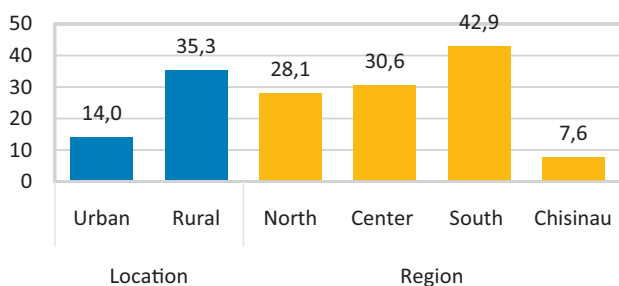
Residence remains an important factor in determining well-being. The rural population is at much higher risk of poverty than the urban population. Furthermore, the poverty rate in rural areas is at least three times higher than in urban settings. Assessments suggest that poverty rates vary across the different regions of Moldova, with some regions being more affected by low access to services, employment, income and quality education. The Southern Region of Moldova has the largest number of poor people, followed by the Central and Northern Region. Chişinău Municipality is the wealthiest area.

There are substantial geographical disparities in the number of people accessing social services. Despite significant progress in recent years, the avail-

13 The identification of the vulnerable groups for the analysis was performed by following the below steps:

1. Initial identification based on the groups included in the COVID-19 Socioeconomic Response and Recovery Plan and also from the VNR document. Inputs from the Government of Moldova on the selected population were included at this stage
2. UNCT reviewed the list of groups and proposed modifications (e.g. the inclusion of persons in detention centres)
3. CSOs recommended modifications based on their experience (e.g. to have the Roma community separated from ethnolinguistic minorities)
4. Analysis of the deprivations suffered by each identified group. Some of the sources utilized for the analysis were the SCORE survey; the VNR; COVID-19 assessments; national strategies and plans; and the Moldova 2030 strategy

Absolute poverty rate by urban/rural location and region (per cent, 2020)



Source: NBS

ability and accessibility of social services for vulnerable and older persons need to be improved. Furthermore, a mapping of social services for children from vulnerable groups in the country's 33 administrative-territorial units revealed uneven and insufficient social services at local level.¹⁴

In addition, disparities in access to services across urban and rural settlements and among ethnic minorities; Roma women are particularly alarming.¹⁵ People living in rural areas have limited access to health care and education.¹⁶ In 2019, 75 per cent of Roma who were registered as unemployed only had primary education.¹⁷ Recent studies suggest that 95 per cent of Roma women living in rural areas who are aged over

50 and have a low level of education are the most vulnerable social group financially.¹⁸

GENDER

Despite improvements in recent years, gender continues to be a determinant of inequalities. Women and men from the most marginalized categories still face some forms of exclusion in different areas of development. For instance, on education, attainment among Roma women remains low. Women with disabilities also face exclusion to quality education.

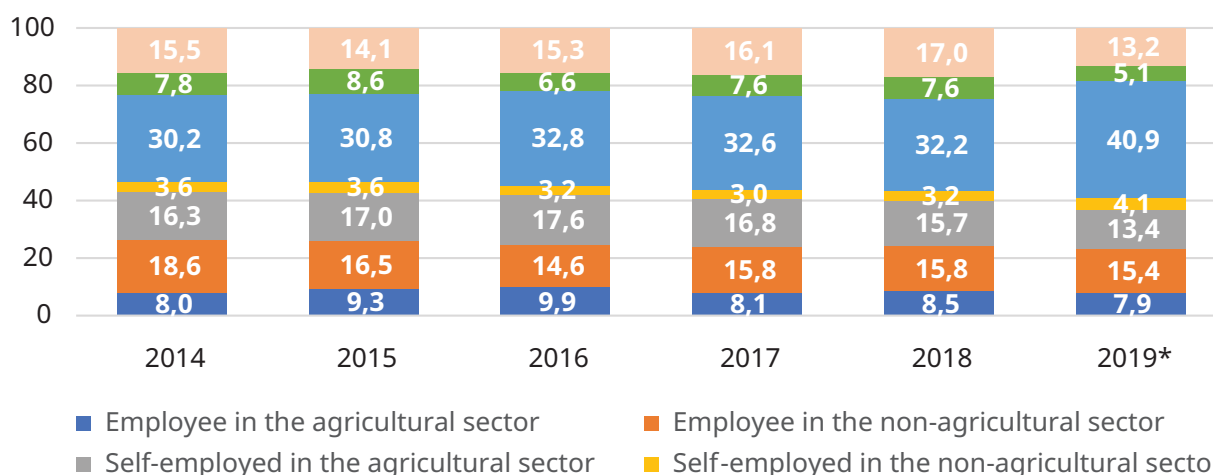
In terms of access to health, vulnerable women lack full access to health care services. Unmet needs for health care services are larger among women, but highest among vulnerable women (see the figure below), reaching 43 per cent among women with disabilities, 35 per cent among poor women and 35 per cent among women aged over 60.

In general, women's empowerment and participation, cultural stereotypes, material deprivation, culture and other factors undermine gender equality in the country.

SOURCE OF INCOME

Source of income also has a strong relationship with, and impacts on, inequality. More than one-third of people living in poverty are retired. In terms of source of income for people living in poverty, there

Structure of the population aged 18+ living in poverty, by the main source of income of the person (per cent)



Source: NBS

14 Soros Foundation Moldova, [Baseline Study on Social Services for People with Intellectual and Psychosocial Disabilities and Children from Vulnerable Groups](#) (2017) [in Romanian].

15 UN Women Moldova, [Impact of COVID-19 Crisis on Roma Population in the Republic of Moldova \(Chişinău, 2020\)](#).

16 UNDP Moldova, [Inequalities in Urban and Rural Moldova: Beyond Incomes and Averages, Looking into the Future of Inequalities](#) (2020).

17 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ["Combined Twelfth-Fourteenth Periodic Reports, Submitted by the Republic of Moldova in Accordance with Article 9 of the Convention Expected to be Presented in 2020", CERD/C/MDA/12-14](#) (2020) [in Russian].

18 UN Women Moldova, [Impact of COVID-19 crisis on Roma population in the Republic of Moldova](#).

has been little change since 2014, with a small increase in the number of people working in the agriculture sector. Based on the main source of income, retired people account for the largest share of people living in poverty (40.9 per cent of the total), followed by those employed in the non-agricultural sector (15.4 per cent in 2019).¹⁹

The most disadvantaged households are those where a pension is the main source of income of the head of the household (39.5 per cent), followed by households where the main source of income of the head of the household is a salary in the agricultural sector (37.9 per cent) or self-employment in the agricultural sector (35.4 per cent).²⁰

AGE

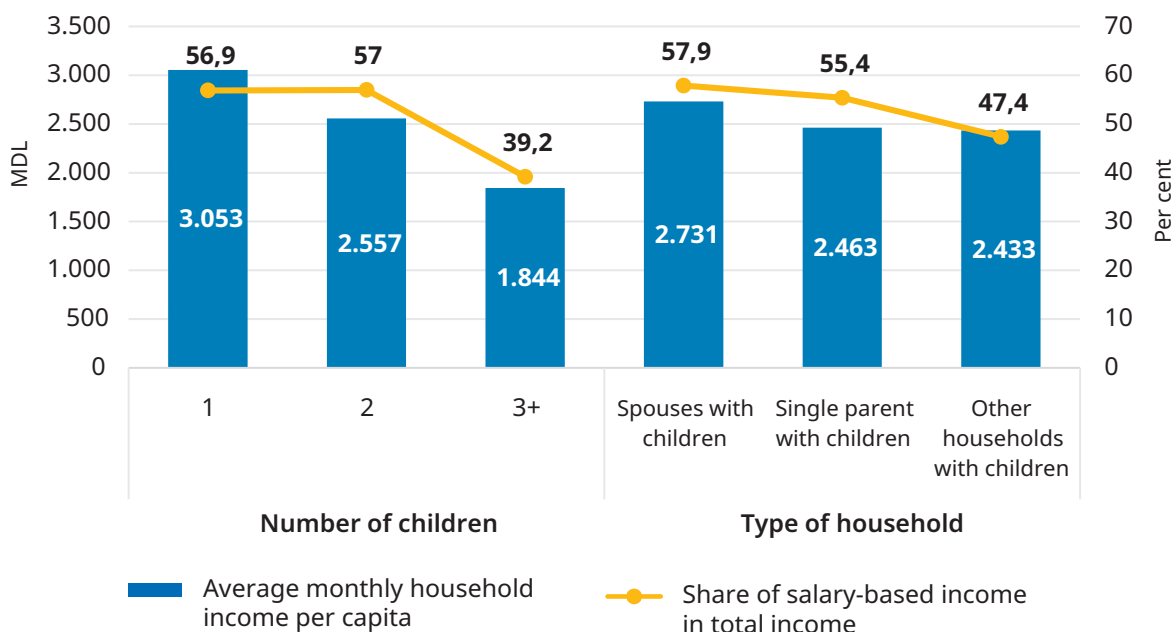
Poverty mainly affects children and older people. While there has been a clear decline in the poverty rate for all age groups, 24.0 per cent of children and 36.8 per cent of older people still live below the poverty line. **Poverty remains particularly prevalent among pensioners in rural areas**, and the *Ajutor Social* cash transfer programme covers only half of the eligible population. The cash benefits are far below the minimum subsistence level, and the eligibility criteria are overly restrictive.²¹

The situation of children differs significantly depending on their area of residence. Children in rural areas (35.7 per cent) are at a much higher risk of impoverishment than children in urban areas (12.5 per cent).²² Poverty rates among Roma children, who mainly live in rural areas, are twice as high as those for non-Roma children.²³

FAMILY SIZE

Household size is a factor determining well-being at the individual level. Households with five or more people face a higher risk of poverty (39.0 per cent in 2020), as poverty rates are nearly twice as high as for households with two, three or four people. At the same time, the absolute rate for households with one person was 31.0 per cent in 2020. For households with children, the level of income depends on several factors, such as the number of children and the household type. Household residence is one of the most important factors. Households with one child are in a better situation with a monthly income of Moldovan Leu (MDL) 3,053.0 per person, compared to households with three or more children, where the average monthly income is MDL 1,844.1.²⁴ Notably, households with more than three children and households with at least one older person are the poorest. Regarding the type of household, households made up of several families have the lowest income levels (MDL 2,433.7 per person per month).

Average income of households with children by number of children and type of household (2020)



Source: NBS

19 NBS, [Poverty Levels in the Republic of Moldova in 2014–2019 \(2020\)](#) [in Romanian].

20 Ibid.

21 CESCR, “[Concluding Observations on the Third Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova](#)”, E/C.12/MDA/CO/3, 2017, para. 48.

22 NBS and UNICEF Moldova, [Analysis of Monetary Poverty and Wellbeing of Households with Children](#) (2021).

23 UNICEF Moldova, *Children in the Republic of Moldova: A Situation Analysis* (2016), p. 7.

24 NBS and UNICEF Moldova, [Analysis of Monetary Poverty and Wellbeing of Households with Children](#).

GROUPS LEFT BEHIND

ETHNO-LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

Moldova is a multi-ethnic country, with around 24 per cent of the population identifying themselves as belonging to ethnolinguistic minorities. The biggest ethnic minorities are Ukrainians (6.5 per cent), followed by Gagauz (4.5 per cent) and Russians (4 per cent). In the census, 6.9 per cent of the population identified as Romanian. The number of Ukrainians and Russians has considerably decreased compared to the previous census in 2004.²⁵

Identified vulnerabilities

The main source of vulnerability for ethnolinguistic minorities in Moldova relates to the **weak mainstreaming of linguistic rights into the legal and policy framework of the country.**

The use of native languages is widespread among minorities in Moldova. That said, the percentage of individuals using their native language more than any other language varies, in the case of ethnic Ukrainians, Bulgarians and Gagauz between 55.6 per cent and 63.8 per cent, compared to 92.8 per cent in the case of ethnic Russians.

Moldova has not reached a sufficient level of state language proficiency by ethnolinguistic minorities for genuine bilingualism and is far from having a multilingual approach in its policy framework. Therefore, minorities face linguistic barriers in order to be fully integrated into general society.

Challenges faced include: a) negative discourse and hate speech that exacerbates stereotypes;²⁶ b) inconsistency in legislation on ensuring linguistic rights and combating racist hate speech and hate crimes; c) the fact that the existing policy framework is not sufficiently funded and implemented;²⁷ d) very low representation of ethnolinguistic minorities in central public authorities, elected bodies and public administration, as well as low participation in public life;²⁸ e) inaccessibility of information of public interest;²⁹ f) low levels of access to justice for ethnolinguistic minorities; g) low inclusion of minority languages in education;³⁰ h) limited access to information because of reduced use of minority languages in the media; and i) low use of minority languages in names and public signs.

Impact of COVID-19:

The linguistic barrier impaired the access of ethnolinguistic minorities to the full spectrum of information about prevention and protection from COVID-19. Communication with minorities was not carried out in their native languages at all stages of the pandemic. Therefore, the pandemic exacerbated already existing vulnerabilities linked to linguistic rights.

25 For the present analysis, Romanians are not considered to be a minority as they speak the same language as people who self-declare as Moldovan and – with the exception of the Roma population – the vulnerabilities experienced by ethno-linguistic minorities in Moldova are linked to the difference in spoken languages.

26 Equality Council, [General Report on the Situation in the Field of Preventing and Combating Discrimination in the Republic of Moldova \(2020\)](#).

27 E. Burdelnii, [Final Report of the Assessment of the Implementation of the National Action Plan for 2017–2020 for the Implementation of the National Strategy for Consolidation of Interethnic Relations for 2017–2027](#) (Chişinău, 2021).

28 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, “Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination”, CERD/C/MDA/CO/7, 2008; Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, “Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 9 of the Convention, Concluding Observations”, Republic of Moldova, 6 April 2011, CERD/C/MDA/CO/8-9; CEDAW, “Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of the Republic of Moldova”, CEDAW/C/MDA/CO/4-5, 2013.

29 Equality Council, [General Report on the Situation in the Field of Preventing and Combating Discrimination in the Republic of Moldova](#), p. 65.

30 There is no financial mechanism for allocating resources for teaching minority language and culture and/or instruction in a minority language.

ROMA POPULATION

The **Roma community accounts for 0.3 per cent of the population of Moldova** and is estimated at 9,300 people. However, these figures are disputed, and many human rights activists in Moldova put the figure closer to 20,000, while some Roma leaders promote the idea of 250,000 Roma living in Moldova.³¹

Identified vulnerabilities

Members of the Roma community in Moldova are among the most marginalized, vulnerable and excluded people in the country, with many living in extreme poverty and often in inadequate housing, with limited access to safe water, sanitation and electricity. Roma routinely face discrimination in access to basic human rights such as social protection, health care, education, productive employment and justice. A large number of Roma have no identity documents, which significantly limits their access to basic services, including medical care, the right to vote, etc.

Discrimination: Many Roma choose to hide their identity as a means of avoiding discrimination. **Roma is one of the most threatened groups by racial discrimination, in particular bias-based exclusion**, in the country and in recent years the situation of discrimination against Roma has worsened.³² Negative perceptions based on stereotypes and prejudice against Roma are widespread. The media,³³ including social media,³⁴ serve as one of the main drivers of hate speech, leading to the stigmatization and discrimination of Roma. In addition, the existing **practices of institutional/structural discrimination in access to justice, including disproportionate and discriminatory use of force and police violence and racial profiling**, greatly contribute to their existing vulnerabilities.

The 2016–2020 **action plan for supporting the Roma population** was the main policy framework to protect the rights of Roma and promote their inclusion in society, including in education, health, housing, employment, culture, media and public administration, but it was insufficiently funded and only partially implemented.

Multilevel poverty: Despite the **special measures** regarding access to vocational and higher education for Roma and other vulnerable groups, there has been no substantive progress in increasing the rate of Roma students.

The **high levels of poverty and social exclusion**³⁵ that some Roma households are exposed to are of greatest concern. This leads to an additional series of difficulties, including: a) **discrimination in access to public services**, including health care and social assistance³⁶ (the key barrier mentioned was lack of money);³⁷ b) **low access to education and the lack of necessary equipment** for organizing and carrying out learning activities; c) **the high level of poverty and the high unemployment rate**; d) **very low participation in public life and government positions** caused by discrimination, language barriers and low levels of education; and e) **the lack of an intersectional approach** to understanding and responding to the vulnerabilities and needs of the Roma population.³⁸

ROMA WOMEN – FURTHER LEFT BEHIND

Roma women in Moldova suffer double discrimination, both as women and as Roma. They are exposed to greater risks of social exclusion and poverty than Roma men and suffer greater gender-based discrimination than non-Roma women.

31 ILO, [Roma Women and the World-Of-Work in the Republic of Moldova](#) (2018).

32 M. Vremiş, N. Vladicescu and P. Vieru, [Perceptions Study on Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova \(Chişinău, 2021\)](#).

33 Council of Europe, [Report on the Mapping of Responses to Hate Speech in the Republic of Moldova](#) (March 2021).

34 Radio Chişinău, [“Statement of the Center for Roma Rights”](#), May 2020.

35 Equality Council, [General Report on the Situation in the Field of Preventing and Combating Discrimination in the Republic of Moldova](#).

36 Opinion poll conducted in 2018 by CBS-Axa, at the request of the Centre Partnership for Development.

37 OHCHR, [Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova](#) (Moldova, 2021).

38 This issue was highlighted by the representatives of CSOs that participated in the UN CCA consultation.

According to an opinion poll conducted in 2019, household chores and family care responsibilities in the Roma community largely fall on women. More than 80 per cent of Roma believe a woman's key role is that of caring for the household, children and family. The rate of domestic violence faced by Romani women is higher than that faced by non-Roma women.

Impact of COVID-19:

Roma were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including by social or economic effects resulting from the pandemic. The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated inequalities, leading to more Roma being made redundant, especially women. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the clean-cut division of gender roles in Roma households. A survey conducted by UN Women³⁹ revealed that women reported spending 20 per cent–40 per cent more hours on housekeeping than men.⁴⁰

The labour situation of Roma has worsened since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, with only 7.3 per cent of Roma in employment between March and May 2020. Roma were also the only group who continued to lose their jobs until the end of the year, with an employment rate of 5.5 per cent in December 2020. Only 2.4 per cent of young Roma reported being in employment (compared to 43.5 per cent of non-Roma).⁴¹ Roma had considerably lower access to health services and medicine than non-Roma between March and December 2020.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The total number of persons living with disabilities in Moldova in 2018 was 176,100, representing 6 per cent of the population. Of the total number of persons with disabilities, 66 per cent live in rural areas and 44 per cent in urban areas. In 2018, the estimated number of **children under 18** with disabilities in Moldova was **10,600**, accounting for 1.8 per cent of the total number of children.

Identified vulnerabilities

Persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, especially women and men living in long-term residential institutions: This group accounts for about 38 per cent of the total number of persons living with disabilities. There is still a high level of reticence towards persons with intellectual disabilities.^{42,43} This group is perceived as “aggressive people, dangerous to society, illiterate people”. There is a lack of social services at community level to ensure their inclusion and empowerment.

Persons with sensory disabilities (visual and hearing impairments), especially children: This group represents about 11 per cent of all persons with disabilities. They have limited access to mainstream services due to a lack of assistive technologies and devices, and limited provision of sign language interpretation. Mainstream services at community level (educational, health and legal institutions) have no capacity to address the needs of persons with sensory disabilities. According to data from the Equality Council, 28 per cent persons with vision disabilities have only a primary level of education.⁴⁴

39 UN Women, “Efectele crizei provocate de pandemia COVID-19 asupra populației de etnie romă din Republica Moldova”, 2020.

40 OHCHR, [Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova](#).

41 Ibid.

42 Acceptance to persons with intellectual disabilities is at 2.6 out of 6. The level of acceptance of minority groups in the Republic of Moldova was measured using the Bogardus social distance scale. The highest degree of acceptance has an index of 0 (the respondent would accept a person from a minority group as a member of the family). The lowest degree of acceptance has an index of 6 (the respondent would exclude members of a group from the country).

43 European Union and Council of Europe Partnership for Good Governance, [Study for the Assessment of the Attitudes of the General Population to Older Persons](#) (2018).

44 Equality Council, [General Report on the Situation in the Field of Preventing and Combating Discrimination](#), p. 24.

Persons with severe and multiple disabilities: According to representatives from organizations of persons with disabilities, this group receive very little attention from the authorities in terms of developing and providing support services. According to a study conducted by the Centre for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2018, only 36 per cent of personal assistance needs were covered.⁴⁵

Persons with physical disabilities: This group of people face challenges related to infrastructural barriers, including the lack of/limited accessibility of public infrastructure and transportation.

Women with disabilities – further left behind: Women with disabilities (48.5 per cent of the total population) face multiple discrimination and exclusion in all areas of life. This includes low participation of women with disabilities in public and political life, and the fact that mainstream services developed to prevent and combat gender-based violence are inaccessible for women and girls with disabilities.

Women with disabilities have less access to education than men with disabilities.⁴⁶ Low rates of employability are one of the greatest barriers to social inclusion for women with disabilities. Having been deprived of employment opportunities at a working age, women are at a greater risk of descending into poverty and of being dependent on welfare payments, not only at the moment when the disability occurs but also in the future. Women with disabilities lack opportunities to escape domestic violence, as most institutions and services are not accessible to them. Besides this, women with psychosocial disabilities face a high risk of violence, including sexual abuse, if they are institutionalized.

This group also face certain disadvantages when it comes to sexuality, reproductive health and starting families. Stereotypes prevalent in society that discriminate against and stigmatize women with disabilities lead some of them to give up family life, especially those with severe disabilities. Women with disabilities have limited access to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights, as health care institutions lack accessible facilities and trained specialists.

Economic vulnerabilities: According to studies on inequalities from 2017⁴⁷ and 2019,⁴⁸ persons with disabilities are among the poorest people, together with older persons. Social protection schemes are the main source of income for people with disabilities, rather than employment and self-employment. The average pension is lower for a person with disabilities compared to a person who does not have a disability (MDL 1,278 compared to MDL 1,709).⁴⁹ **The employment rate of persons with disabilities is half that of the general population.**⁵⁰ **The lack of/limited accessibility, including access to assistive technologies,** is another challenge facing persons with disabilities. This was also highlighted by the 36 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and organizations of persons with disabilities during the consultation process held by the United Nations in 2020.

Discrimination: Since its creation up to the present day, the Equality Council has determined discrimination based on disability in 28 per cent of its decisions, with disability being of the most frequently invoked discrimination criteria, together with gender/sex and age.⁵¹ The main fields of discrimination refer to lack of/refusal to ensure reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities; access to goods and services; education; employment; and access to justice.⁵²

There is very limited participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes, caused by a) the lack of effective and formal consultative mechanisms at both national and local levels that might encourage and enable the meaningful participation of people with disabilities at

45 Centre for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, [Report on the Implementation of the “Personal Assistance” Social Service: Challenges and Needs](#) (2018).

46 Centrul Parteneriat pentru Dezvoltare, [Calea Incertă Spre Calificarea Adulților](#) (2020).

47 East European Foundation, [Study Inequalities in the Republic of Moldova: Challenges and Opportunities](#) (2017).

48 East European Foundation, *Study Unequal Moldova: Analysis of the Most Relevant Inequalities in the Republic of Moldova* (2019).

49 NBS data.

50 Centre for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Alliance of Organizations for People with Disabilities, [Report on Monitoring the National Action Plan for 2018 for the Implementation of the National Employment Strategy for the Period 2017–2021](#) (2018), p. 3.

51 Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection, *Draft 2nd and 3rd Combined Periodic Report on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2020).

52 Equality Council, *General Report on the Situation in the Area of Prevention and Fight Against Discrimination*. In 2019, 13.75 per cent of decisions ascertaining discrimination indicated that this was on the grounds of disability, including health status. The highest number of cases of discrimination on the basis of disability referred to access to publicly available goods and services (54.5 per cent); 27.2 per cent were in the area of education; and 18.1 per cent related to employment.

all stages of the decision-making process; b) the lack of a human rights-based approach to disability, with persons with disabilities not being perceived as important stakeholders with equal rights and opportunities; and c) limited accessibility of persons with disabilities to information, communication and online platforms, as well as the limited accessibility of public infrastructure and transportation.

Impact of COVID-19:

A sociological study conducted by CSOs on the impact of the pandemic on persons with disabilities⁵³ found that more than **50 per cent of households where persons with disabilities live are economically and socially affected by the pandemic**, with more than 85 per cent of these households already reporting in May 2020 that they would be left without necessary resources should the state of emergency continue. Reductions in already-low incomes and higher spending caused by the pandemic led to the greater impoverishment of older women and persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities. During the pandemic, out of 47 per cent of respondents with disabilities (48.9 per cent on the Left Bank) who needed social aid, only 8.7 per cent (8.9 per cent on the Left Bank) benefited from it. Limited accessibility of social assistance services was also reported.⁵⁴

WOMEN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

In 2020, there were 1.37 million women and girls in Moldova, making up 52 per cent of the total population usually resident in the country.

Identified vulnerabilities

In Moldova, 6 out of 10 women aged between 15 and 64 years (63.4 per cent) are subject to certain forms of domestic violence over the course of her lifetime, and 5.9 per cent of women are victims of violence outside the family. For **rural women, the lifetime prevalence rate of violence is 68.2 per cent**, 10.8 percentage points higher than that of women living in urban areas (57.4 per cent).⁵⁵

Women face multiple forms of domestic violence. Around 60 per cent of women have experienced psychological violence at a certain point in their lifetime; 55 per cent have been subject to psychological violence oriented towards making them socially isolated; and 10 per cent have suffered economic violence at least once. In addition, approximately **40 per cent of victims have experienced physical violence at least once in their lives**, and about **19 per cent have experienced sexual violence**.

Despite the fact that there is a fairly high level of reporting of cases of violence against women, a large number of cases continue to go unreported. About one-third of women who have been victims of domestic violence, and more than **one-fifth of victims of violence overall, have never reported the aggression** they faced.

Access to sufficient income is a key element for women to leave the circle of violence. The gender employment gap for women aged over 55 stood at nearly 15 per cent in 2019 (with an employment rate of only 34 per cent, according to the NBS).

Older women further left behind: According to available data provided by CSOs, **women aged 55–65 were most affected by gender-based violence**, as they were more likely to be living with several aggressors within the same household (their partner and other household members). Furthermore, 50 per cent declared that they would not report gender-based violence cases.

53 AOPD, "[Sociological Study Impact of the Pandemic on Persons with Disabilities](#)", May 2020.

54 OHCHR, [Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova](#).

55 NBS, *Violence Against Women in the Family in the Republic of Moldova* (2011).

Impact of COVID-19:

With the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposed restrictive measures, the situation for victims of domestic violence has deteriorated even further. Social distancing and isolation at home have increased the risk of domestic violence, with women being more affected than men.

Women survivors of domestic violence during the lockdown have had to face many challenges, such as a) financial problems; b) the need to place/accommodate survivors of domestic violence with children in rented emergency apartments – a double challenge faced by both the women and the specialists who monitored them; c) restrictions creating difficulties in accessing services, and the suspension of public transport that limited the ability of women affected by domestic violence to go shopping or to seek help from the competent bodies; d) the closure of kindergartens, online schooling and bans on going out to playgrounds, which have all led to increased pressure on women; and e) access to justice being hampered, with local public authorities effectively nowhere to be found during the state of emergency.

VULNERABLE CHILDREN

The share of children aged 0–17 in the total number of the population with usual residence accounted for 21.6 per cent.⁵⁶ In 2020, 31.1 per cent of households in the Republic of Moldova had at least one child under 18, almost 2.3 percentage points less than in 2015. In total, 15.9 per cent of households with children had at least one household member who had migrated (19.1 per cent in rural areas versus 11.9 per cent in urban areas). Of these households, 48.2 per cent had one child, 37.1 per cent had two children and 14.7 per cent had three or more children.⁵⁷

Identified vulnerabilities

Poor children: Although Moldova has made progress at the legislative and policy level, as well as in reducing monetary poverty, poverty rates remain high, particularly affecting children and households with children. With an overall poverty rate of 25.2 per cent in 2019, the poverty rate among children amounted to 24.0 per cent. The situation of children differs significantly depending on their area of residence. **Children in rural areas are at a much higher risk of poverty** than children living in urban areas. Thus, the poverty rate for children in rural areas was 36.0 per cent in 2019, compared to 7.1 per cent among children in urban areas. The bigger discrepancies relate to extreme poverty. The extreme poverty rate of children in rural areas in 2019 constituted 17.6 per cent, compared to 2.5 per cent for children in urban areas. Overall, in Moldova, **11.3 per cent of children suffer from extreme poverty.**

Children further left behind: The most vulnerable groups of children are Roma children, child survivors of violence, children with disabilities and children without parental care, who are exposed to social inequalities in education, health, access to good-quality services and participation. Unequal access to basic services and opportunities feeds a vicious cycle of disadvantage and exclusion. The most vulnerable children are often subject to multiple and intersecting discrimination based on their socioeconomic status, disability and type of impairment, ethnic origin or other factors. Many of these tend to be of a systematic nature.⁵⁸

Children survivors of violence: In 2020, the number of children victims of violence grew by 14.7 per cent versus the previous year. Over half of them are in cities, and the majority of victims of violence are boys (57 per cent). **The phenomenon of violence against children is widespread.** Research reveals⁵⁹

56 NBS, [Situation of Children in 2020 \(2020\)](#).

57 Ibid.

58 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.

59 UNICEF and the Government of the Republic of Moldova, *National Survey on Early Childhood Care and Development: Family Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (Government of the Republic of Moldova/UNICEF, Chişinău, 2018)*.

an alarming incidence of family disputes. Every third child under the age of 7 is subject to occasional or systematic emotional abuse as a witness to family disputes. Over half of caregivers resort to methods that result in the emotional abuse of the child, such as requiring the child to perform certain activities as punishment, the withdrawal of privileges and shouting. 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.⁶⁰

The Violence Against Children Study⁶¹ commissioned by USAID in 2019 indicates that about two out of five girls (36.8 per cent) and boys (37.8 per cent) had experienced any type of violence. About 1 in 7 girls (14.4 per cent) and 1 in 20 boys (5.3 per cent) experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. Many survivors of sexual violence did not tell anyone about their experiences. While three out of five girls (61.9 per cent) and two out of five boys (43.4 per cent) knew a place to go for help, seeking and receiving help was rare.

The number of children at risk is increasing, with the most vulnerable being children from rural areas. In 2020, about 10,280 children were registered as being at risk, 71.7 per cent of them from rural areas. Boys predominated, constituting 52 per cent of children at risk.

Children with disabilities: In 2020, there were an estimated **12,000 children** with disabilities in Moldova, or about 2 per cent of the total number of population under 18 with usual residence. Despite the existence of national data on prevalence, the true prevalence of developmental delays in infants and young children in Moldova is unknown.

Coverage of early identification and early intervention services for children with developmental delays and disabilities aged 0–3 is very low, reaching around 10 per cent of families with young children in need. The situation is similar for rehabilitation services, and information on such services remains largely unavailable.

The inclusive education reforms have resulted in positive trends in inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools, as well as the development of support services for inclusive education and training to build the capacity of teachers in inclusive education. Beyond this progress, more needs to be done to facilitate the educational inclusion of children with severe and multiple disabilities.

Children with disabilities remain one of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups facing difficulties in the realization of their rights, suffering from stigmatizing attitudes towards them that are reinforced by a lack of community services and a lack of participation in making decisions that affect their lives.⁶²

Roma children: Most Roma families live in extreme poverty and lack access to the basic services they need, including health care and education. Roma children face discrimination to the same extent as adults, being denied the right to a safe and healthy childhood and to education. The problems Roma children face can start early in life, **affecting children's development.**⁶³ They are less likely to be registered at birth. Many lack birth certificates that are needed for them to enjoy their rights to a whole range of services, including early education programmes.⁶⁴

Persistence of high school dropout rates among Roma children, in particular Roma girls, was one of the main concerns expressed by the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2020.⁶⁵ For this, the committee recommended the state should provide inclusive re-entry programmes for women and girls who have dropped out of school, including in rural areas and in Roma communities. The enrolment rates of Roma children, including Roma girls, at all school levels are much lower than those of non-Roma children.

Children in residential institutions: The number of children in institutional care has fallen from 9,600 to close to 1,000 over the past 10 years, and the number of children in family-based care has increased

60 Ibid.

61 Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, https://msmps.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/OIM_MoldovaVACS2019_EN_interactive3-1.pdf.

62 CRPD, *Concluding Observations* (2017).

63 East European Foundation, [Unequal Moldova](#).

64 UNICEF, "[Roma Children: Inclusion and Reintegration of Roma Children into the Education System](#)".

65 CEDAW, "[Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova](#)", CEDAW/C/MDA/CO/6, 10 March 2020.

from 6,400 to more than 20,000 (this number includes children left behind by migrant parents who have any form of protection). However, hundreds of children still end up in residential institutions every year, mainly driven by poverty or disability. Living in an institution has proven long-term negative impacts and causes profound delays in nearly all areas of development, including cognitive and emotional development. Stigma, discrimination and gender roles also continue to influence the decision to place a child in institutional care.

Children in contact with the law: The national legal and policy framework is conducive to improved access to justice for children. Solitary confinement of children has been discontinued, alternatives to detention have been improved and all children in contact with the law are entitled to free legal aid. While the number of child offences in Moldova decreased from 998 in 2015 to 606 in 2020, child offenders have become younger and the offences more violent, which significantly reduces the application of diversion measures. Some of the identified problems that children in detention face relate to the poor state of repair and poor conditions within all prisons where children are held; the underdevelopment of psychological assistance and assistance services to mitigate conflict situations; the fact that housing units do not meet standards for protecting the health and development of children, and that sanitary blocks pose a risk of potential infection outbreaks; the fact that the education system does not meet the needs of children; the inability of the prison system to ensure the effective separation of children in pretrial detention (detention on remand) and of adults in detention; and the fact that prisons and the probation system do not enable the re-socialization of minors released from detention.⁶⁶

Impact of COVID-19:

The overall household income of families with children in Moldova has decreased as a result of the pandemic. These families have tried to cut down on expenses they do not consider as priorities (sport, social activities, clothes and so on). In parallel, families experienced an increase in expenses due to the pandemic (increased food prices, increased health care costs to visit private hospitals, increased transportation expenses, utility bills and so on). A quarter to a third of households with children reported less variety in children's meals and having to buy food of lower nutritional value.

Schools offered alternatives and children tried to participate. Lack of devices to connect to the Internet at home for children and of experience with online teaching for teachers were the most reported barriers to effective learning during the pandemic.

ASYLUM SEEKERS, REFUGEES AND STATELESS PERSONS

Asylum seekers: In 2020, 70 new asylum seekers were registered by the Bureau for Migration and Asylum (BMA) in Moldova. The main countries of origin were Turkey, Uzbekistan and Ukraine. **Refugees:** In 2020, Moldova hosted 411 refugees. The main countries of origin were Syria, Ukraine, Turkey, Afghanistan, Iraq and Armenia. **Stateless persons and applicants for stateless status:** In 2020, Moldova hosted 1,886 stateless persons, 306 applicants for stateless status and 1,547 persons with undetermined citizenship. Of these, 73 per cent of all stateless persons resided in Transnistria Region.

Identified vulnerabilities

Asylum seekers: Asylum seekers are obliged to stay at the government-run Temporary Accommodation Centre (TAC) during the refugee status determination procedure. The TAC offers shelter, psychosocial counselling and limited medical assistance, but no food or basic items such as sanitary materials. To address part of this gap, Chişinău Municipality delivers lunches five times per week for all asylum seekers living at the TAC.

66 Child Rights Ombudsperson, [Raportevaluarea respectării drepturilor copiilor aflați în detenție în legătură cu urmărirea penală sau executarea pedepsei](#) (2020).

Asylum seekers enjoy the right to education, employment and primary and pre-hospital emergency health care under the same conditions as citizens of Moldova. Those who are not legally employed or enrolled in an educational institution do not have access to state health insurance. As a result, their access to health care is limited to free-of-charge primary and pre-hospital emergency care. At the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, the government presented pledges aiming, among other things, to ensure that asylum seekers' basic needs will be met and that they will have access to health insurance.

Detained asylum seekers and applicants for stateless status: Asylum seekers and applicants for stateless status are generally not detained. However, foreigners who file an asylum/statelessness application during their stay in the Migrant Accommodation Centre, a detention centre under the responsibility of BMA, are released from custody only by court decision. Pursuant to Section 64 of the Law on Foreigners, detention (public custody) is a measure of restriction of freedom of movement ordered by the court. Unlike the criminal procedure where there is a wide variety of preventive measures as an alternative to detention, in the migration field detention is the only form of public custody available.

Refugees and stateless people: The law of Moldova accords rights to refugees and stateless people on a par with citizens, except for political and land property rights. Effective access to services may be hindered because service providers and refugees or stateless people have limited knowledge of the applicable legal provisions and rights. Refugees often do not feel empowered to claim their rights.

Upon the grant of refugee or stateless status, refugees and stateless people enter into a state-funded integration programme managed by the BMA, which is not sufficiently funded. In addition, the BMA lacks the required staff due to unfilled vacancies and gaps in its organizational structure.

The lack of attractive employment opportunities coupled with negative perceptions of employers vis-à-vis refugees and stateless persons in general impacts on the well-being of the latter. Overall, even though there are integration services available, there is no comprehensive approach and coordination of integration activities among stakeholders, leading to duplication of efforts and gaps.

Unaccompanied and separated children: There are gaps in the legal representation and support for asylum-seeking children, as well as in the way in which best interest procedures are conducted. Child protection authorities have limited information about the asylum procedure and safeguards relating to unaccompanied and separated children during the refugee status determination procedure. Medical age assessment is used automatically with child applicants prior to considering their best interests. The national child protection system is not able to provide protection and support for asylum-seeking children before a final decision on their status is issued.

Trafficking survivors: The mechanisms to identify trafficking cases are weak, and the link between trafficking and the need for international protection is not adequately assessed/identified. To date, very few asylum seekers and refugees have been identified as victims of trafficking. Such cases may be accommodated in the centre for assistance and protection of (potential) victims of trafficking in human beings, where one of the main challenges is the language barrier and the lack of interpretation.

Impact of COVID-19:

The restrictions put in place to control the spread of the virus had a serious impact on the socioeconomic situation of asylum seekers, refugees and stateless persons. Due to loss of employment and the lack of employment opportunities during the lockdown, many persons of concern were unable to pay utilities or rent. Since the end of the lockdown, most have gradually resumed economic activities, which has eased their situation. Of the children of concern to UNHCR covered by this assessment, 19 per cent were not able to attend classes during the pandemic due to lack of proper equipment, an Internet connection, digital knowledge and support from parents.

RETURNING MIGRANTS, FAMILIES DEPENDENT ON REMITTANCES AND VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In recent years, approximately 350,000 nationals of Moldova have been involved in **short-term labour migration**. Of these, 20 per cent had a precarious legal status. In 2019, 341 people were identified as **victims of trafficking** according to available data on figures of identified (presumed) victims. This represents a considerable decrease of 24 per cent in comparison with 2018.⁶⁷

Identified vulnerabilities

With a **quarter of households in Moldova** (approximately 237,000 households) receiving remittances, many vulnerable families in the country depend on this income. For half of these households (118,000 households), remittances make up more than 50 per cent of their disposable income. In Moldova, 23.4 per cent of households, i.e. 224,000 households (30.5 per cent of those in rural areas), would be placed below the poverty line if they no longer received remittances.

Returning migrants: Among those who wanted to return to Moldova as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting restrictions, the key motives related to loss of employment (26 per cent of respondents); temporary suspension of employment (20 per cent); the risk of being evicted from rented housing (14 per cent); and health-related problems and fear of being infected with COVID-19 (12 per cent). Migrants with irregular legal status in their destination countries were most affected. Without formal work contracts, these people were left without employment or any source of income as soon as quarantine restrictions were announced, and they were not able to access the unemployment or social benefits offered by the host countries at times of crisis for citizens and labour migrants with legal status (an exception is Ireland).

Victims of trafficking: Moldova remains primarily a country of origin for trafficking.⁶⁸ People who live below or near the poverty line and who have low educational attainment are most at risk, while the lack of job prospects in Moldova or within local communities continue to be the main contributing push factors.

Victims from the Transnistria Region are more likely to be trafficked through Odessa (Ukraine), whereas those from Gagauzia are more likely to be trafficked through Turkey (for sexual exploitation in particular).

Impact of COVID-19:

During a crisis, certain factors increase the vulnerability of some groups to potential traffickers, such as limited access to services, loss of employment and the reduction of working hours. These situations can place people in settings where their well-being and that of their families may be compromised. At the same time, a crisis can also aggravate the situations of those who are already victims of trafficking.

Approximately 7,000 returning migrants (9 per cent) are vulnerable and would require social, financial, humanitarian or logistical support upon return.⁶⁹ They indicated that they could consider remaining in Moldova under certain conditions, such as provision of jobs and competitive salaries, a climate enabling investments, improvement in the quality of life, and access to the quality public services. In addition, 80 per cent of migrants indicated either that they had reduced the amount they were remitting or had stopped remitting altogether because of the impact of the COVID-19 emergency impact.⁷⁰

67 National Committee for Combating Trafficking in Persons, [Raport National de realizare a politicii de prevenire și combatere a traficului de ființe umane pentru anul 2019](#) (2019).

68 According to the IOM Mission to Moldova Prevention and Protection, these people were neither Moldovan citizens nor did they possess "Transnistria Region identification documents".

69 The actual figure is likely higher, as the most vulnerable groups were not covered by the survey.

70 IOM, [IOM Rapid Field Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 on the Wellbeing of the Moldovan Diaspora: An Evidence Base Regarding Migrants' Coping Strategies and Contributions](#) (2020).

PERSONS LIVING WITH AND AFFECTED BY HIV

Based on data from the Integrated Biobehavioural Survey 2020, the HIV epidemic continues to be concentrated in key populations, with a weighted average prevalence of 11.4 per cent among people who inject drugs (PWID), 11.4 per cent among men who have sex with men and almost 3 per cent among sex workers, while in the general population the burden is about 0.3 per cent. However, the 2020 Integrated Biobehavioural Survey recorded different levels in different places and by key population. In Balti, HIV prevalence is about 15 per cent among PWID, 4 per cent among sex workers and 8 per cent among men who have sex with men. In Tiraspol, HIV prevalence has been increasing among PWID (the only population surveyed) and has reached 24 per cent. Among people in detention, HIV prevalence continues to increase and has reached 4 per cent.

Identified vulnerabilities

Persons living with HIV are more exposed to socioeconomic vulnerabilities and poverty, have often not completed their education and are not in decent work conditions. **About 82 per cent of persons living with HIV are living under the minimum subsistence level: every third person with HIV stated that their income was not enough to meet their basic needs**, and every second person stated that their income was only enough to meet their basic needs. The Stigma Index (2017–2018) found that **about 36 per cent of persons living with HIV were unemployed**, with women twice as likely to be unemployed as men: 26.6 per cent of men living with HIV were unemployed, compared to 45.7 per cent of women.

Impact of COVID-19:

COVID-19 increased the risks faced by persons living with HIV as a result of low access to, or disruption of, HIV treatment and prevention; weakened health systems; impoverishment; increasing vulnerability; and increased marginalization and abuse of rights. Persons living with HIV are also vulnerable to COVID-19, even if they are receiving antiretroviral treatment, as they have a much higher burden of existing illness and co-morbidities such as Tuberculosis and hepatitis.

OLDER PERSONS

The poorest households are those that include an adult with a disability, followed by households made up of older persons.⁷¹ In Moldova, 24.3 per cent of **households composed of a single person aged over 60 face absolute poverty**. In addition, older women face more intense material, financial and physical vulnerabilities than men as a result of the perpetuation of patriarchal gender roles throughout their life cycle, as the Active Ageing Index shows.⁷²

The pension of pensioners from rural areas (who were employed in agriculture) does not cover the minimum subsistence level. The minimum pension covers just 63 per cent of basic needs for those who depend on it.

The most pressing problems that older people face when accessing health and social services are a) insufficient human resources to provide quality medical and social care; b) the fact that most health centres are in urban areas; and c) additional costs not covered by health insurance.⁷³

71 CPD, [Inegalitățile în Republica Moldova: Provocări și oportunități](#) (2017).

72 UNFPA, [Active Ageing Index in the Republic of Moldova](#) (2016).

73 Equality Council, [General Report on the Situation in the Field of Preventing and Combating Discrimination](#), pp. 19–21.

Impact of COVID-19:

The latest risk analysis of COVID-19 on older persons⁷⁴ shows that older women were among the most affected and most vulnerable populations, having the highest risk of poverty. Also, 44.7 per cent of older persons declared that their available income was not sufficient for their minimum existence needs, which was exacerbated by COVID-19.⁷⁵ The income of older people decreased during the pandemic. The most affected older persons on the labour-market were pre-pensioners, of whom about 16.7 per cent lost their salary income.⁷⁶

In terms of food security, it is estimated that 4.2 per cent of people aged 60+ had no access at all to food during the pandemic; for 40.2 per cent, food was only partially accessible.⁷⁷ Older persons faced also bigger difficulties in accessing treatment and medical check-ups, even if family doctors continued to provide primary medical consultation within their facilities and by phone.

PEOPLE IN DETENTION

In total, 6,683 people are detained in prisons on the Right Bank, while 3,000 prisoners are estimated to be detained on the Left Bank. The incarceration rate is 168 per 100,000 of the population, one of the highest in the European Region. Moldova has registered a 72 per cent reoffending rate.

Identified vulnerabilities

Prisoners are subject to various levels of vulnerability, stigma and discrimination. Imprisonment limits access to education, health care, employment and social life.

In Moldova, prisoners are detained in poor conditions (overcrowding; poor state of repair and hygiene; limited access to natural light; insalubrious sanitary facilities; and vermin infestation).⁷⁸ One-third of all prisoners are registered as having chronic health conditions and 40 per cent have mental health disorders. A large share of prisoners enter the prison system with a pre-existing condition, which might worsen during their time in prison due to limited access to health care and poor detention conditions.

After their release, prisoners are subject to multiple layers of discrimination. Having a criminal record impedes prisoners in finding a job, finding housing, obtaining credit from the bank, creating a family and having normal social relations.

Women prisoners face more discrimination than men in the society, both during imprisonment and after their release.

Impact of COVID-19:

Constant transportation and movement of detained and imprisoned people presents a high risk of COVID-19 infection for both detainees and prison staff, especially given the high number of infected detention facility employees. Further risk factors are the impossibility of maintaining social distance, as well as inadequate health care for people in detention.

74 UNFPA, Implications of COVID-19 on Older People in Moldova (2020).

75 Institute for Public Policy, [Public Opinion Barometer](#) (2020).

76 HelpAge International Moldova and Platform for Active Ageing, Monitoring Report of Measures Taken by Competent Public Authorities for Prevention, Preparedness Planning and Management Actions During COVID-19 Pandemic, from the Perspective of Impact on Older Persons, Case Study – 3 Districts (Edinet, Straseni and Stefan Voda), p. 6.

77 OHCHR, [Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova](#).

78 United Nations Committee Against Torture, Concluding Observations to the Government of the Republic of Moldova by the United Nations Committee Against Torture.

LGBTI+ PERSONS

It is estimated that LGBTI+ persons account for around 5 per cent to 7 per cent of the population. LGBTI+ people are among the most discriminated against and underrepresented groups.

Identified vulnerabilities

LGBTI+ persons remain the least accepted social group in Moldova. Given the wide lack of acceptance of LGBTI+ people in society, they face various types of vulnerabilities, particularly in relation to the right to personal security and integrity, the right to effective remedy and access to services and the right to work.⁷⁹

Lack of protection and remedies in cases of bias-motivated crimes (violence) against LGBTI+ people: According to Genderdoc-M, an association working in the field of LGBTI+ rights, homophobic and transphobic crimes are not recognized as such by the police, by prosecutors or by the judiciary. The right to self-expression and freedom of peaceful assembly, even if formally secured by the authorities in the context of Moldovan Pride, remains a much-discussed challenge for LGBTI+ people in the country.

The intolerance towards LGBTI+ people fuels hate speech and hate crimes against them. The legal framework does not criminalize hate speech towards LGBTI+ people, and the cycle of hatred and intolerance continues.

Impact of COVID-19:

During lockdown, the organization that provides services and support to LGBTI+ people had to interrupt the delivery of these services. Members of the LGBTI+ community were exposed to an increased risk of violence (for instance, if they were forced to return to families that do not accept them), with a lack of access to health care (for instance, hormone therapy) and to work and livelihoods.⁸⁰

SMALLHOLDER AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS

Small-scale farming predominates in the agricultural sector in Moldova, and the role of smallholders in the whole agricultural production and rural development of the country is very significant. There are 900,000 agricultural holdings with an average land size of 2.5 ha. In total, 98.8 per cent of agricultural producers are smallholders, and they cultivate 36.4 per cent of the total agricultural land, generating over 62 per cent of the total volume of agricultural production.⁸¹ Although they make up one of the most important sectors for the country, smallholder producers suffer great vulnerabilities. It is estimated that 41 per cent of people who are self-employed in the agricultural sector are poor.⁸²

79 UNDP, [STUDIUL privind percepțiile și atitudinile față de egalitate în Republica Moldova](#) (Chișinău, 2018) (in Romanian), p. 50. 28 per cent of respondents from the general population said that the first association they had when hearing about LGBTI+ people was “abnormal”, while 29 per cent had the association “promiscuous”. A further 66 per cent of respondents said that they would prohibit LGBTI+ people from exercising their right to get married, and 71 per cent would stop them from adopting a child.

80 OHCHR, [COVID-19 and the Human Rights of LGBTI People](#) (2020).

81 NBS, [General Agricultural Census](#) (2011).

82 NBS, [Poverty Level in the Republic of Moldova in 2014–2018](#) (2020).

Identified vulnerabilities

Smallholders are dealing with multiple challenges, in terms of economic profitability and various threats posed by the effects of climate change and extreme weather events. This situation was aggravated by the negative consequences of a severe drought in the country, which decreased the cereal, fruit and vegetable harvests by 20 per cent to 50 per cent.

Small-scale farms are mainly subsistence and semi-subsistence farms that produce crops for self-sufficiency, meaning that the economic situation of smallholders is very unstable. Poverty rates are highest in rural areas.

This group experience major deficiencies in terms of poor infrastructure in rural areas and low access to financial resources needed for investment in production technologies, high costs of the inputs and agriculture machinery. As for the marketing of products, due to small volumes and inconsistent quality, smallholders cannot access high-value markets or negotiate long-term supply contracts.

Groups further left behind: Elderly people, women living in rural households and families with adult members with disabilities are particularly exposed to poverty. The lack of employment opportunities and population ageing mean that smallholders are highly dependent on self-employment, remittances and pensions.

Impact of COVID-19:

The COVID-19 related measures imposed by the government in the spring of 2020 negatively affected the agricultural sector and smallholders, who experienced lack of access to local markets to sell their products as well as difficulties accessing inputs for production.

PERSONS LIVING IN RURAL AREAS

It is estimated that 56.9 per cent of the population of Moldova live in rural areas.⁸³ Rural women constitute almost 30 per cent of the country's population and 51 per cent of the stable⁸⁴ rural population.⁸⁵ Furthermore, 66 per cent of people living with disabilities in Moldova live in rural areas.⁸⁶ According to NBS data, 56.6 per cent of people aged over 60 live in rural areas.⁸⁷

Identified vulnerabilities

Life expectancy in rural areas is 2.6 years lower than life expectancy in urban areas. Driven by the lack of opportunity to earn a living and find employment, as well as by the reduced access to services, Moldovans are migrating from the rural areas to the cities.⁸⁸

In rural areas, income levels are 1.4 per cent lower than in urban areas.⁸⁹ In rural households, salaries are the most important source of income (38.1 per cent of total income), but the contribution is 24.8 percentage points lower than in urban areas.⁹⁰ The rural population is more dependent on transfers

83 NBS, [2019 MOLDOVA ÎN CIFRE: Breviar statistic / МОЛДОВА В ЦИФРАХ: Статистический справочник](#) (2019).

84 The stable rural population refers to the number of people who have a permanent home in the respective territory, including people who are temporarily absent.

85 Institute for Public Policies, [Perspective of Women from Rural Areas on Both Banks of River Nistru](#) (2019).

86 NBS, [Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Moldova in 2018](#) (2018).

87 NBS, *Vârstnicii în Republica Moldova în anul 2017* (2018), available at <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=6141>.

88 UNDP Moldova, [Inequalities in Urban and Rural Moldova](#).

89 Institute for Public Policies, [Perspective of Women from Rural Areas](#), p. 33.

90 NBS, [Veniturile și cheltuielile populației în anul 2019](#) (2020).

from abroad than the urban population, with remittances making up 16 per cent of income compared to 8.5 per cent for the urban population. In addition, social benefits are a more important source of overall income, making up 20.5 per cent of total income compared to 16.8 per cent in urban areas.

Access to public services is also lower for the rural population. In terms of access to health, there is currently a scarcity of medical staff in rural areas; family doctors have to provide primary medical assistance to the population of at least two to three communities. In this context, those most vulnerable, such as older persons and persons with disabilities from rural areas are suffering for low access to health. In rural areas, there is a higher prevalence of chronic diseases (50.8 per cent, compared to 44.2 per cent in urban areas).

Girls and women from rural areas face difficulties in exercising their sexual and reproductive rights due to limited access to family planning services and contraceptives. Women from rural areas who are victims of gender-based violence do not have access to protection services due to the lack of shelters and support services for victims, including psychosocial counselling, legal assistance and rehabilitation programmes.⁹¹

In terms of education, according to the results of the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), there are differences between the competencies of students from urban and rural areas. Approximately 56 per cent of students in rural schools do not reach the minimum level of competence in science.⁹² This could be due to the unequal distribution of educational services within in Moldova.

There is particularly low access to clean water and sanitation: about 23 per cent of villages do not have access to drinking water and sewerage networks, and many of the existing systems are outdated.⁹³

There is a lower knowledge of human rights and poor perceptions and level of tolerance towards members of underrepresented groups among people living in rural areas.

Impact of COVID-19:

COVID-19 deepened existing inequalities for the rural population.⁹⁴ Access to medical services was even lower than at other times due to a lack of transportation, as well as due to fears of infection among medical staff. Rural population have also experienced lower access to social and support services, and children in rural areas have had lower access to good-quality distance education given limited Internet access, specifically access to broadband.

91 CEDAW, “Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova”, [CEDAW/C/MDA/CO/6](#), 2020.

92 People’s Advocate, [Report on the Respect of Human Rights and Freedoms in the Republic of Moldova](#) (2019).

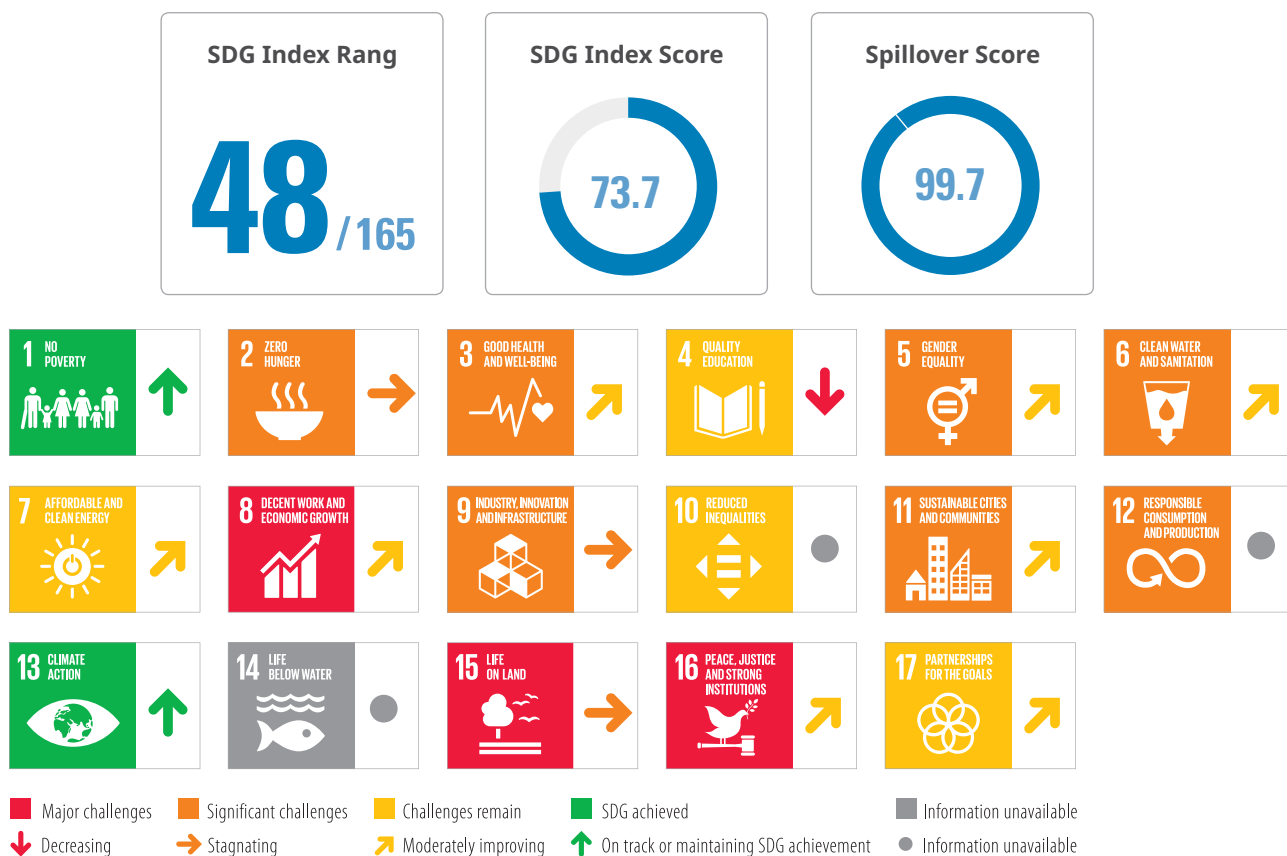
93 NBS, [Water Supply and Sewerage in 2017](#) (2018).

94 According to the members of the NGO Task Force on COVID-19 and Human Rights created at the initiative of OHCHR.



3
**PROGRESS
TOWARDS
ACHIEVING
THE SDG
AGENDA**

SDG assessment and trends (SDG Report 2021)



Source: <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/profiles/moldova>

In 2015, Moldova committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The first National Voluntary Review (VNR) of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda⁹⁵ was presented to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum in 2020. The VNR highlighted significant progress towards achieving SDGs 1, 8, 13 and 17, while progress towards achieving SDGs 2, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 has been moderate. Although efforts were undertaken to realize development outcomes across all social areas, there has been less noticeable progress towards achievement of SDGs 4, 6, 10, 12, 15 and 16. It should be noted that, in the SDG Report 2021, negative progress was identified for SDG 4 and major challenges remain on SDGs 8, 15 and 16.

At the same time and in parallel with the VNR process, the NBS has developed a list of nationalized SDGs indicators that will allow monitoring of progress towards the 2030 Agenda.⁹⁶ However, data collection and re-

porting per the SDGs is jeopardized by the government's limited internal capacities and the cross-cutting nature of many SDGs.

INCLUSIVE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Moldova is a diverse and multi-ethnic country.

While over three-quarters of the population are Moldovan, the country is also home to Romanians, Ukrainians, Gagauz, Russians, Bulgarians, Roma and other ethnolinguistic groups.⁹⁷ Gagauzians and Bulgarians are predominantly concentrated in southern Moldova; other nationalities are dispersed across the country, while most Ukrainians and Russians live in the biggest cities (Chişinău and Balti Municipalities). Transnistria Region is populated by ethnic Moldovans, Russians and Ukrainians in roughly equal shares.

95 United Nations Moldova, [Republic of Moldova Voluntary National Review Progress Report 2020](#).

96 Government of the Republic of Moldova and NBS, [Nationalization of Indicators for Sustainable Development Goals](#) (2017).

97 These figures do not include the Eastern raions and Bender city. For more detailed information, see NBS, [Results of Population and Housing Census in the Republic of Moldova \(2014\)](#).

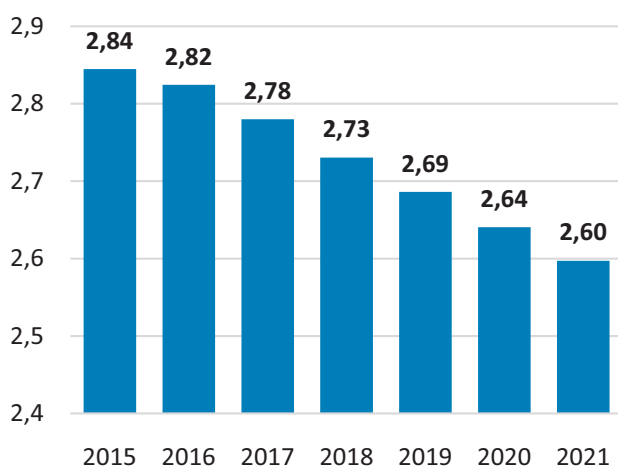
DEMOGRAPHIC DECLINE

In recent years, the development of Moldova has been compromised in part by the rapidly declining population, which not only comes with negative economic effects due to growing pressure on social budgets but can also weaken demand for investment as available human capital shrinks.

Moldova is one of the countries with the fastest shrinking populations in the world. Over the last decades, Moldova has faced accelerated population decline due to massive outmigration, high mortality and lower birth rates, leading to a growing share of older people in the population. Over the last eight years, the resident population⁹⁸ has decreased by 10.5 per cent (from 2,844,000 in 2015 to 2,597,100 in 2021).⁹⁹ These demographic dynamics have led to an average annual population decline of 1.8 per cent, posing significant challenges for the country's demographic situation and its future socioeconomic development.

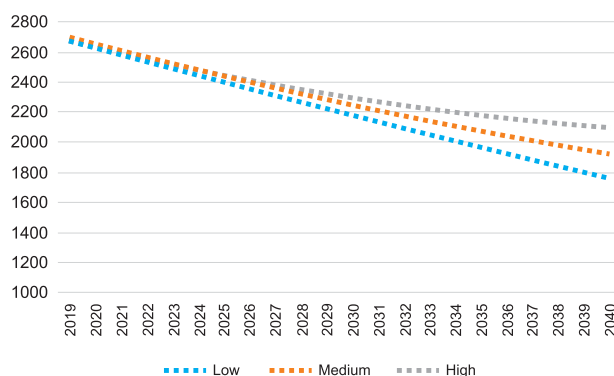
In coming years, the challenge of an ageing population in Moldova will be felt more keenly. The population decline is expected to continue, with recent UNFPA projections¹⁰⁰ showing that, between now and

Resident population in Moldova (millions)



Source: NBS

Population Projection



Source: UNFPA and Demographic Research Centre

2040, the population is expected to decrease on average by 34.5 per cent in the *low growth* scenario, and by 21.5 per cent in the *high growth* scenario.

The **low growth scenario** is based on the following assumptions: (i) the fertility rate will decline to 1.7 children per woman of reproductive age; (ii) the mortality rate will be moderate, while life expectancy will grow; and (iii) the net migration flow will be within -1 per cent to -1.3 per cent. The **high growth scenario** is based on optimistic projections of (i) an upturn in fertility rates to the level of 2.1 children per woman of reproductive age; (ii) a substantial reduction in mortality rates and an increase in life expectancy for both sexes; and (iii) halting the reduction in net emigration towards the end of the projection period. The **medium population growth scenario** is an intermediary scenario based on a faster increase in life expectancy at birth for men than for women.

DECLINING BIRTH RATES

The number of children in the population of Moldova is decreasing,¹⁰¹ primarily because of declining birth rates. **The fertility rate of Moldova**¹⁰² **is below the population replacement level, but one of the highest of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).** The total fertility rate in 2020 was stable at 1.77 births per woman, but below the rate of 2.1 births per woman needed to maintain a stable population over time, and below the desired fertility rate of 2.8.¹⁰³

98 The NBS, with UNFPA support, recalculated the population in 2020, based on a new methodology that includes the habitually resident population, consisting of those who have lived mainly on the territory of the Republic of Moldova for the last 12 months, regardless of temporary absences.

99 NBS data (2021), available [here](#).

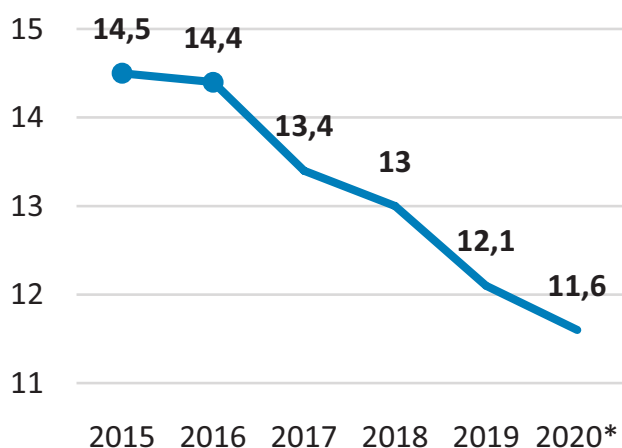
100 UNFPA and the Centre for Demographic Research Projections, Moldova Country Gender Assessment (2021).

101 The share of children in the total resident population is relatively stable (21.6 per cent in 2021), but the absolute number of children is continuously decreasing (from 602.1 thousand in 2016 to 559.7 thousand in 2021), indicating high rates of adult population decline.

102 The fertility rate is the number of live births per 1,000 women of reproductive age (aged 15 to 49) per year. The total fertility rate in Moldova is calculated based on the NBS population number, revised based on the 2014 population census.

103 Replacement level fertility is the total fertility rate, or the average number of children born per woman at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next, without migration. The desired fertility, or ideal fertility of a female at a given point in time, is the total completed fertility she would like to have. Further analysis can be found in UNFPA, Generations and Gender Survey (2020).

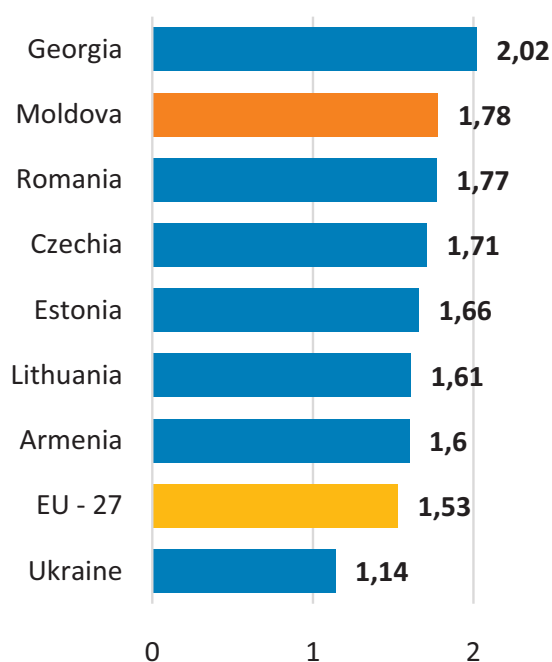
Birth rate



* Provisional data

Source: NBS

Fertility rate (selected countries, 2019)



Source: NBS and Eurostat

The decision on the number of children to have is based on various factors, including access to quality childcare services, work-life balance, family-friendly policies at work and gender equality at a household and public level. In 2020, the number of births declined by over a quarter compared to 2015, while the birth rate fell to a five-year low of 11.6 babies per 1,000 population. At the national level, there were 30,730 live births in 2020, 9,817 fewer than in 2015 (a fall of 24 per cent).

Studies suggest that the child population is falling so quickly in part due to the outmigration of parents.¹⁰⁴ In the medium term, fewer children result in a lower number of students at schools and universities (notably, in the last decade, the number of university students has almost halved),¹⁰⁵ while in the long run it leads to a lower number of graduates entering the labour-force.¹⁰⁶ In the context of the steady decrease in the number of children being born, there has been an upward trend in the number of vulnerable children, from 31,117 in 2015 to 34,443 in 2017,¹⁰⁷ and it is likely that this has been exacerbated by COVID-19.

POPULATION AGEING

Between 2015 and 2021,¹⁰⁸ the share of the working-age population shrank by 12.2 per cent, while the proportion of pension-age people¹⁰⁹ grew rapidly until 2019 (by 1.3 per cent on average) before slowing down in 2021. **Over the last years, the population ageing coefficient¹¹⁰ has increased by 4.4 per cent** from 18.1 per cent (in 2015) to 22.5 per cent (in 2020). **The share of people aged over 65 in the total resident population also increased from 11.4 per cent (in 2015) to 14.5 per cent (in 2020)**, surpassing countries such as Albania (14.7 per cent), Northern Macedonia (14.48 per cent), Armenia (11.8 per cent) and Kosovo¹¹¹ (8.5 per cent).¹¹² Despite the overall high share of older people in Moldova, the share of adults aged over 80 is quite small, suggesting that, while the older population is growing, this rate of growth is not commensurate with an adequate increase in longevity. The overall share of population aged over 80 is 2.35 per cent, twice as low as in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (4.6 per cent).¹¹³

104 Although there are no clear statistics to underpin a detailed analysis of child migration, a few assumptions are set forth in Committee on the Rights of the Child, "Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 44 of the Convention Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of States Parties Due in 2015, Republic of Moldova", CRC/C/MDA/4-5, 2016, para. 88.

105 According to NBS data, the number of students in universities declined from 107,813 in 2010 to 59,033 in 2020.

106 A higher dependency ratio means more pressure on the working population to provide contributions for social protection for older people.

107 Soros Foundation Moldova, [Baseline Study on Social Services](#).

108 In nominal terms, the share of the economically active population (aged 16–56/61) declined from 1,740,500 people to 1,580,300 people 2015–2019.

109 Pension age population is classified as between 16 and over 57 for women and 62 for men.

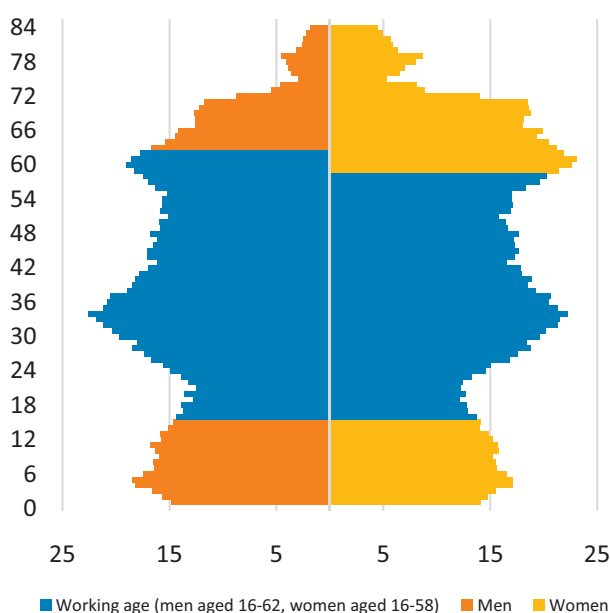
110 According to the NBS, the population ageing coefficient is the number of people aged over 60 per 100 inhabitants.

111 Kosovo, under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

112 EUROSTAT, "Population By Age Group", 2020.

113 UNFPA and the Centre for Demographic Research Projections, Moldova Country Gender Assessment.

Population as of 1 January 2021 by age and sex (thousands)



Source: NBS

In recent decades, **life expectancy in Moldova has been growing at a faster pace than in the European Union,¹¹⁴ but Moldovans still live on average 10 years less than their European peers.** Even if this pace could be maintained in future, it would be unlikely to converge with the European Union average in the medium term. The COVID-19 pandemic wiped back the attained progress in life expectancy, dropping it by 1.1 years¹¹⁵ in 2020, with higher case fatality rates among older age groups – precisely those that have accounted for recent improvements in mortality. However, in neighbouring Romania, the decline was of 1.4 years; in some other European Union countries, it was even higher.

As the population ages, it assumes a “female face”: of all people aged over 65, almost two-thirds (62 per cent) are women, while the share of women aged 65–69 is 24.3 per cent of the total population aged over 65. The number of advanced-age women (aged over 80) is more than twice as high as that of men. The gender gap in life expectancy in Moldova is 8.5 years (76.1 for women/67.6 for men), while in the European Union it is almost half that (83.8 for women/78.4 for men).¹¹⁶

This phenomenon is explained by the poor health outcomes of Moldovans, leading to high mortality rates, most notably among men. It is worth noting that European Union death rates from COVID-19 tend to be higher among males than females, but in Moldova this trend is reversed, with a higher death rate among women.

In Moldova, the average age is rising at a much more rapid rate than in neighbouring countries. The median age of the country's population¹¹⁷ is 38.8: 35.9 for men and 39.3 for women (2019). In the last five years, the median age has been increasing by more than a year on average (37.4 in 2014), yet this is still lower than the European Union median age (42.6). According to the recent UNFPA estimates, the median age for women will reach 45.1 in 2040, while that of men will reach 41.5.

The Active Ageing Index¹¹⁸ score for Moldova is 27.1 points (below the European Union average of 33.9 points). This index shows that there are empowerment gaps for people aged over 55 regarding participation in social and economic life, limiting the benefits they might receive from an active and healthy ageing process. The potential of older people is also limited by **challenges relating to the rights of older persons, namely limited access of older people to public care services and barriers to remaining longer in the labour-market (including legislative barriers).** The same is true for children and persons with disabilities.¹¹⁹ Older people are generally perceived positively in society. The majority of respondents in a study undertaken by the Equality Council mentioned that they would rate their attitude towards older persons as “good” or “very good”; however, every fifth respondent in the same study declared that s/he would not accept an older person as a co-worker.¹²⁰

One in 10 households in Moldova consists of a single adult aged over 60. Of all households, 13.1 per cent (125,200) consist of one single adult aged over 60, of which the greatest share belongs to households formed of people aged over 63 (11.5 per cent of total households, i.e. 110,200) and to households composed of women aged over 60 (10 per cent of total households, i.e. 96,100).

¹¹⁴ Life expectancy in Moldova grew from 69.3 (2010) to 71.9 (2019), while in the European Union 27 it has grown insignificantly, from 79.8 (2010) to 81.3 (2019). Note that the life expectancy data for Moldova is based on [World Bank data](#); for the European Union 27, it is based on [Eurostat data](#).

¹¹⁵ [NBS population data for 2021](#) (accessed 11 October 2021).

¹¹⁶ World Bank database on life expectancy, 2019.

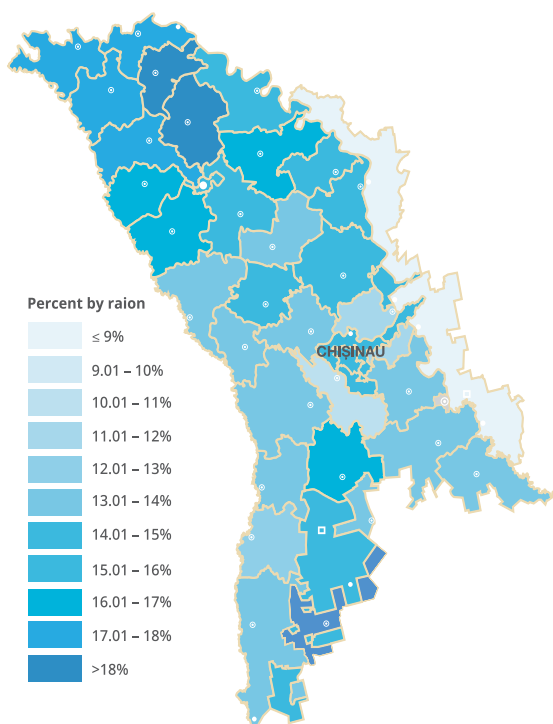
¹¹⁷ The median age divides the population into two parts of equal size: that is, there are as many persons with ages above the median as there are with ages below the median.

¹¹⁸ Active Ageing Index definition from [UNECE, “Active Ageing Index”](#).

¹¹⁹ CESCR, “[Concluding Observations on the Third Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova](#)”, E/C.12/MDA/CO/3, 2017, para. 25.

¹²⁰ For further details, see European Union and Council of Europe Partnership for Good Governance, [Study for the Assessment of the Attitudes of the General Population to Older Persons](#), p. 5.

Share of the 65+ population by raion (2019)



Source: NBS

The distribution of older people throughout Moldova is uneven, with older people more densely populated in the Northern Region of Moldova. The highest share of the population aged over 65 lives in Donduseni District (18.5 per cent), while the smallest share of older people lives in Ialoveni District (9 per cent), located close to Chişinău.¹²¹ It is noteworthy that almost half of the districts in Moldova, including Balti Municipality, are “growing older” at a faster rate than the national average.

The number of single-parent families is rising in Moldova. During 2014–2018, the number of single-parent households with one child increased from 6.4 per cent to 7.0 per cent, this share being larger in urban areas. Despite this, the share of children born outside marriage declined by 3.6 per cent over the last decade, while the share of children born to mothers under the age of 17 almost halved.¹²²

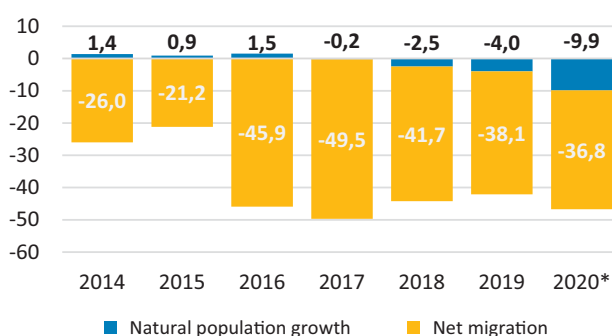
OUTMIGRATION

Between 2014 and 2021, the negative net migration rate more than doubled, with the highest share (over three-quarters) among people aged 20–29.¹²³ Furthermore, in 2021, the share of the population aged 14–34 fell to only a quarter. Despite COVID-19 curtailing people’s mobility, a high stock of circular labour migrants¹²⁴ mostly of working age (aged 15–59) and predominantly from rural Moldova continues to seek job opportunities in Russia and Europe.¹²⁵

Around 10 per cent of young people in Moldova emigrate abroad annually for educational purposes (about 90 per cent to Romania, followed by Russia and Bulgaria), and the majority of those who study abroad choose to resettle abroad, contributing to the loss of qualified human capital and a shrinking labour-force. This trend has negative impacts on the structure of the workforce remaining in the country and is accelerating the ageing of population, contributing to depopulation of rural areas (over three-quarters of migrants come from rural areas), gender imbalances, declining birth rates, high rates of divorce (partly due to spouses migrating) and changing lifestyle patterns. A smaller youth population will translate into fewer entrants to the labour-force, limiting the economic capacity to cover the needs of those who have already retired.

The number of households with children affected by migration grew in recent years, implying an increase in the number of children left behind. Between 2015 and 2020, the share of households with

Population growth components (thousands)



* Provisional data

Source: NBS

121 The calculation of the share of the population aged over 65 by district is based on the stable population number from 2019. Despite the inaccuracies, the districts with the highest and smallest share of people aged over 65 are expected to be the same.

122 NBS data from 2019.

123 Net migration is the number of immigrants minus the number of emigrants. In Moldova, the estimates do not include the Transnistria Region. The NBS released preliminary data for 2019 that revealed a limited positive net migration trend in comparison to 2017, a result of higher immigration rates compared to outmigration.

124 In the second quarter of 2021 there were approximately 76,500 circular labour migrants.

125 NBS data on the first quarter of 2021, available [here](#).

children with at least one household member abroad decreased from 19.4 per cent to 15.9 per cent, indicating either that families were joining those who had already migrated in destination countries or that fewer people with children were migrating.¹²⁶ Notably, this share was higher in rural areas (19.1 per cent) than in urban areas (11.9 per cent).¹²⁷ Children in these households were more likely to be exposed to risks relating to education, health and psychosocial problems, including deteriorating academic performance and lower school attendance, lowering their human capital potential. It is important to note that the share of households with children where at least one person has migrated has decreased in cities. The opposite is the case in rural areas, where there has been a continuous growth in the last three years.

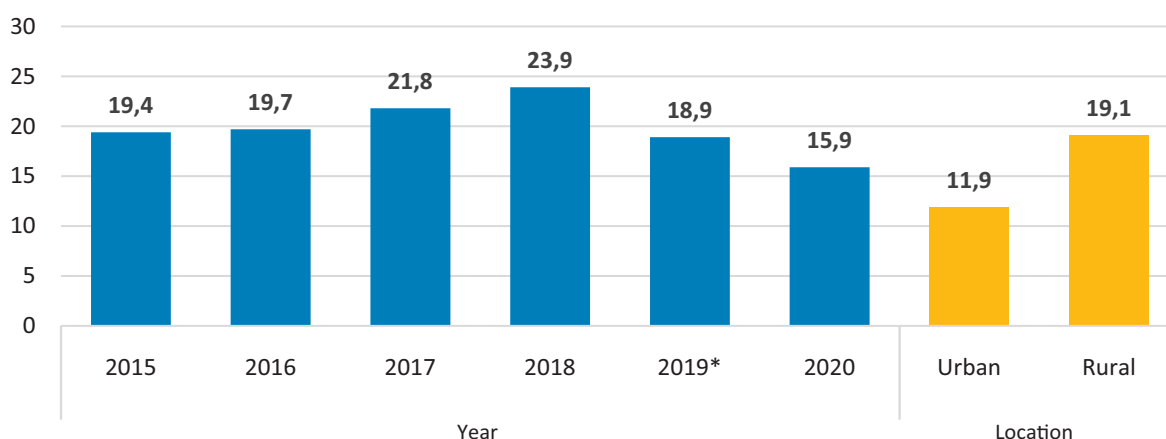
Migration is not gender-neutral in Moldova. Border crossing data indicate that approximately 46 per cent of migrants to Moldova are men and 54 per cent are women.¹²⁸ Most short-term migrants are men (67.5 per cent), and almost one-fifth of these circular migrants are employed illegally.¹²⁹ As women are usually disproportionately responsible for unpaid household labour, including childcare, which limits their mobility, they tend to seek migration opportunities at an older age than men. Consequently, negative migration growth is higher among women aged 35–54 (-2,832 persons)

than men in this age group (-1,697 persons).¹³⁰ Female migration is usually dependent on the family living conditions and is driven by low living standards, unemployment and the lack of job opportunities. In recent years, migration patterns have moved from circular labour migration (i.e. temporary) to resettlement (i.e. permanent), while the share of men and women labour migrants who have permanently settled abroad for longer than a year reached 55 per cent and 60 per cent respectively.

A vast brain drain is a feature of emigration from Moldova, placing the country in the top 10 within the European Region in terms of skilled labour-force emigration. Data show that the emigration rate of highly skilled workers is close to 40 per cent in Moldova and highest among health professionals. Although the mobility of highly skilled professionals generates gains in terms of remittances, extensive and sustained emigration is likely to have long-term negative effects as it depletes human capital and reduces its overall competitiveness.

The COVID-19 pandemic facilitated the return of labour migrants to Moldova, but the economic crisis and lack of reintegration incentives reverted the trend back towards an emigration pathway.

Share of households with children with at least one household member abroad in the total number of households with children, by year and by urban/rural location (2020 data for urban/rural location)



*2019 data not comparable to previous years

Source: NBS

126 Another assumption could be that fewer people migrated, especially those from households with children. Furthermore, the data are not directly comparable to previous years because of changes in the Household Budget Survey methodology.

127 NBS and UNICEF Moldova, [Analysis of Monetary Poverty and Wellbeing of Households with Children](#).

128 Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova and Asylum Office, [Extended Migration Profile of the Republic of Moldova 2014–2018: Analytical Report](#) (Chişinău, 2019) [in Romanian].

129 Approximately 20 per cent of all short-term migrants are Moldovans travelling abroad with a biometric passport and working with no formal contract.

130 [NBS data from 2019](#).

INTERNAL MIGRATION

Along with external migration, **Moldova faces internal migration pressures, as people migrate from rural areas to the capital city and urban settlements.** Of all internal migrants, 89 per cent are aged 20–49. During 2020, the urban population increased by roughly 7,000 as people migrated from rural areas. The majority of internal migrants were women, i.e. 56.2 per cent.

Nevertheless, Moldova remains a rural country, with the lowest level of urbanization in Europe. The rate of urbanization has only been 0.7 per cent

in the last five years, which is very low compared to the average in the European Union. Most of the urban population is concentrated in two municipalities, Chişinău and Balti,¹³¹ which provide greater economic opportunities and a concentration of social infrastructure. About 57.5 per cent of the population of Moldova live in villages, twice as high as the European average (29.1 per cent in 2018) and about the same as Lithuania (the European Union country with the highest rural population). The lack of jobs and inequalities between the urban and rural population are two factors triggering internal migration and the depopulation of rural areas.



Photo: UNDP Moldova

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Despite substantial progress towards poverty reduction in the last decade, the COVID-19 pandemic, the agricultural drought of 2020 and the energy crisis of 2021, along with high inflation, are likely to push many vulnerable people back into poverty. Between 2014 and 2018, both the absolute and extreme poverty rates declined. The data for 2019 suggest that absolute poverty was as high as 25.2, while the extreme poverty rate stood at 10.7 per cent.¹³² However, these higher

numbers do not necessarily reflect a worsening of the situation; rather, they suggest better capturing of the poverty data due to enhanced data collection methodology. In 2020, the absolute poverty rate reached 26.8 and the extreme poverty rate stood at 10.8, indicating that the positive trend of prior years could have been reverted by the COVID-19 pandemic as many studies suggest that vulnerable groups experienced challenges related to job loss, reduction of consumption, etc.

¹³¹ National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, <https://statistica.gov.md/en>

¹³² In 2019, the absolute poverty line was estimated at MDL 2,095.1 per month per person, and the extreme poverty line was on average MDL 1,689.7.

In both rural and urban areas, the poverty rate was declining during the pre-COVID-19 period. However, this decline was not the result of job creation and higher employment; rather, it was due to expanded social assistance programmes.

During its review of the progress of Moldova, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) underscored the fact that poverty is endemic in Moldova, especially in rural areas and among pensioners. The committee recommended that the state should focus its efforts on addressing poverty, with a special focus on people in rural areas and pensioners.¹³³

Poor households suffer multiple deprivations and have notable overlapping vulnerabilities, particularly children and older people.¹³⁴ Households with more than three children have the highest poverty rate among any other vulnerable group (42.1 per cent). Furthermore, poor families with many children have a baseline vulnerability related to their daily diet (notably, 20 per cent–100 per cent less of each essential nutrient per family member in comparison to wealthier income quintiles). About 12 per cent of poor households consulted during the recent COVID-19 impact assessment study experienced a 75 per cent to 100 per cent decrease in their income, and 76 per cent of poor households did not have enough income or savings to cover their recurrent monthly expenses.¹³⁵

Persons with disabilities are also among the poorest people in Moldova, along with older people. They receive most of their income from social protection schemes rather than from employment and/or self-employment.

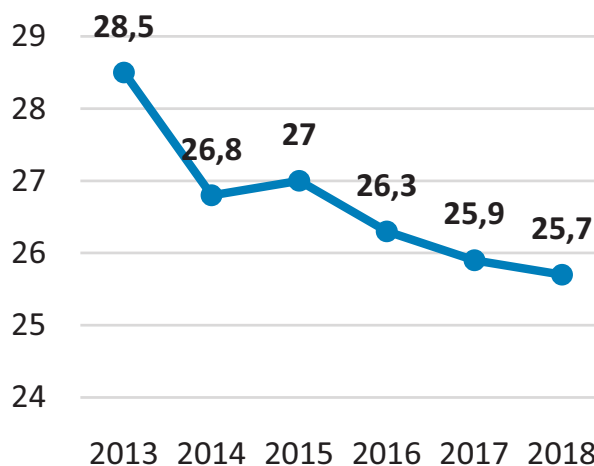
In 2020, the depth of absolute poverty in Moldova stood at 3.7 per cent,¹³⁶ which suggests the percentage of consumption of the population that needs to be increased in order to overcome poverty under the conditions of maintaining or reducing the current level of inequality. At the same time, the severity of absolute poverty was 1.0 per cent.

There are substantial geographical disparities in people accessing social services. The absence or limited accessibility of these services for beneficiaries, including in districts with high service coverage, is caused by (i) a lack of specialists providing specialized services;

(ii) the long distance to travel from home to the available service providers; (iii) the lack of transportation, including vehicles specially adapted for children with disabilities; (iv) a discrepancy between the demand and supply of specific services, as well as between the type of service and the number of people who need it; (v) long waiting times to access social services; (vi) excessive bureaucratic procedures, often prompting potential beneficiaries to disengage; and (vii) a lack of information on the availability of services. To date, the majority of Territorial Social Assistance Structures have expanded provision of home-based support services for children and/or to prevent child abandonment (such as mobile teams, personal assistance, respite care, day care centres and parent-child centres) and opted for the creation or expansion of family-type care services (such as foster care and family-type homes). At the same time, there is a clear need to establish Multifunctional Community Centres, as well as a need for specialized services for children in conflict with the law and children with behavioural problems (both of which are currently lacking). Despite improvements, the intersectoral cooperation mechanism needs to be enhanced to address the difficulties and needs of vulnerable people.

The Gini coefficient decreased from 28.5 per cent in 2013 to 25.7 per cent in 2018.¹³⁷ Significant inequalities remain, however, in terms of disposable income, in particular disposable cash income. Notably, the disposable income of families with more than three chil-

Gini Index (per cent)



Source: World Bank

¹³³ It also urged the state party to ensure that the Ajutor Social cash transfer programme covered all eligible persons and to increase the amount of benefits to a level providing beneficiaries with a decent standard of living. It further recommended that the state party review the eligibility criteria, including the list of assets, in order to ensure that the Ajutor Social cash transfer programme covered all persons in need.

¹³⁴ UNDP, [Social and Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Republic of Moldova \(2020\)](#).

¹³⁵ The Public Opinion Barometer run by the Institute of Public Policies in June 2020 found that 36.6 per cent of households with low socioeconomic status could not afford monthly expenses and 43.1 per cent could barely manage them. These figures highlight the increased extent of vulnerability of respondents in the sample.

¹³⁶ NBS, [Poverty Levels in the Republic of Moldova in 2014–2019](#).

¹³⁷ The World Bank [Gini Index](#) measures inequality from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (maximum inequality).

dren is three times lower than the disposable income of families with only one child.

It is expected that the Gini coefficient will increase as a result of the impact of COVID-19 on remittances and employment.

In 2020, remittances represented 15.4 per cent of the income of the poorest 20 per cent of households, which represented a 4.9 percentage points increased compared to 2019. Social assistance benefits remained relatively unchanged during the same period, representing around 25 per cent of the income of the poorest 20 per cent of households. Amid the COVID-19 crisis, remittances provided a safety net for migrant families and ensured temporary relief for many rural households.

Poverty also varies depending on the level of education of the head of the household. The probability of being poor is lower in the case of households where the main breadwinner has a higher level of education. In the case of households where the head of the household has a higher level of education, the risk of falling into poverty is reduced to 6.6 per cent, while this risk

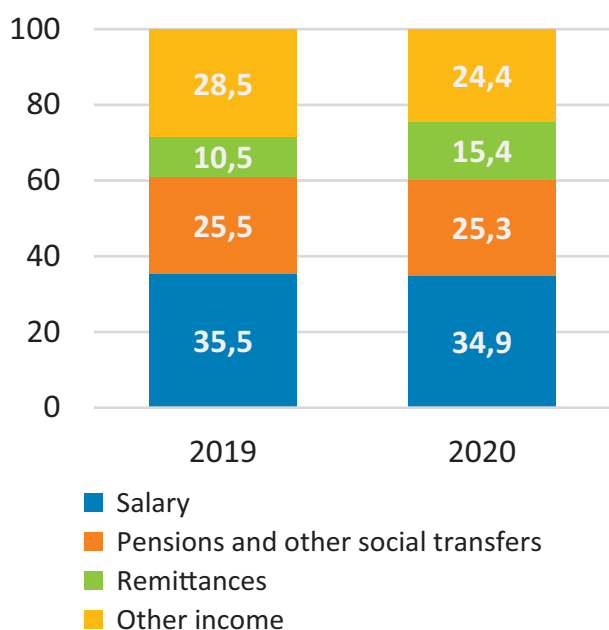
can reach up to 78.6 per cent for households where the head of the household has no primary education or *has no education at all*.

The most disadvantaged households are those where the pension is the main source of income of the head of the household (39.5 per cent), followed by households where the main source of income of the head of the household is a salary in the agricultural sector (37.9 per cent) or self-employment in the agricultural sector (35.4 per cent).¹³⁸

Male-headed households are more likely to be able to afford unforeseen expenses (of MDL 5,000 or more) than female-headed households (13.9 per cent for male-headed households, compared to 9.8 per cent for women-headed households, in 2018).¹³⁹

Parental alcohol abuse is a factor in poverty experienced by households with children. Lack of supervision and emotional and physical abuse from parents are factors prompting both child abandonment and children deciding to run away from home and ending up on the street. For instance, most of the beneficiaries of the Roadside Assistance Service within the Municipal Directorate for the Protection of the Rights of the Child in Chişinău fled their homes between the ages of 8 and 13.

Income composition of the poorest 20% of households (per cent)



Source: NBS

Moldova is ranked 90 out of 189 countries in the HDI for 2020.¹⁴⁰ The HDI measures national progress in health, education and income. The HDI value of Moldova for 2019 was 0.750, which puts the country in the high human development category. Within the Europe and Central Asia Region, Moldova by 2020 HDI ranking is close to the performance of Azerbaijan.

Under the Gender Inequality Index, Moldova ranked forty-sixth out of 162 countries in 2019 with a score of 0.204 points.¹⁴¹ This low ranking suggests that, despite much progress towards achieving gender equality, Moldova still lags behind.

In conclusion, while the gap in basic living standards is narrowing, other forms of inequality remain a challenge for poorer and more vulnerable population groups. These include unequal access to education, health care, labour and participation in public life and technology. These challenges are exacerbated by the climate crisis. An in-depth analysis of the different aspects that constitute multidimensional poverty will be covered in the following chapters.

138 [NBS poverty data](#) from 2020.

139 NBS data from 2019.

140 UNDP, [2020 Global Human Development Report](#) (2020).

141 The [Gender Inequality Index](#) measures the loss in human development due to inequality between women's and men's achievements. UNDP, Gender Inequality Index (2019), Table 5.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THOSE LIVING IN POVERTY

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities and increased the exposure of existing and new population groups to the specific risks of poverty, exclusion and limitations on their human rights. A number of already vulnerable groups in particular have been hard hit, such as people living in poverty, older people, persons with disabilities, Roma, young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and vulnerable women, among others.

Poor households have been affected more severely by the pandemic, since they do not have the resources to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 infection and the economic and social impact of pandemic-related restrictions. The government's main anti-poverty programme was found to be insufficient, reaching too few of the poorest to alleviate the situation.

In terms of food security, for many children – especially children from families living in poverty and Roma children – school feeding programmes were an important part of their daily food intake. School closures, coupled with reduced incomes, may mean a worsening of the country's malnutrition rates. More than 20 per cent of women and men who participated in a rapid assessment reported facing barriers to accessing food due to COVID-19 restrictions.¹⁴² Of Roma respondents to the OHCHR survey, 57.1 per cent had delayed their payment of utilities (water, electricity, natural gas) due to a lack of money during lockdown, compared to 18.5 per cent of non-Roma.¹⁴³

The main anti-poverty programme, *Ajutor Social/Social Aid*, remains relatively small and covers 7 per cent of the total population. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, only 7.8 per cent of 32.5 per cent of respondents to the OHCHR survey who needed social aid received it. The main reasons for not receiving the allowances/social aid were: **ineligibility** (36.9 per cent for the Right Bank and 35.3 per cent for the Left Bank); **lack of knowledge of how to claim aid** (14.7 per cent for the Right Bank and 9.9 per cent for the Left Bank); and **impossibility of contacting the social worker** (7.3 per cent for the Right Bank).¹⁴⁴



Photo: ILO Moldova

142 United Nations Moldova, [United Nations Moldova COVID-19 Socioeconomic Response and Recovery Plan – Updated Version](#) (2020).

143 OHCHR, [Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova](#).

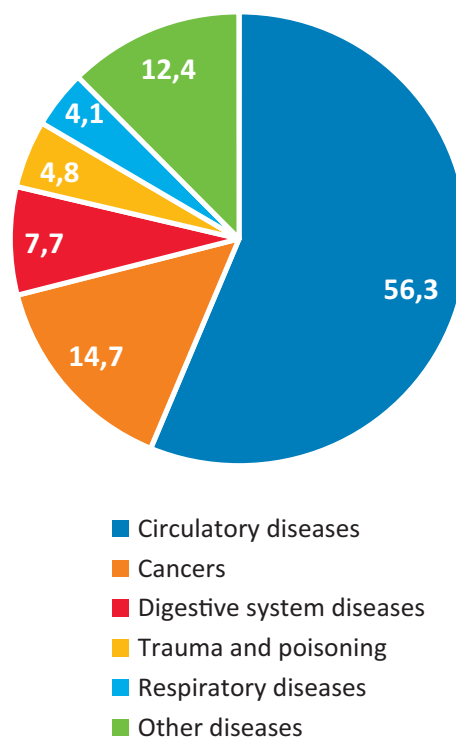
144 OHCHR, [Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova](#).

QUALITY HEALTH CARE

In recent years there has been positive progress towards universal access to health care aimed at ensuring healthy lives and well-being. That said, Moldova still has much to do in terms of achieving better health outcomes. Life expectancy at birth has increased by an annual average of 1.6 years over the last 6 years, primarily due to a decline in infant mortality rates.¹⁴⁵ However, the steady positive improvements in life expectancy over the last few years have been offset by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a decline in 1.1 years of life expectancy in 2020. Nevertheless, **with a life expectancy of 69.8 (2020), people in Moldova live on average 10 years less than their peers in the European Union.**

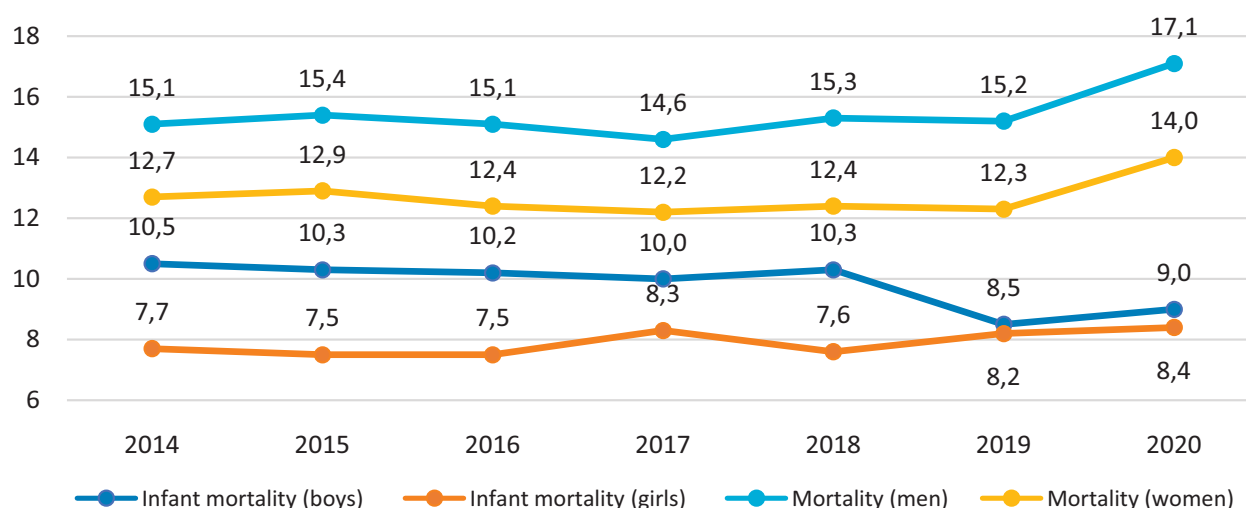
Extra years of life gained through increased longevity, however, do not translate into living those years in good health. **The number of healthy life years lived by Moldovans is the lowest in Eastern Europe, just behind Russia and Ukraine.** It is noteworthy that women spend a larger proportion of their life in poor health (11.2 years) compared to men (8.6 years).¹⁴⁶ People living in rural areas in Moldova live on average four years less than people in urban settings.¹⁴⁷ The health of the rural population seems to lag behind when compared to urban residents, with prominent gender differences.

Mortality structure (per cent, 2020)



Source: NBS

General and infant mortality rates



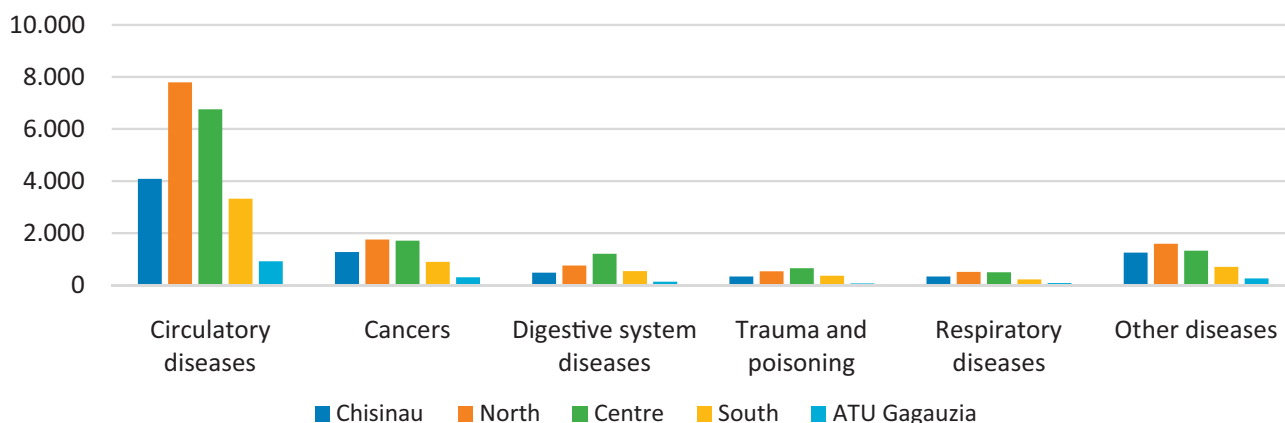
Source: NBS

¹⁴⁵ Between 2015 and 2020, infant mortality declined from 9.7 per cent to 8.8 per cent (NAPH data).

¹⁴⁶ GBD 2017 DALYs and HALE Collaborators, "Global, regional, and national disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) for 359 diseases and injuries and healthy life expectancy (HALE) for 195 countries and territories, 1990–2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017". The Lancet, vol. 392, no. 10159 (2018), pp. 1859–1922.

¹⁴⁷ NBS data for 2016.

Number of deaths by cause of disease by region (2020)



Source: NBS

Moldova faces a significant disease burden, primarily arising from non-communicable diseases (NCDs)

caused by behavioural and other socioeconomic factors. In 2020, approximately 80 per cent of all deaths were attributable to NCDs. This represents a major burden of mortality and illness among the population. Circulatory diseases account over a half of all mortalities, followed by cancer and digestive diseases. NCDs impact men and women differently: the likelihood of a man dying prematurely from cardiovascular disease (CVD), cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease is twice as high as the risk for women. CVDs and cancers are the main causes of death among older people, while among children the greatest disease burden is attributable to neonatal disorders, unintentional injuries, nutrition deficiencies and childhood infectious diseases. Due to COVID-19, mortality from infectious diseases almost doubled as a share of all causes of death in the population. Furthermore, the COVID-19 increased mortality rate by 11.7 per cent in 2020 compared to 2019.

Mortality rates vary between regions. The number of people dying from CVDs is twice as high in the north of Moldova than in Chişinău. Besides SARS-Cov-2, **high blood pressure, dietary risks and tobacco** (followed by high body mass index, alcohol use and high fasting blood glucose) **are the main risk factors driving mortality and disability**.¹⁴⁸ Around 50 per cent of adults in Moldova have high blood pressure. Among young adults and people of prime working age, nearly half of all men smoke, and close to half drink alcohol excessively. Around 10 per cent of deaths are caused by consumption of alcohol, twice as high as the global average.

ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

Access to health care for Moldovans is inequitable due to physical and geographical barriers in access to services, a limited benefits package and high out-of-pocket (OOP) payments. Despite increases in public spending over time, and a ratio of public spending on health to gross domestic product (GDP) (3.9 per cent in 2019) that is relatively high by lower-middle-income country standards, the OOP payment share of current spending on health remains high, at 35.1 per cent in 2019. However, OOP payments have gone down by roughly 10 per cent in the last years as a result of increased pharmaceutical reimbursement under benefit packages and other financial protection policies.

The main barriers to accessing adequate health care include the lack of some primary health care services in rural areas, the high emigration of the health workforce that facilitates geographical inequality in the availability of specialized health care, high OOP payments and a low *per capita* allocation for health care.¹⁴⁹

In general, **people in Moldova believe that the right to the highest attainable standard of health is the right that is least respected in the country**: 71.6 per cent of the population consider that the right to health needs more attention from society.¹⁵⁰

WOMEN ACCESS TO HEALTH

Cervical cancer is among the top leading causes of morbidity and mortality among women. Despite substantial progress in cervical cancer screening (mortality rate has decreased in the last three years), 51 per

¹⁴⁸ Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, Republic of Moldova.

¹⁴⁹ D. Mijatović, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, [Report Following her Visit to the Republic of Moldova from 9 to 13 March 2020 \(Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 2020\), para. 102, p. 27.](#)

¹⁵⁰ UNDP Moldova, [“The Population’s Perception of Respect for Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova Has Not Changed Significantly in the Last Two Years”](#), 10 December 2018 [in Romanian].

cent of Moldovan women are diagnosed at a much later stage (III-IV) than in European countries. Nevertheless, Moldova has made progress in preventing cervical cancer among women: screening programmes have improved, the capacities of health care providers have been strengthened, clinical protocols have been aligned with international standards and laboratories are better equipped to improve the accuracy of diagnosis.

Among women, the use of modern contraceptive methods is still fairly low, despite significant progress in ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health

services and information. **Girls and women with disabilities face particular obstacles to realizing their sexual and reproductive rights.**

YOUNG PEOPLE ACCESS TO HEALTH

A network of 41 Youth Friendly Health Clinics contributed to substantial progress in addressing adolescent health issues. The spectrum of health problems faced by adolescents and young people is diverse and includes the use of psychoactive substances, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV, unplanned pregnancies, mental health problems, violence, trauma, stigma and discrimination.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ACCESS TO HEALTH

The health system of Moldova has performed relatively well, given the heavy strain placed on it by the pandemic. The National Commission for Emergency Situations (NCES) declared a state of emergency in between March 2020¹⁵¹ and May 2020, with strict quarantine and sanitary measures imposed.

The OHCHR survey showed that 26.3 per cent of respondents on the Right Bank and 20.7 per cent of respondents on the Left Bank reported needing medical advice during the pandemic relating to chronic illnesses and other conditions. Of these, more than 40 per cent on both banks of Nistru River reported not receiving the full medical treatment they required. The number of those who could not get any treatment was twice as high among Roma (47.1 per cent) than non-Roma (23.7 per cent). The lack of accurate and reliable information, as well as pandemic fatigue among general public (and health professionals alike), led to suboptimal compliance with preventive measures and contributed to low population vaccination rates.

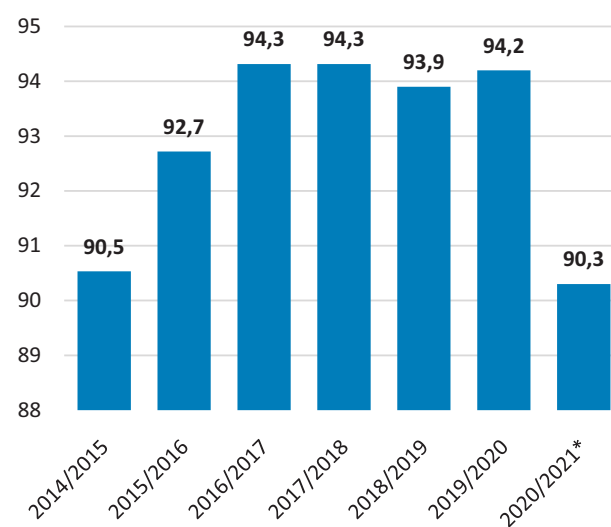
ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

Education is a fundamental determinant, not only of health, demographic trends and individual income, but also of a country's aggregate level of economic growth. Education can put people on a path towards good health, empowerment and employment that might attract foreign investments and prevent emigration.

In the 2020/21 academic year, the number of students increased by 1,200 compared to the previous year. However, this was still lower than in 2017/18; 334,400 students were enrolled in general and secondary education, representing 92.17 per cent of the population aged 7-18 habitually resident in the country.

According to PISA 2018, students in Moldova scored lower than the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science.¹⁵² Most 15-year-old Moldovans lack the basic skills to participate effectively and pro-

Gross pre-primary enrolment rate (per cent)



*Preliminary data
Source: NBS

151 Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, [Decision No. 55, 17 March 2020](#).

152 OECD and [PISA](#), Results from PISA 2018: Country Note for Moldova (2018).

ductively in society: 43 per cent of students in Moldova are functionally illiterate (i.e. 4 out of 10 15-year-olds cannot effectively summarize and systematize information), and 43 per cent do not have minimum knowledge in science.

Suboptimal PISA results have been caused by inadequate curricula and poor teaching quality: the latter is considered to be one of the most important contributing factors to improving student achievement.

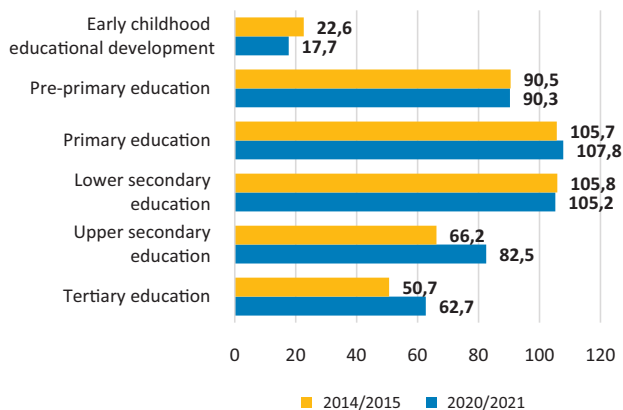
The school network infrastructure in Moldova is obsolete, often putting children’s health at risk. In particular, many rural schools are not connected to sewerage and do not have well-equipped sanitary blocks. Toilets are usually located outside the building and are not safe, particularly for young girls, who may easily develop chronic diseases of the reproductive system at an older age. Out of the total of 1,240 schools, 1,048 have sanitary facilities indoors.¹⁵³ However, only 80 per cent (879) of them are compliant with sanitary requirements.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that the education system does not have the tools and skills to provide good-quality education remotely. The majority of schools identified a lack of necessary equipment, communication infrastructure and elementary IT skills as key challenges in responding to the new requirements of online training.

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

Moldova has one of the highest preschool enrolment rates among countries in the CEE-CIS¹⁵⁴ Region. The preschool enrolment rate for children aged 3–6 is about 90.3 per cent¹⁵⁵ (compared to just 44 per cent in 2000) and is relatively high compared to other countries in the region. Enrolment rates accelerated between 2010 and 2020 as a result of an 8 per cent increase in the number of preschool facilities, mostly in rural areas. That said, disparities in provision and access of preschool facilities between rural and urban areas have continued to widen, increasing from 27 per cent in 2010 to 41 per cent in 2019.¹⁵⁶ Almost one-third of children in rural areas do not attend early education facilities, compared to almost universal access to kindergartens in urban areas.¹⁵⁷

Enrolment rates by education level (per cent)



Source: NBS

Roma children, children with disabilities and children from disadvantaged households still face barriers to accessing preschool education.¹⁵⁸ There are relatively few privately run early childhood education facilities¹⁵⁹ due to the absence of a legislative regulatory framework. Many private institutions currently operate as non-profit entities and are not subject to the same quality checks and educational standard requirements as public preschools.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION

Enrolment rates for primary, secondary and tertiary education improved between 2014–2015 and 2019–2020,¹⁶⁰ although access to good-quality primary and secondary education remains relatively low compared to other countries in the region.

INCLUSION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Despite substantial progress, the inclusion of vulnerable groups – including people with disabilities – into the educational system in Moldova remains an issue. Although the proportion of students with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities enrolled in general education institutions increased from 83.3 per cent in 2014 to 94.5 per cent in 2020, most educational institutions are not adapted to meet inclusive education standards.

153 Administrative data from local public administrations as of 1 October 2020.

154 CEE-CIS.

155 NBS, Education in the Republic of Moldova (2020/21).

156 NBS, Education in the Republic of Moldova (2018/19).

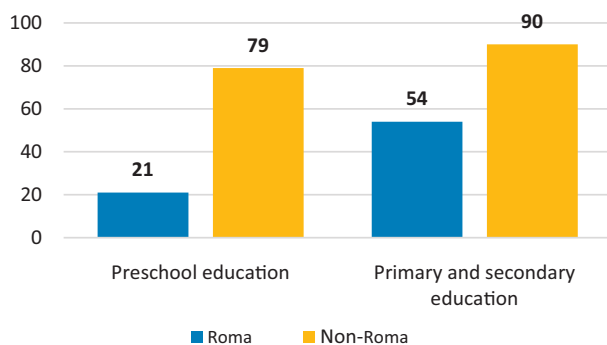
157 Preschool attendance is significantly lower in rural areas (64 per cent) than in urban areas (82 per cent), with the highest enrolment in Chişinău (90 per cent). See UNICEF Moldova, [Early Childhood Development](#).

158 Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis, pp. 47–48.

159 Private institutions represent only 1 per cent of the total number of preschools: NBS, Early Education Institutions in 2019 (2019).

160 The gross enrolment rate suggests that the closer this indicator approaches to 100 (or even if it exceeds it in some cases), the better the access to that level of education. The gross enrolment can be above 100 per cent as it is computed based on the total number of children of all ages enrolled at an education level divided by the total number of children of the school age for that specific education level.

Gross participation rate of Roma and non-Roma children in education (per cent, 2011)



Source: Source: UNICEF, based on UNDP/World Bank/European Commission, *Situation of Roma in Roma-Populated Communities (2011)*

Specific groups of children, notably girls in rural areas and including Roma girls and girls with disabilities, are at high risk of being out of school.¹⁶¹

For instance, on average only half of Roma children attend primary and secondary school, compared to 90 per cent of non-Roma children.¹⁶² The Roma minority is one of the most vulnerable population groups, and often adult household members are illiterate and/or very poor.

School dropout is higher among girls (10.3 per cent) than boys (9.8 per cent).¹⁶³ Just over a quarter of young women (25.2 per cent) are not in work or education, as are 30.2 per cent of young men.¹⁶⁴ Roma girls and boys make up a significant portion of these young people.

DECREASE IN THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS

According to baseline scenario projections made by the Centre for Demographic Research, by 2035 the population aged under 24 will have decreased by almost 33

per cent compared to the centre's estimates for 2014. The most drastic reduction is anticipated in the early education (preschool) population (almost 50 per cent). The main factor behind this is the anticipated decrease in fertility rates, compounded by the decrease in the overall female population.¹⁶⁵

A continuous **decline in the number students in the last decades has had a negative impact on the efficiency of the education system, forcing the optimization of school infrastructure and the introduction of *per capita* financing.** In turn, this has led to a decrease in government spending on education as a share of GDP, from 9 per cent in 2009 to 6.1 per cent in 2020. The *per capita* funding mechanism is based on the principle of "money follows the pupil", under which the allocated resources for each student are transferred to the educational institution where s/he is enrolled. The introduction of a new financing formula has streamlined the financing of "hub schools" and facilitated upgrading school infrastructure.

YOUNG NEET PEOPLE

In Moldova, 27.4 per cent of young people are NEET.¹⁶⁷ This is more than twice the European Union average.¹⁶⁸ Notably, the share of NEET adolescents aged 15–19 (16 per cent) is lower than the share of NEET youth aged 20–24 (25 per cent). Girls and young women are more likely to be NEET than boys and young men: the figures are 35.5 per cent for girls and young women, and 19.4 per cent for boys and young men. Young people residing in rural areas are overall more likely to be NEET. In Chişinău, the region with the most opportunities for study and work, about a third of women aged 15–29 do not work, study or receive any training. In the Southern Region of Moldova, the share of NEET among young women is even higher – about 35 per cent.

Government spending on education, 2018–2020

Expenditure type	2019	2020 ¹⁶⁶
Expenditure on education as a share of total Government of Moldova expenditure (per cent)	18.4	17.2
Government of Moldova expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP (per cent)	5.8	6.1

¹⁶¹ In 2017, CESCRC recommended that Moldova should address low enrolment rates among Roma children and young people in rural areas, as well as the high dropout rates at all levels of education.

¹⁶² UNICEF Moldova, *Children in the Republic of Moldova: A Situation Analysis (2016)*, p. 53.

¹⁶³ World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2017 (2017)*, p. 239.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Centre for Demographic Research, *Analysis of Population Situation in the Republic of Moldova (Chişinău, 2016)*.

¹⁶⁶ NBS, *Education in the Republic of Moldova: Statistical Publication, 2019/2020 (Chişinău, 2020)*.

¹⁶⁷ NBS, *Young People in the Republic of Moldova in 2019 (2020)* [in Romanian].

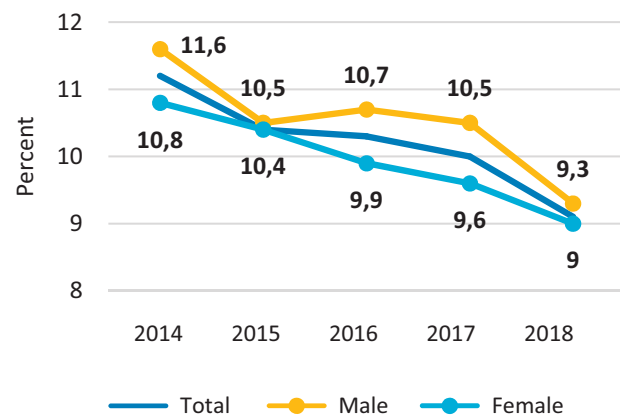
¹⁶⁸ European Union average: 12.9 per cent of 15–29-year-olds and 10.5 per cent of 15–24-year-olds.

A deeper analysis of the factors leading to such a high NEET rate in Moldova shows that the challenges are related to lack of opportunities in the labour-market, resulting from the economic and social crisis in recent years, low incomes that do not provide a decent living and inequalities in the workplace. Many young people are discouraged, or see no prospect of future success in the domestic labour-market and so choose to work or look for a job abroad.¹⁶⁹ Among students from the poorest backgrounds, 22 per cent are looking to enrol at university compared to 77 per cent of students from higher-income groups. A significant number of young people do not have access to post-secondary education. According to PISA, in Moldova, about 1 in 3 high-achieving students from disadvantaged backgrounds do not expect to complete tertiary education, compared to 1 in 10 high-achieving students from advantaged backgrounds.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Enrolment in the higher education system of Moldova has declined over the last decade. The major challenge faced by the higher education system of Moldova relates to its internal financial inefficiency and poor teaching quality. The share of spending for tertiary education as a share of Government of Moldova expenditure on education is roughly 11 per cent (2018), which is higher than in similar countries in the region (Belarus, Armenia and Georgia). Although the share of spending on tertiary education has declined in recent years, in real terms expenditure per student has increased as fewer students are enrolling. These changes, however, have not translated into improvements in quality.

Participation rate of young people and adults in formal and non-formal lifelong learning by gender



Source: NBS

The higher education and vocational education and training (VET) systems of Moldova do not meet labour-market demands in terms of skills mix.

ACCESS TO CULTURE

Household cultural consumption is very low. Surveys show that 80 per cent of the population said that they had not attended or participate in a cultural event (cinema, performing arts, museum, art exhibition, etc.) in the past year. However, there is a clear need to develop cultural education in Moldova in the sense of integrating culture, cultural heritage and arts into the education system and cultural institutions, as well as harnessing culture in both formal and non-formal education settings.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Government of Moldova closed all schools on 11 March 2020. Approximately 434,000¹⁷⁰ students in all academic institutions at all levels were asked to stay at home, and schools were tasked with providing distance learning opportunities.

The closure of early childhood education, preschool and school institutions meant that many parents – mothers especially – had to temporarily leave work or be released from work to care for young children. This situation is aggravating the financial situation of families with young children and pushing young families deep into poverty, negatively affecting the well-being of children.

Pupils in all age groups did not have equal access to good-quality online education due to lack of devices, connectivity issues and many teachers being unfamiliar with online teaching methods. Over 150,000 children of preschool age were unable to attend kindergarten and pursue their schooling.

According to OHCHR's survey, 24.4 per cent of respondents had insufficient equipment to facilitate access to online education, and 10.3 per cent did not have any equipment. On the Left Bank, 77.6 per cent had sufficient devices, 14.3 per cent had devices but not enough of them and 6.1 per cent had no devices at all.¹⁷¹

169 UNDP, UNFPA, CNTM and INCE, Inclusion of Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET Youth): Sociological Study (Chişinău, 2017), p. 12.

170 NBS, [Education in the Republic of Moldova: Statistics Periodical \(2019/2020\)](#) (2019).

171 OHCHR, [Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova](#), p. 16.

The COVID-19 pandemic is also having an impact on the psychoemotional well-being of young people. Young people already faced problems relating to psychoemotional well-being before the onset of the pandemic. Measured on a scale from 0 to 10, the perceived level of life satisfaction among young people aged 15–29 was at only 6.5 points in 2015.

BINDING CONSTRAINTS AND PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

Moldova remains one of the poorest countries in Europe, with the lowest GDP *per capita* in the region (approximately US\$ 4,551 in current prices). Between 2016 and 2019, the country's real GDP grew at an average rate of 4.15 per cent,¹⁷² propelled by consumption and fuelled by remittances. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economy contracted by 7 per cent. Although the economy of Moldova turned towards recovery in 2021, the rate of growth is likely to slow down as a result of the regional energy crisis.

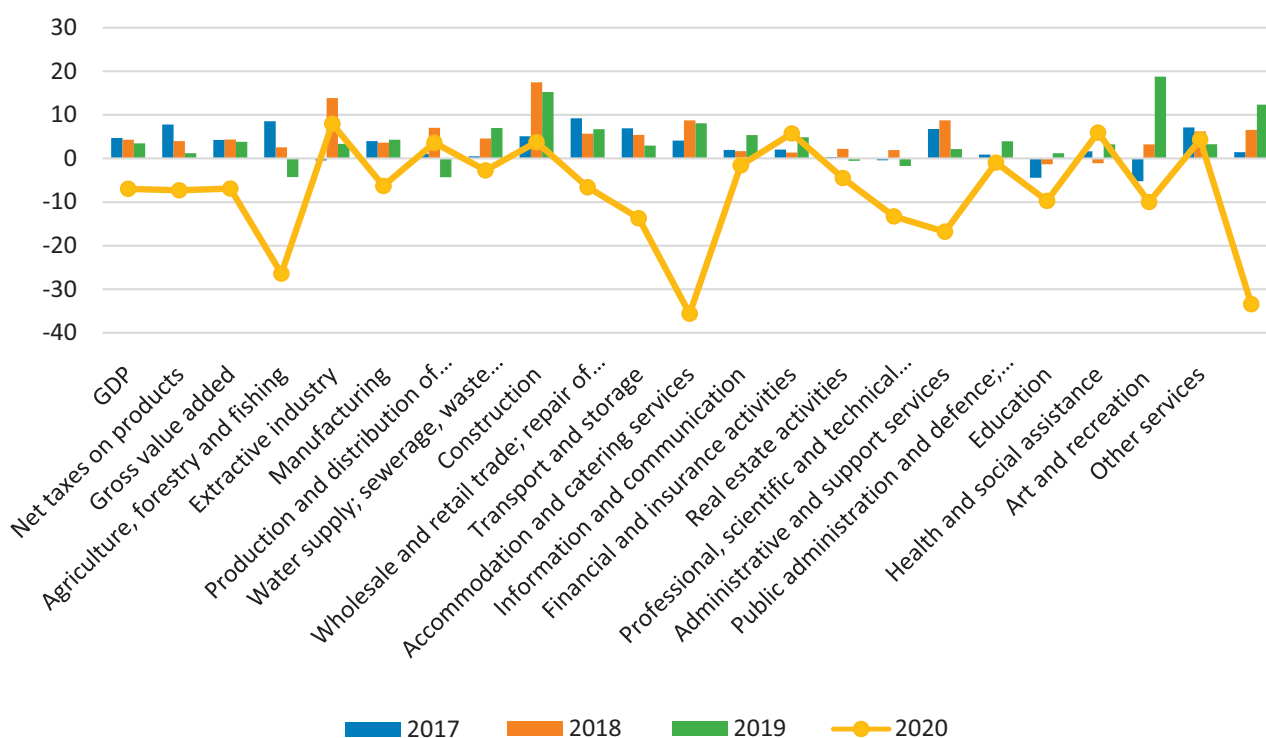
In 2019, the GDP of Moldova grew by 3.6 per cent, mainly driven by investments and private consumption as a result of higher wages, social allocations and remittances. The slow-down in the GDP growth in the pre-COVID-19 period was caused (among other fac-

tors) by deceleration in Europe and Central Asia (a 2.2 per cent growth rate) triggered by a slow-down in Russia and Turkey, two major regional economies.

The COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by severe drought, led to the disruption of supply chains and negative growth (notably in the services and agriculture sectors), cumulatively contracting the economy by 7 per cent in 2020.

The COVID-19 crisis has hit the economy of Moldova sharply, decelerating economic activity, weakening public finance and challenging macroeconomic stability. The COVID-19 lockdown contributed to supply chain disruptions and the contracting of production and domestic trade. However, the economy has been show-

GDP dynamics (percentage change)



Source: NBS

172 GDP increased in real terms from MDL 160.1 billion to MDL 210.1 billion 2016–2019.

ing signs of recovery, having grown by roughly 21.5 per cent year-on-year in the second quarter of 2021. Compared to a 14 per cent decline in GDP during the same period of 2020 (versus 2019), this rate of growth is quite high. The economic expansion was fuelled by government spending (29.1 per cent), household consumption (20.7 per cent) and gross fixed capital formation (24.5 per cent).

Between 2016 and 2019, performance in the banking sector improved substantially, leaving Moldova better positioned to face the COVID-19 crisis than other countries in Europe and Central Asia. Public debt as a proportion of GDP has been gradually declining, reaching 27.4 per cent by the end of 2019. This is relatively low compared to other countries in the region, but it is expected that, in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, public debt will reach 36 per cent of GDP by the end of 2020.¹⁷³

In addition, the impact of the increase in the inflation rate (13.94 per cent), producer's prices (over 16 per cent) and the energy price (over 60 per cent) in 2021 will likely push more people into poverty.

REMITTANCES CONTINUOUSLY FUEL THE ECONOMY

Moldova is the country most reliant on remittances in the whole of Europe. Although declining, personal remittances still represent quite a large share of GDP – 13.22 per cent, or approximately US\$ 1.876 billion in 2020.¹⁷⁴ In Moldova, a quarter of households (approximately 237,000 households) receive remittances; for over a half of them (approximately 118,000 households: 52.4 per cent in 2018), remittances constitute more than 50 per cent of the disposable income available to the household. In rural areas, the share of remittances in disposable income is particularly high, reaching 59.7 per cent in 2018, 7.9 per cent higher than in urban settlements. Almost a quarter of households (23.4 per cent – 224,000 households) would fall below the poverty line if they were deprived of remittances; in rural areas, this share reaches 30.5 per cent.¹⁷⁵

With an increasing number of diaspora engagement policies, the still-general scarcity of data means decision makers have little evidence on which to base and monitor their strategies and programmes, which often end up overly focused on remittance flows due to their prominence in analytical literature.

Migrants create bridges that allow the sharing and dissemination of knowledge, ideas, values, technology

and other resources. They are agents of change that can have a profound impact in reshaping the worlds they inhabit. As such, these communities are important actors that can accelerate countries' achievement of sustainable development, as framed within the 2030 Agenda and beyond.

FDI

FDI increased steadily between 2016 and 2019, but is still suboptimal. Moldova lags behind peer countries, both in terms of the volume and number of projects. Despite recent increases, FDI remains low compared to other countries in the region. In relative terms (i.e. *per capita*, per US\$ 1,000 GDP and as a percentage of fixed capital formation), FDI inflows to Moldova remain lower than several comparator countries, including Albania, Estonia, Romania and Ukraine. The data also show that these statistics for Moldova are lower than the average for countries with economies in transition.

The implementation of the European Union free trade agreement (DCFTA 2014) has improved trade relations between the European Union and Moldova in recent years, and the European Union now buys close to two-thirds of the total exports of Moldova and accounts for 54 per cent of its total trade. That said, the full trade potential of this agreement has not been exploited.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Despite the country's commitment to industrialization, the contribution of industry to GDP remains one of the lowest in the region. Key trends in the industrial sector are as follows.

- **Over the last decade, the agrifood industry has grown at an annual average rate of 4.5 per cent, which was slower than the average annual growth in the manufacturing industry (5.2 per cent).** In addition, between 2015 and 2019, average annual growth rates for the two sectors were much lower, at around 1.1 per cent and 2.9 per cent respectively.
- **Activities of low and medium technological intensity make up 80 per cent–85 per cent of manufacturing, dominating the sector.** These include food and beverage manufacturing and the manufacture of non-metallic mineral products, textiles and clothing and products from rubber and plastics.

173 As of 30 June 2020, public debt reached 31.7 per cent of GDP (Ministry of Finance data).

174 World Bank, "[Personal Remittances, Received \(Current US\\$\)](#)", for Moldova.

175 Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova Migration and Asylum Office [Extended Migration Profile Report](#). See also Government of Moldova, [Analytical Note: Labour Force Migration and the Impact on the Labour Market in the Republic of Moldova](#) (Chişinău, 2018).



Photo: ILO Moldova

- The last five years has seen a significant increase in the share of industries of medium-to-high technological intensity in the total volume of production of the manufacturing sector (from about 7 per cent in 2014 to about 15 per cent in 2019).
- **Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs)¹⁷⁶ represented approximately 98.6 per cent of all enterprises in 2019** and employed 61.6 per cent of all economically active people. **Microenterprises accounted for 85.1 per cent of the MSME sector.** MSMEs are unequally distributed across the country, with about 65 per cent operating in Chişinău and 4.7 per cent in Balti (the second largest city).
- **e-Commerce is still not used by most local companies, and most of their transactions are conducted in traditional ways.**
- **At the national level, too few enterprises integrate innovations into their activity (only about 19 per cent of enterprises).**
- **Substantial progress has been achieved in the reduction of state interference in the activity of private companies.**

ENERGY DEPENDENCY AND GROWING IMPORTANCE OF RENEWABLES

The country's dependence on energy imports is high, at 87 per cent. Around 74 per cent of the primary energy supply and 75 per cent of its electricity needs are covered by imports. This dependency contributes, among other things, to high energy prices and large debts to foreign suppliers, making the affordability of energy a primary concern. As a result of the recent energy crisis, the gas price for Moldova almost tripled in 2021. This is not only a huge economic burden, but it also affects the country's energy security, making it vulnerable to risks relating to fuel supply disruption.

The residential sector is the largest energy user, with a 40 per cent share of national energy consumption. Furthermore, around 70 per cent of energy consumption for heating is dependent on connection to the electricity grid. **The energy use per capita in Moldova is about one-fourth of the one in OECD countries and is likely to increase** as incomes rise. Improving energy efficiency is one of the most cost-effective options for meeting growing energy demand.

Moldova is one of the most carbon-intensive and energy-intensive economies in the region, with en-

¹⁷⁶ Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova Migration and Asylum Office [Extended Migration Profile Report](#). See also Government of Moldova, [Analytical Note: Labour Force Migration and the Impact on the Labour Market in the Republic of Moldova](#) (Chişinău, 2018).

ergy consumption twice as high as the European Union average and accounting for 65 per cent of GHG emissions. The government is making efforts to remedy this by modernizing and reforming the energy sector, while substituting fossil energy imports, increasing energy efficiency. The government had the target of diversifying primary energy sources to at least 17 per cent use of renewable sources in gross final energy consumption and achieving at least a 10 per cent share of renewable energy in final energy consumption in the transport sector by 2020. In both cases, the target was not met.

In practice, deployment of renewables has been limited, except for the use of biomass in the heating sector. The newly created solid biofuel production industry (briquettes and pellets) has already created about 400 new jobs in rural areas and had an assessed turnover of USD 6 million–USD 8 million in 2017. However, much more should be done to further stimulate biomass and solar energy production.

INNOVATIONS AND RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (R&D) AS DRIVERS OF SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Moldova spends a modest amount on R&D (0.24 per cent of GDP in 2019), eight times less than the European average of 2.18 per cent and around half as much as neighbouring Romania (0.51 per cent, 2018) and Ukraine (0.47 per cent, 2018). The country ranked 59 out of 131 countries and economies in the Global Innovation Index (GII) ranking in 2020, accumulating a total of 32.98 points out of a possible 100.¹⁷⁷

In 2019, expenditure on R&D represented 0.24 per cent of GDP. Most expenditure is on operational costs and capital investments. This low level of spending on R&D has led to an innovation shortfall and losses in the country's competitiveness and productivity. Moreover, weak linkages between research institutions and the private sector make innovation transfer difficult and sporadic, with many R&D products not reaching the market.

THE EMERGING IT SECTOR AND THE DIGITALIZATION AGENDA

Moldova has a dynamic and competitive telecommunications market characterized by high Internet access speed, good mobile services accessibility and technological development.

In recent years, the ICT sector has become one of the most dynamically developing sectors in the economy of Moldova. In 2019, the ICT sector contributed 4.7 of GDP, while its gross value added was 9.2 per cent higher than in 2018. This was a result of government policy measures to stimulate growth in the ICT sector and in innovation through the establishment of the Moldova IT Park in 2018.

The domestic ICT market grew from US\$ 27.5 million to US\$ 33.5 million in the same period, while the value of the export market grew from around US\$ 80 million to US\$ 120.90 million.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Moldova is still behind Ukraine and Belarus in the development of its ICT sector. The domestic ICT market has been developing at a slower pace than the export market. However, the increasing migration-to-Cloud technologies in the domestic market and implementation of a digitalization road map, as well as the growing demand for ICT products spurred by the COVID-19 crisis, will increase the demand for ICT consulting and support services.

Over 76 per cent of the population use the Internet.¹⁷⁹ Levels of digital literacy are among the most advanced in the region, and access to the Internet is ubiquitous. More than 98 per cent of localities in the country have access to fibre-optic networks and to high-capacity mobile Internet. However, Internet penetration at household level is still relatively low: only 49 per cent of households had access to broadband Internet in 2019.

AGRICULTURAL SECTOR CHALLENGES

Agriculture has traditionally been a key sector in the economy of Moldova and the largest contributor of exports. In the pre-COVID-19 period, the contribution of the agricultural sector to GDP significantly decreased,¹⁸⁰ but it has still maintained an average growth rate of 2 per cent.

The livelihood of people living in rural areas depends mainly on agricultural activities, as approximately 57 per cent¹⁸¹ of them work in agriculture or related sectors. Every fifth employed person in Moldova is engaged in agriculture, forestry or fishing (61 per cent of men, 39 per cent of women and 38 per cent of youth).

However, the share of informal employment in agriculture is quite high (around 59.1 per cent in 2020,

177 In the GII, Moldova scored 35.5 points in 2019, the lowest since 2013. For comparison, the world average in 2019 based on 129 countries was 36.31 points. The Global Economy, Moldova, www.theglobaleconomy.com/Moldova/.

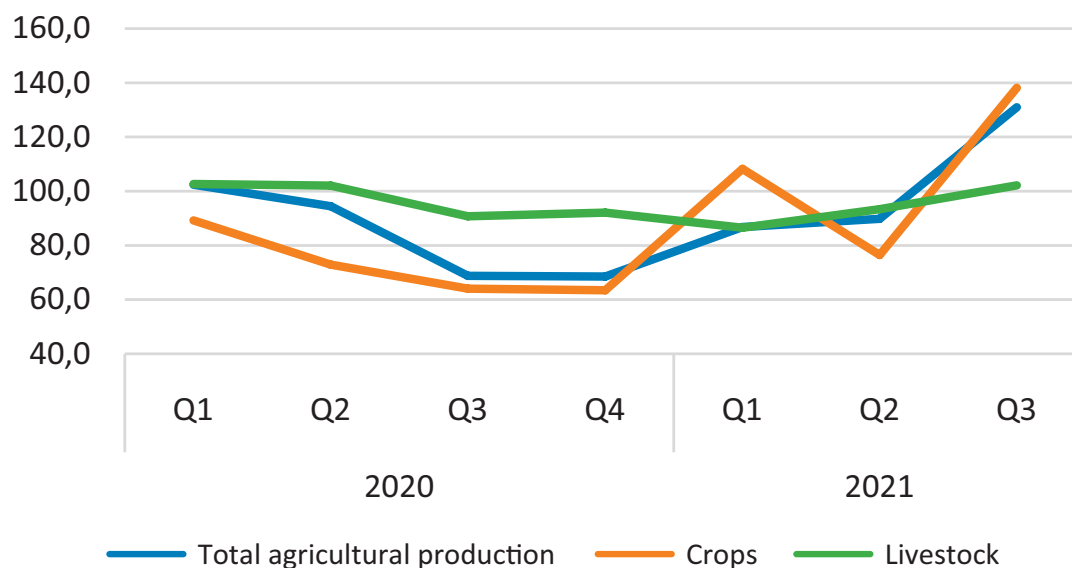
178 European Union Mayors for Economic Growth, [Market Research of the IT Sector of Economy in the Eastern Partnership Countries](#) (2019).

179 World Bank, ["Individuals Using the Internet \(per cent of population\)](#), Moldova.

180 Between 2000–2016, the share of agriculture in GDP almost halved from 29 per cent to 14 per cent, while in contrast the share of the service sector increased from 49 per cent to almost 70 per cent of GDP.

181 NBS data for 2019.

Agricultural production dynamics (per cent, corresponding quarter from the previous year = 100)



Source: NBS

according to the NBS).¹⁸² According to the Agricultural Census (2011), only 36 per cent of agricultural farms are managed by women, and most of these women (57 per cent) are of pre-retirement or retirement age.¹⁸³

Agricultural output is affected by climate change and faces challenges related to the underutilization of modern technologies and innovations. 2020 was a particularly difficult year for agriculture and farmers due to the severe drought in the country, which affected both the north and the south. Thus, the agricultural production volume index in households of all categories (agricultural enterprises, farms and households) in 2020, according to NBS estimates, was 73 per cent compared to 2019. The decrease in global agricultural production was determined by the decrease of plant production by 35.9 per cent and of animal production by 3.8 per cent.¹⁸⁴

Farms in Moldova are largely dominated by smallholders, who generate over 62 per cent of the total volume of agricultural outputs.¹⁸⁵ The share of smallholders and family farms out of the total number of agricultural holdings is 98.2 per cent, with 168,100 family farms of below 10 ha registered in 2020.

Exports of agrifood products account for about 80 per cent of goods traded by Moldova. The key comparative advantage of Moldova relates to the trade

benefits from the DCFTA agreement (facilitating access to the European single market), as well as the country's geographical proximity to the European Union. Furthermore, high level of e-readiness and recent infrastructure development are additional factors creating preconditions for FDI inflow. **Moldova has good potential for organic agrifood production**, which is currently substantially underdeveloped.

Wage levels in the agricultural sector are 34.1 per cent lower than the national average due to the seasonality of labour demands and the low level of qualifications among agricultural workers.

TOURISM

The service sector makes up over 57 per cent of the economy of Moldova. At the same time, it has been one of the sectors most affected by COVID-19, as a result of which the overall economic impact of the pandemic on the tourism sector has been high. Furthermore, although the contribution of tourism and hospitality to GDP is low (below 1 per cent), this sector emerged as one of the fastest growing in recent years until, affected by the containment measures, the sector lost its dynamism in 2021. Restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic led to a decline of over two-thirds in the tourism sector: outgoing tourism declined by 84.3 per cent, domestic tourism fell by 46.3 per cent

182 NBS data from <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=6952>.

183 M. Vremis, Women in Rural Areas, United Nations Information Note developed within the project on 'Strengthening of the National Statistics System', 2016.

184 NBS data from https://statistica.gov.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/Moldova_in_cifre/2021/Breviar_2021_eng.pdf.

185 FAO, Country Study on Smallholders and Family Farms in Moldova (final draft version) (2018).

and incoming tourism went down by 20.2 per cent. This led to a substantial fall in revenues for tourism companies (-81.4 per cent versus 2019), with the largest decline for outgoing tourism (-86.1 per cent) and incoming tourism (-82.5 per cent), followed by a decline in domestic tourism of 60.6 per cent between January and June 2020. Similarly, hospitality employees were among the most affected in the overall economy, especially the ones working in urban areas. The average number of employees decreased in the second quarter of 2020 (compared with the similar period of 2019) by more than 60 per cent.¹⁸⁶

LABOUR-MARKET PERSPECTIVES: BARRIERS AND DISINCENTIVES TO EMPLOYMENT

Ongoing processes of economic transition, volatile growth,¹⁸⁷ population ageing and the shrinking labour-force have all strongly affected the labour-market in Moldova.¹⁸⁸

Outmigration and economic growth in recent years have given rise to record low levels of unemployment, although low levels of employment and high inactivity persist. The unemployment rate was 5.1 per cent in 2019 (women: 4.4 per cent; men: 5.8 per cent). Unemployment among young adults aged 15–24 is a more pressing problem and reached nearly 8 per cent in 2019. However, a look at the unemployment rates solely is misleading. The real problems are low employment rates and high levels of inactivity. The employment rates of the country have been very low over the past decades (2000: 45 per cent, 2019: 40 per cent; European Union average: 53 per cent in 2019). In addition, one in every three young people is not in the labour-force.

According to ILO calculations, the country saw a decline in working hours of 8.7 per cent in 2020 (European Union average: 7.4 per cent), equivalent to 85,000 full-time jobs. In 2021, the loss of working hours only slightly decreased and is still at 6.8 per cent (European Union average 2.7 per cent), equivalent to a loss of 82,000 full-time jobs.¹⁸⁹ Working-hour losses have various causes: shorter hours, being employed but not working, unemployment and inactivity. **Educational attainment has improved, while employment opportunities for many seem not to have changed appreciably. A high level of informal employment ex-**

poses structural deficiencies, a lack of decent work opportunities and measures ensuring occupational safety and health. The share of informal employment has escalated, reaching nearly 40 per cent of total employment in 2018. In 2019, this figure declined to 23 per cent, following the adoption of a new definition of employment by the NBS in line with international best practice.¹⁹⁰ Regarding occupational safety and health, the number of accidents at work remains high. The number of fatal workplace accidents was 5.2 cases per 100,000 employees in 2020.¹⁹¹ The average rate for the European Union is 1.2 cases.¹⁹²

People in Moldova perform an average of 3.9 hours of unpaid work a day, higher than the average in OECD countries (3.4 hours a day). Most unpaid work is done by women, with 4.9 hours a day, representing 66 per cent of their total working time, while men allocate half that, undertaking 2.8 hours of unpaid work a day.

Labour productivity has started to recover in recent years, but it is critical not to lose momentum. A growth in labour productivity of 0.5 per cent was mainly due to a reduction in unproductive labour and to firms being more innovative and adapting to market conditions.¹⁹³

Skills mismatch and the shortage of skilled workers rank among the top obstacles (along with access to finance, absence of the rule of law and corruption) to enterprise performance, according to employers in Moldova. In 2019, the job vacancy rate (jobs registered with the Public Employment Service) grew by 83 per cent (i.e. roughly 5,000 available jobs), coupled with a fall in registered unemployment.

Despite this positive trend, more than 60 per cent of all employees receive a wage that is lower than the mean value in the national economy. **In 2019, the wage disparity between men and women reached 14.4 per cent, the equivalent to an annual financial loss for women of MDL 14,490, the highest in six years.** The OECD average is 13 per cent. For old-age pensioners, there is a significant gender disparity in income of 21.6 per cent, which is 4 per cent higher than in 2018. In urban areas, the gender gap in pensioners' income is even more pronounced, reaching 32.6 per cent in Chişinău. These discrepancies lead to significant financial losses for retired women.

186 UNDP, [Social and Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Republic of Moldova](#).

187 The growth model, propelled mainly by consumption and remittances, has been unsustainable and is losing strength.

188 NBS, [Number of Population with Habitual Residence in the Republic of Moldova by Sex and Age Groups on 1 January 2020](#) (2020) [in Romanian].

189 www.ilo.org/budapest/countries-covered/moldova/WCMS_433690/lang-en/index.htm.

190 In 2019, households engaged in production for their own consumption have been removed from the employment figures.

191 NBS data from [Victimele accidentelor de munca. SiteTitle \(statistica.md\)](#).

192 Health and Safety Executive, ["Comparisons with other countries", hse.gov.uk](#).

193 World Bank, ["Moldova Special Focus Note: Are Moldovan Firms Ready for Fast Recovery?"](#), 2020.

Moldova needs to unlock the potential of its workforce to enhance livelihoods and business performance. This untapped potential is to be found in people who are not currently active in the labour-force, such as those living in households engaged in subsis-

tence agriculture, women who are currently out of the workforce, short-term migrants and/or people intending to migrate and migrants returning as a result of the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON MSMEs

The COVID-19 crisis has pushed many small businesses to the brink of collapse. MSMEs have fewer cash reserves to maintain employee salaries when shocks occur and have more trouble navigating and accessing channels of aid. Job losses are rippling through multiple industries and occupations. The impact across employment and productivity is expected to be at levels not seen before in Moldova. The pandemic has attacked the economically vulnerable, much as it has attacked those with pre-existing health vulnerabilities. The economically vulnerable part of the population is the least able to withstand this disruption: already in its inception phase, the COVID-19 pandemic affected over 33,000 workers in Moldova who were vulnerable to pay cuts, lost hours and layoffs. The number of people working remotely has doubled, particularly affecting women and young people. Sectors like accommodation and food service, retail and manufacturing are experiencing the greatest economic impacts.¹⁹⁴ The biggest losses in income for women and men are those generated from family businesses (66 per cent), farming (42 per cent) and remittances (40 per cent). Around 21 per cent of women in Moldova who took part in a rapid assessment reported experiencing a reduction in remittances from abroad.¹⁹⁵ As the majority of Roma have a low level of education and skills, they are the group most heavily affected by the COVID-19 crisis, making up the highest share of those who have lost their jobs (69.2 per cent); Roma aged 35–49 are particularly affected.¹⁹⁶

75 per cent – 100 per cent	One-third	Only 12 per cent	50 per cent
Experienced declines in sales	Have capital/ liquidity that covers no more than three months of operations	Have access to external financing sources	Have no proper internal procedures for crisis management

Source: Impact and Needs Assessment of Target Beneficiary MSMEs under COVID-19 Crisis

CLIMATE CHANGE FOOTPRINT AND ENVIRONMENTAL VULNERABILITIES

CLIMATE VULNERABILITIES, ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE

In May 2017, the Republic of Moldova ratified the Paris Agreement, and in March 2020 it submitted the second Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC2) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), committing to reduce its GHG emissions by at least 70 per cent by 2030 (compared to the 1990 level) and by up to 88 per cent subject to a global agreement addressing access to low-cost finan-

The 2007 drought caused estimated losses of about **US\$ 1 billion**, while the 2008 and 2010 floods cost the country about **US\$ 120 million** and **US\$ 42 million** respectively

194 NBS data on Q1, 2020: labour force survey results.

195 UN Women, [The Impact of COVID-19 on Women's and Men's Lives and Livelihoods in Europe and Central Asia: Preliminary Results from a Rapid Gender Assessment](#) (2020).

196 UN Women Moldova, Impact of COVID-19 crisis on Roma population in the Republic of Moldova, p. 22.

cial resources, technology transfer and technical cooperation. Along with the overall national GHG emission targets, there are GHG emission reduction targets for sectors against reference year (1990) levels. Achievement of the NDC2 targets is sought through the Low Emissions Development (LED) Strategy approved in 2017 and currently being updated to align with the more ambitious national climate targets. The updated LED programme is expected to be approved by the government in 2022.

There have been **US\$ 1.2 billion** in economic losses from disasters over the last 10 years

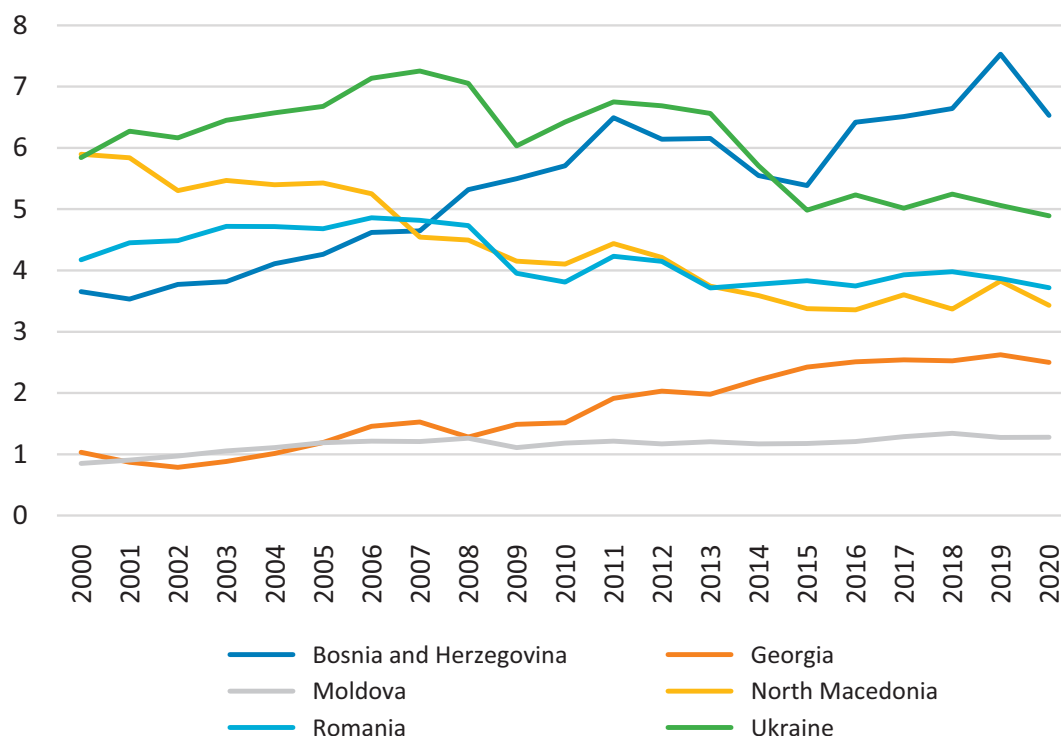
Between 1990 and 2016, GHG emissions dropped by almost 70 per cent, mainly due to low economic activity. Emissions from the energy sector decreased by almost 73 per cent; from the industrial sector by 51.5 per cent; from the agricultural sector by 53.5 per cent; from the land land-use sector by almost 40 per cent;

and from the waste management sector by 3.6 per cent. Since 2015, a small increase has been observed in CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion and cement production.¹⁹⁷

Weak management of rural areas and poor community development policy led to over-exploitation of landfills that affects primarily poor rural groups, especially women, while rapid urban growth is expected to add further to this pressure, contributing even more to inequalities and the societal divide in cities. Poverty predominates in rural areas, which are mostly populated by subsistence farmers, who are usually the poorest groups in the country. This – in combination with unsustainable practices in the agriculture, land-use and forestry sectors, as well as improper waste and chemicals management – leads to soil and forestry degradation, air, water and land pollution, with a secondary impact on human health, biodiversity loss and ecosystem deterioration. Regarding climate action, environment and civil protection, Moldova overall has recorded limited progress on implementing reforms in line with the Association Agreement/DCFTA.¹⁹⁸

As Moldova is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change in Europe,¹⁹⁹ the country's unique biodiversity is being threatened by the effects of climate

CO2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion and cement production (tCO2 per capita)



Source: Source: Global Carbon Project

197 [SDG Indicators Dashboard: Moldova profile.](#)

198 European Union, Association Implementation Report on Moldova (2019).

199 World Bank, [Republic of Moldova Climate Adaptation Investment Planning Technical Assistance](#) (2016).

change, habitat fragmentation and over-exploitation. Due to unprotected and deforested lands (protective forest belts date back to 1947 and have not been maintained since then) and the lack of a regional/cross-border approach to flood prevention (together with Romania and Ukraine), Moldova faces harsh flooding, with the potential for substantial losses in terms of agricultural land and households. Land degradation and soil erosion are projected to worsen. Around 42 per cent of all agricultural lands, or 953,900 ha (2015), have already been degraded to some degree, and the productivity of most current crops may decline by between 10 per cent and 20 per cent.²⁰⁰

Climate modelling anticipates that droughts will become longer and more frequent. The major expected effects of climate change in Moldova are as follows:

- By 2040, a decline in average annual rainfall by 6.8 per cent and a decline in summer and autumn precipitation by 19.3 per cent and 16 per cent respectively.
- Increased frequency and severity of droughts, with catastrophic droughts (less than 50 per cent of annual rainfall) 4.5 times is more likely to occur.
- A two-thirds decrease in available water resources by 2080.
- An increased number of hailstorms and torrential rain, with an increased incidence of flash floods and higher flood severity.

Moldova is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change in Europe

The people of Moldova are already experiencing the impacts of climate change, with more frequent droughts, heavy rains, flooding and other severe weather events. On average, Moldova is exposed to 4–5 severe droughts and 1–2 disastrous floods every 10 years.

Economic losses from disasters over the last 10 years are over US\$ 1.2 billion. The 2007 drought caused estimated losses of about US\$ 1 billion while the 2008 and 2010

floods cost the country about US\$ 120 million and US\$ 42 million respectively.²⁰¹ These losses will continue to affect the most vulnerable population and are likely to increase population displacement. The legislative framework and institutional approach for disaster risk reduction and climate change is fragmented, and there is limited coordination among the relevant stakeholders.

The economy and population of Moldova, particularly female-headed households and vulnerable groups, are highly vulnerable to both climate change and disasters.

It is essential to strengthen national and local capacities to avert, manage and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change, as a recognized form of actual and potential loss and damage under the UNFCCC, with special attention to gender-differentiated risks. When enabling conditions are present, migration can also support climate action.

The present total cost of inaction on climate adaptation is an estimated US\$ 600 million, equivalent to 6.5 per cent of GDP. By 2050, the direct costs of climate change (the decrease in production plus the increase in damage and the costs of prevention) are expected to be about US\$ 1 billion, 70 per cent of which will be incurred by agriculture, which faces the biggest challenges. The estimated cost of implementing the environmental action plan is US\$ 200 million, while the annual cost of inaction could rise to US\$ 61 million.

Climate change adaptation measures are not part of the budget in Moldova and the national budgeting process is not yet climate-sensitive, and thus not eligible for climate financing. At the same time, the country is one of the most vulnerable in the region due to highly exposed and impacted sectors of the economy, along with the country's population well-being already being affected by climate change. The NDC2 estimates national losses caused by global warming and the extreme weather events associated with it at US\$ 1.3 billion annually by 2050 if climate change mitigation and adaptation measures are not taken. The implementation of adaptation action is still project-based, fragmented and poorly monitored, supported mostly by external financing coming through aid from development partners. A more systematic and intersectoral coordination approach of both adaptation planning and action would be beneficial to reduce climate risks and the potential impact of climate hazards.

Resilience building in local communities and vulnerable groups remain key issues to be addressed in the country. Development and adaptation policies for

200 Government of Moldova, [National Land Degradation Neutrality Targets](#) (Moldova, 2018).

201 www.gtai.de/resource/blob/31308/53d2d5546ad5a9e06cbb9327fe6bf4e0/pro201706275007-data.pdf.

forced climate migrants need to focus on reducing people's vulnerability to climate change, moving people away from marginal areas and supporting livelihoods that are more resilient. In particular, more efficient use of existing resources would offset some of the predicted impacts of climate change. Furthermore, there is a need to provide opportunities for regular migration pathways or consider planned relocation as a last resort strategy for the "trapped" population. On the other hand, transitioning to a low-carbon economy can create new income opportunities as well as change labour demands, especially within energy-intensive sectors, including for migrants. A just transition could ensure that migrants have access to adequate means of social protection and opportunities for skilling and re-skilling.

Improving access to finance for local business (MSMEs) and for migrants to implement climate-smart investments, as well as the development of green jobs and, ultimately, unlocking the liquidity of commercial banks in Moldova, would help promote climate action. For all this to happen, there is a need to build capacity and enhance the climate-expertise of national stakeholders to understand and promote green and climate jobs for returning migrants and greening existing employment. Clearly there has to be a balance of policies that promotes the incentives for workers to stay at home. The growing need for financial inclusion in climate action, particularly through migrants and their families, is to be supported by awareness-raising programmes that would increase their literacy in climate action and climate finance.

Furthermore, there is a need to provide opportunities for regular migration pathways or to consider planned relocation as a last resort strategy for the "trapped" population.

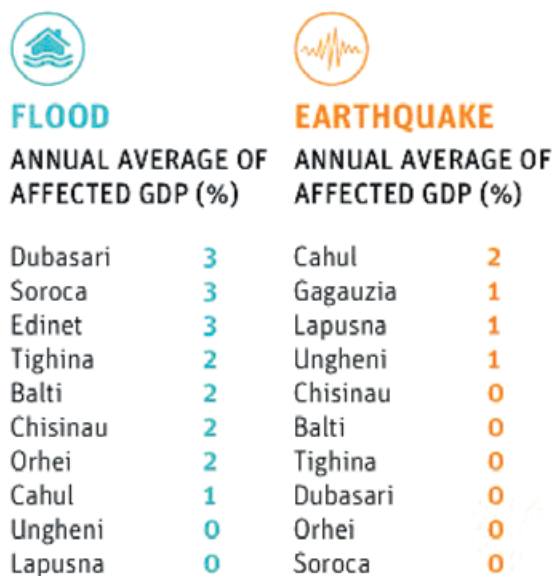
In 2011, the UNDP supported the development of the draft Disaster Risk Management Strategy for Moldova. The priorities identified in the strategy are also aligned with the Sendai Frameworks, for example 1) understanding the disaster risks, 2) strengthening disaster risk governance, 3) increasing the level of resilience through investment and disaster risk reduction and 4) improving the disaster preparedness level.

The disaster risk management mandate currently lies with the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which serves as the Secretariat for NCES and is the main body responsible for developing and managing civil protection and disaster risk management policies.

The **gender-responsive preparedness and recovery strategies** in Moldova are included in the Civil Protec-

tion Plan, revised yearly depending on the situation analysis. Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation both seek to create gender sensitive and resilient societies; therefore, this issue cannot be addressed in isolation. Closer collaboration on these two critical development issues is becoming more important as the Government of Moldova has signed the Paris Agreement. Against this, additional effort should be invested into mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation into national development plans, poverty reduction strategies, sectoral policies and other development planning tools.²⁰² Strengthening disaster risk governance is prioritized in the National Implementation Plan of the European Union–Moldova Association Agreement, but it is not yet backed up by national policy planning frameworks.

TOP AFFECTED PROVINCES



Source: World Bank, [Disaster Risk Profile: Moldova](#) (2017)

WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION

Climate change will increase the challenges connected to water provision, as the likelihood of droughts (as well as of floods) will be exacerbated because of climate change in the coming years.

Government spending on water supply and sewerage, although it has increased in recent years, is still low. Furthermore, the country has the largest urban–rural gap and the lowest level of access to water supply and sanitation services in the Danube Region.

Although **public access to water supply has gradually increased in recent years, reaching 82.1 per**

202 UNDP, "Theory of Change", CPD formulation process, 2018.

20.8 per cent of the population in rural areas have access to a sanitation service within the house

cent in 2018, there are still discrepancies between rural (71.17 per cent) and urban (97 per cent) settlements, while the quality of drinking water does not comply with sanitary chemical norms (69 per cent of samples from centralized groundwater sources do not meet chemical requirements). The water supply for the population in rural localities is mainly sourced from groundwater, which is very often affected by natural or anthropogenic pollution.²⁰³ In particular, Anenii Noi, Glodeni, Causeni, Falesti, Riscani, Stefan Voda, Taraclia, Hancesti and Gagauzia have the most unfavourable situation in terms of drinking water quality compliance.

In rural areas, most of the people rely on wells to access water for consumption. However, the National Agency for Public Health, which analyses the quality of water, has reported that more than half of the wells in the country have poor-quality water. The worst situation is in the centre of the country.²⁰⁴

The low quality of the sewerage system was considered one of the biggest problems relating to the right to a healthy environment by 61.1 per cent of respondents in the human rights perception study from 2020,²⁰⁵ as was the low quality of water (53.4 per cent).

Wastewater is the main source of surface water pollution in Moldova. A fact recognized and stipulated in the Moldova 2030 strategy. As the population connects to water supply systems, water consumption increases and in the absence of proper sewage and wastewater treatment solutions, these systems become major sources of water pollution, as is the case of the rural Moldova.

Although the amount of wastewater sufficiently treated in the non-residential sector increased by 0.7 per cent between 2011 and 2018, the figure is

only 18 per cent,²⁰⁶ and the proportion of the population having a sanitation service and bath or shower within the dwelling is still suboptimal (83.8 per cent in urban areas and 20.8 per cent in rural areas in 2018).²⁰⁷ Meanwhile, around 54 per cent of the samples taken from the water provided to schools exceeded the maximum allowed concentrations for chemical-sanitary parameters, while 20 per cent of the samples did not meet microbiological safety parameters. The fight against the COVID-19 pandemic is tightly linked to clean and safe water and sanitation services, highlighting the urgency in this area.

The Government of Moldova – a country that is divided into two major river basins (the Nistru and the Danube–Prut) – approved the [Dniester River Basin Management Plan](#) (2017–2022) in 2017. The plan's objectives included preventing the deterioration of surface and groundwater status; the gradual reduction of pollution; and the improvement of water bodies. In 2012, the Commission on Sustainable Use and Protection of the Dniester River Basin (the Dniester Commission) was established under the terms of the treaty between the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. The treaty covered almost all aspects relating to river basin issues, except for navigation and hydropower.

Some 90 per cent of the country's surface water stems from the inflow of the Nistru and Prut, creating a high reliance on external relations to ensure water security. Moreover, the country only has 738 m³ *per capita* of storage capacity to support water provisions in case of extreme weather events.²⁰⁸ The European Union Water Directives are almost fully transposed into the national legal framework and capacities for integrated water management, including a transboundary cooperation supported by the European Union Water Initiative Plus and *Global Environment Facility* (GEF) projects.

Moldova has been benefiting from the UNECE-WHO Regional Office for Europe Protocol on Water and Health²⁰⁹ as a tool to improve the water, sanitation, hygiene and health situation. The protocol is an international binding legal agreement intended to protect human health and well-being through sustainable water management and by preventing, controlling and

203 Moldova VNR (2020).

204 Access to safe water and sanitation is key in the context of protection against COVID-19. According to data from the OHCHR survey, 23.6 per cent of respondents (7.9 per cent on the Left Bank) did not have access to centralized water supply systems/aqueducts. Respondents with incomplete general education (40.1 per cent for the Right Bank and 18.2 per cent for the Left Bank), people of low socioeconomic status (40.9 per cent for the Right Bank and 19.8 per cent for the Left Bank) and people from rural areas (33.5 per cent for the Right Bank and 14.9 per cent for the Left Bank) were more affected.

205 People's Advocate Office, p. 41

206 State Chancellery and NBS, [Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals \(2020\)](#), p. 17.

207 State Chancellery and NBS, [Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals](#), p. 18.

208 World Bank, [Moldova Policy Notes 2019: Sustaining Stability and Reviving Growth](#) (2019), p. 71

209 See www.unece.org/env/water/pwh_text/text_protocol.html for more information.

reducing water-related diseases. One of the key obligations under it is to set intersectoral targets on water, sanitation and health to ensure access to drinking water and sanitation for everyone and in all.

AIR QUALITY

Moldova is in line with the global trend of continuous urbanization, from 47 per cent in 2010 to 60 per cent in expected in 2030 (UN-Habitat). Cities are increasingly and significantly the main drivers of (global) environmental degradation. Municipalities have the greatest impact on air quality and are responsible for more than 50 per cent of total air pollution in Moldova.

Transport is the main source of air pollution in cities: the total volume of emissions in the air from the transport sector in 2019 was 803.69 tons in Chişinău and 151.10 tons in Balti,²¹⁰ and the sector was responsible for 18.9 per cent of total national GHG emissions in 2019. The age of the fleet of vehicles, the low quality and the high sulphur content of fuel aggravate the problem. The relatively old and uncomfortable public transport, which often runs late because of the lack of dedicated lanes, means the public is rapidly shifting to the use of private cars. As of October 2020, 669,181 passenger cars were registered across Moldova in the Public Service Agency²¹¹ corresponding to 265 passenger cars per thousand inhabitants. In the two largest cities Chişinău and Balti there are 223,386 (Chişinău) and 31,020 (Balti) cars registered.²¹² In comparison, in the European Union there were approximately 530 passenger cars per thousand inhabitants in 2018.²¹³ The increased use of personal vehicles creates even more traffic jams and will lead to a traffic collapse in upcoming years.

Municipalities are responsible for more than 50 per cent of the total air pollution in Moldova

There is an obvious lack of implementation of up-to-date green and low-carbon urban practices (including sustainable transport and mobility) utilizing innova-

tive, climate-smart technologies, engaging the public and private sectors in planning and greening urban solutions.

Moldova has not yet ratified the amended versions of the latest protocols to the UNECE Convention²¹⁴ on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution, including the 1999 Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-Level Ozone (Gothenburg Protocol). The revised Gothenburg Protocol sets emission reduction targets and contains measures relating to transport, industry and agriculture, the implementation of which can help reduce the emissions of various pollutants and thus contribute to the achievement of certain SDGs (particularly SDG 3 on good health and well-being, SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities and SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production). Furthermore, according to the Association Agreement signed with the European Union in 2014, Moldova is developing national legislation to fulfil the reporting requirements of emission inventories and reporting under the European Union's National Emission Ceilings Directive.

PROTECTED AREAS AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Protected areas make up 5.8 per cent of the country's territory,²¹⁵ below the set target of 8 per cent to be achieved by Moldova by 2020. This area is not, however, enough representative of species and of habitat diversity, and therefore effective management of biodiversity outside the protected areas is essential to maintain the ecological integrity of the ecosystems of Moldova. Threats to biodiversity include human encroachment through land conversion; soil erosion; pollution; non-native and/or invasive species; habitat fragmentation because of infrastructure development; and climate change. Despite the fact that biodiversity plays a crucial role in the national economy and development, with the quantified value of ecosystem services estimated at 41 per cent of GDP, it is not perceived as a priority. The spatial planning framework continues to be deficient, and biodiversity conservation is not taken into account. The long-term solution lies in mainstreaming biodiversity concerns into agricultural, forestry and other production activities and in connecting conservation efforts to economic development.

Moldova has one of the poorest forest coverages in Europe (at around 11.2 per cent of the territory),²¹⁶

210 MARDE, [Anuarul IPM \(2019\)](#).

211 Public Services Agency, "[Statistics of the State Register of Vehicles in the Division of Vehicle Types](#)" (accessed 26 November 2020).

212 Public Services Agency, "[Statistics of the State Register of Vehicles in the Division of Vehicle Types](#)".

213 Eurostat, "[Passenger Cars in the EU](#)", data extracted April 2020.

214 Moldova has been a party to the UNECE Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution since 1995, and has ratified its 1984 Protocol on Long-Term Financing of the Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-Range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe, the 1998 Protocol on Heavy Metals and the 1998 Protocol on Persistent Organic Pollutants (since 2002).

215 Government of Moldova, [The Sixth National Report on Biological Diversity](#) (2019).

216 [Ibid.](#)

and that coverage is highly fragmented. Past forest mismanagement has caused a decline in forest quality and increased vulnerability to pests and diseases, while significantly decreasing the availability of ecosystem services. Over the last 30 years, the area of eroded lands has increased by 223,800 ha. In total, this represents 880,000 ha, 25.9 per cent of the country's total territory and 40 per cent of agricultural land. Only 5 per cent of pastures maintain high biological value, while about 70 per cent have lost the ability to recuperate. As a result, soil loss causes an estimated agricultural production loss of US\$ 53 million a year. In addition, relevant information and data are missing on the current status of the forests, as Moldova never conducted a Forests Inventory. This exercise is crucial for the country to identify the needs in afforestation and sustainable management of forests.

The current area covered by forests is insufficient to meet the ecological and social-economic needs of Moldova. In order to ensure a constant ecological equilibrium and a stronger effect on the climate and hydrological conditions, as well as to enhance the productivity of agricultural lands, forest lands should occupy at least 15 per cent of the country's territory. The dispersion and fragmentation of forest resources and their uneven distribution across the country make it

more difficult to exercise beneficial eco-protective influences on the environment, create comfortable living conditions for the population and provide wood and non-wood products.

The number of recorded incidents of illegal fishing increased by 3.8 per cent between 2011 and 2018. The number of species included in the Red Book of endangered species went from 242 in 2011 up to 427 in 2018, a sharp rise of 76.4 per cent. Of this number, 208 were animal species and 219 were plant species.²¹⁷

Moldova hosts some of Europe's oldest forest flood plains and meadows, reedbeds, lakes and swamps, providing critical wintering and feeding habitats for hundreds of thousands of water birds migrating along various Eurasian–African flyways. Among these are the "Padurea Domneasca" Nature Reserve, located in the middle section of River Prut and stretching over 6,032 ha, and the Man and the Biosphere Programme/UNESCO Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, covering 14,771 ha and hosting the country's largest natural lakes – also designated wetland sites of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. However, their ecosystems are under threat due to unsustainable agricultural practices and previous river engineering, which have affected the groundwater table and discharge.

GOVERNANCE AND THE RULE OF LAW

LGBTI+ individuals face the most discrimination, particularly through negative speeches from, for example, politicians and religious figures. The high level of intolerance stems from the limited coverage of sexual education in the school curricula, and the superficiality in the coverage of human rights and gender identity issues. Children and their families lack access to psychological services, and school psychologists and social workers do not have enough training on issues relating to sexual identity.

(Notes from consultations with CSOs in Moldova)

CAPACITY OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS TO DRIVE THE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

In the VNR, the Republic of Moldova acknowledged that sustainable development cannot be achieved without respect for human rights and gender equality and without ensuring peace, stability, effective governance and the rule of law. Thus, the priorities of the current government of the Republic of Moldova also include promoting the rule of law and equal access to justice; combating all forms of corruption; developing efficient, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels; ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels; and ensuring access to information.²¹⁸

The greatest challenges for Moldova in terms of good governance include political volatility, widespread corruption, lack of transparency, weak accountability mechanisms and fragile social cohesion. Another challenge for the good governance is the slow decentral-

217 State Chancellery and NBS, [Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals](#), pp. 31 and 33.

218 United Nations Moldova, [Republic of Moldova Voluntary National Review Progress Report](#).

ization process and unequal development avenues for certain regions of the country.

The CSOs usually do not have a role in the implementation of policies relating to inter-ethnic issues, including the monitoring of their implementation, because they lack capacity for this. Hence, CSOs need to have their capacity strengthened so they can participate in the implementation and monitoring of such policies, along with government institutions and international bodies.

(Notes from consultations with CSOs in Moldova)

Moldova lacks a system for continuous monitoring of the implementation of European Court of Human Rights decisions by CSOs. There is a lack of capacity among CSOs in this respect .

(Notes from consultations with CSOs in Moldova)

According to the Rule of Law Index developed under the World Justice Project, Moldova ranks 92 across 128 countries. Moldova ranks 56 out of 128 regarding the extent to which government powers are effectively limited by the legislature, while the extent to which the judiciary has the independence and the ability in practice to exercise effective checks on the government was very low, with Moldova ranking 103 out of 128 countries.²¹⁹ The Annual Nations in Transit report of Freedom House places Republic of Moldova in the category of transitional to hybrid regimes, with a democracy percentage of 35.12 and a democracy score of 3.11.

Between 2016 and 2017, Moldova underwent the review by and received recommendations from the Unit-

ed Nations Human Rights Council and the most treaty bodies.

The United Nations conducted the SCORE exercise in 2018. This found that **overall social cohesion²²⁰ in the country was fragile, with negative attitudes towards women and weak social tolerance**. This social cohesion is also impacted by the protracted conflict with the Transnistria Region. According to SCORE, 85 per cent of the respondents preferred people from the LGBTI+ community, drug users and sex workers to leave their communities. Furthermore, over half of respondents preferred Muslims and people living with HIV and AIDS to leave their communities, and over one in three stated that they would prefer Jews, Roma and immigrants to do so too. The most accepted groups were Russian speakers and those not speaking the state language. The majority of citizens would accept them as friends. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Moldova aggravated these ongoing dynamics, as highlighted by a recent survey on the impact of COVID-19 on social cohesion in Moldova.²²¹

Despite a fairly good legal framework ensuring accountability and securing a system of checks and balances between the legislature, executive and the judicial powers, challenges remain in the field of creating efficient tools for accountability especially for CSOs and vulnerable groups. The weak implementation of the legal provisions related to accountability determined the persistence of the concerns of the United Nations Human Rights Committee about corruption, which remains endemic and systemic in the judiciary, thus undermining the effective administration of justice in Moldova.²²²

OPEN GOVERNMENT

The **Public Opinion Barometer** of June 2020 has shown that the population of Moldova either does not trust the government at all (48.1 per cent) or has a low level of trust in the government (27.3 per cent).²²³ Trust in parliament has declined in the last 15 years.

Trust in public institutions has generally been improving, with some notable positive and negative fluctuations during the last four years. For instance, the trust in parliament, the government, the president, justice or the police has increased on average, with an increase of between 15 per cent and 20 per cent (even more in case of the president – a 36 per cent increase) between 2016 and 2019. However, the 2020 data show

219 See the WJP Rule of Law Index at: <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/>

220 United Nations SCORE Index 2018.

221 United Nations RCO, [Survey Measuring the Impact of COVID-19 on Social Cohesion in Moldova](#) (2020).

222 United Nations Human Rights Committee, [Concluding Observations on the Third Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova by the Human Rights Committee](#) (2016), para. 29.

223 Institute of Public Policy, [Public Opinion Barometer](#).

a decline in trust of between 4 per cent and 8 per cent (even more in case of the president: an 18 per cent decrease), except the police, which registered an increase in trust of 5 per cent.²²⁴ The latest fluctuations might be associated with the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the response provided by the national authorities.

According to the People's Advocate Office, the right to access to information, despite formally being well-regulated, continued to be limited in 2019. The authorities regularly refused the delivery of public interest information requested by mass media and civil society, justifying the refusal with the protection of personal data or state secrets. Some of the authorities continued to treat requests for access to information as simple petitions, which implied that the authorities considered they had a longer length of time to respond to requests made, and did not accept electronic requests without the signature of the person asking for the information.

Although the gradual increase in transparency in the country is encouraging, with a few good examples available – such as the development and implementation of the *MTender* Portal (MTender.gov.md) and the portal for monitoring the activity of service providers working on HIV and AIDS treatment and prevention – further efforts are needed to increase government transparency, and CSOs can play an important role in this regard. By 2018, the implementation of *MTender* allowed a saving of 14 per cent on competitive tenders (saving US\$ 27.5 million), and its supplier base has increased by 30 per cent since October 2018 when its use became mandatory for all public procurement.²²⁵

Furthermore, the government has committed itself to open its contracts (including various data sets) to civil society for monitoring purposes. To date, the Government of Moldova has made 1,136 data sets available for general public access.²²⁶

As a result of greater decentralization, the country has been gradually implementing participatory budgeting by involving local communities and civil society in decision-making on the financing of capital investments.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** revealed some weaknesses in the developed systems when procurement procedures were simplified, and procurements were made exempt from registration in the Tender Portal. The is-

sue was addressed in part through the development of the tender.health platform at the initiative of a coalition of CSOs.²²⁷

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE

The **level of citizen participation in governance is low, according to the SCORE Index, while the participation gap is quite high.**²²⁸ This indicates many significant barriers for effective citizen engagement. The biggest gap is among young people (between 18–29), while the interest of persons with disabilities and Roma in civic engagement is much lower than among other groups, suggesting significant barriers contributing to the marginalization of these groups. Furthermore, there are no accessible consultative mechanisms at the central and local level to ensure active involvement and participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the dialogue between citizens and the government.

Several categories of children and young people face various barriers and blockages that affect and limit their participation in social life. Children with low academic performance, children from disadvantaged groups (including children of Roma ethnicity), children with disabilities and children from at risk and vulnerable groups are often excluded and do not participate in decision-making processes. Existing participatory mechanisms aimed at consulting young people do not work properly. In addition, limited access to information and information platforms is another factor impeding the participation of persons with disabilities. Therefore, fair participation is not ensured.

Nevertheless, civic engagement by the citizens of Moldova was higher in the last presidential elections (59.01 per cent) than in the parliamentary (52.30 per cent) and local elections (41.69 per cent).²²⁹ These relatively low percentages suggest that there is only moderate willingness to use all political and social means of action to change communities (or the country) for the better. Lack of trust in the political system is also one of the reasons for high outmigration, particularly among young people.

Civic involvement of youth is low. On the one hand, the lack of culture and traditions for civic participation makes their involvement more difficult to sustain, while on the other there are few mechanisms to maintain policy dialogue with youth and no formal tools for

224 BOP, http://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BOP_06.2020_anexa.pdf, June 2020.

225 *MTender platform* has been developed with the support of the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development.

226 <https://date.gov.md/>.

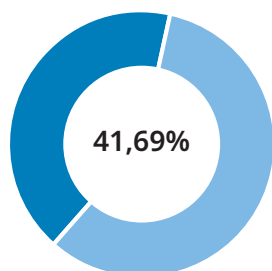
227 <http://tender.health>.

228 Participation gap is defined as the difference between the share of those willing to participate in activities useful for the community and effective participation.

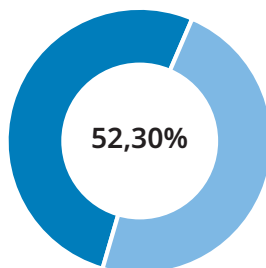
229 CEC, [ALEGERI PREZIDENTIALE 2020 Analiza de gen](#) (2020).

Voter turnout in the last...

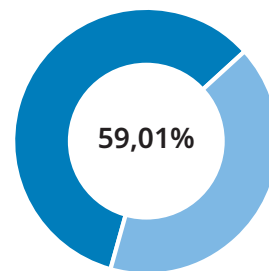
Local elections (2019)



Parliamentary elections (2021)



Presidential elections (2020)



Source: CEC

engagement in the process of education, vocational training or during working life.²³⁰ Locally, only 5 per cent of young people are involved in local public budget consultation processes. As a result, up to 72 per cent of the total number of programmes created for adolescents locally do not meet the needs and aspirations of young people. Besides this, the low level of information and awareness of young people is a barrier that limits the participation of young people in decision-making processes. Many young people who are not part of formal participation structures are unaware of existing opportunities for participation at the local and national level.

There is a need for stronger engagement of young people in governance in rural areas. For this to happen, the skills and capacities of the municipal authorities need to be developed to implement the best tools for meaningful participation in the planning process and project implementation.

(Notes from consultations with CSOs in Moldova)

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

At the same time, it has been reported that citizens are more involved in community decision-making in localities headed by female mayors than in local public

authorities led by men. Involvement of youth in volunteering activities remains modest. About 11 per cent of youth aged 15–24 and 8 per cent of those aged 25–34 are involved in volunteering activities, such as assistance to schools; kindergartens, religious, charitable or cultural organizations; NGOs; trade unions; town halls; businesses and companies; or political parties (10.1 per cent and 5.2 per cent); work for the benefit of the community (19.9 per cent and 17.5 per cent); or conduct other volunteer activities (3.2 per cent and 2.6 per cent).²³¹

In general terms, there are more men than women in leadership positions at all levels. Of all leaders at all levels, in 2018, 59.7 per cent were men and 40.3 per cent were women. Between 2014 and 2018, the gap between women and men increased from 14.8 percentage points to 19.4 percentage points. In the case of leaders of economic and social units, gender differences were more pronounced. Thus, in 2018, the ratio between women and men among leaders was 1 to 4 (27.3 per cent women compared to 72.7 per cent men), regardless of the form of ownership of the unit.

In 2017, Moldova adopted a new mixed electoral system in which 101 seats in parliament were split between Members of Parliament elected on political party lists by all voters (50 per cent using a proportional system) and single-mandate constituencies (i.e. 51 persons elected by so-called “*circumscripții nominale*”, using a majoritarian system), where each constituency elects one Member of Parliament. This new system was implemented in February 2019. **Despite the system being considered less favourable to women's political participation and representation,²³² the number of seats occupied by women has increased over the**

230 The statement on the lack of traditions but also mechanisms for civic engagement of young people was confirmed through the UN CCA consultations process with CSOs.

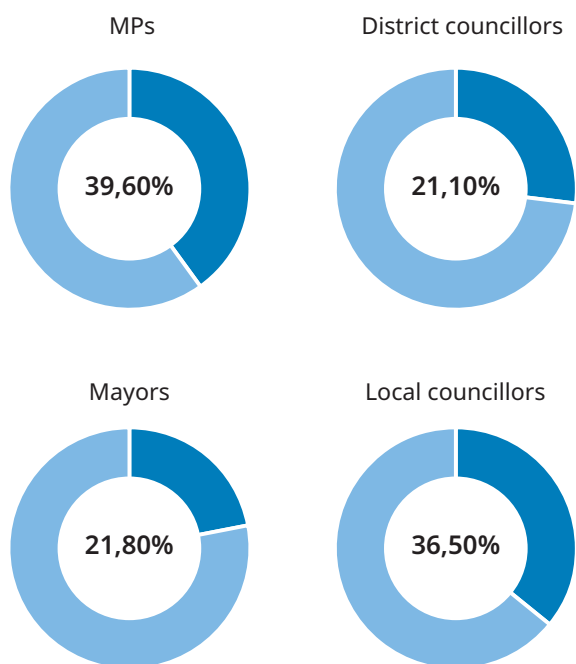
231 Demographic Research Centre, Comprehensive Youth Sector Analysis (UNICEF and UNFPA, 2019).

232 It was envisaged that the mixed electoral system would be a regressive step from the previously adopted 40 per cent gender equality quota for party lists, as the introduction of the mixed system reduced the applicability of this provision to the proportional component of parliament, and

last three parliamentary elections. In 2021, women obtained 40 out of 101 seats in parliament, which translates to 39.6 per cent of the total number of seats, compared to 21 seats in the 2014 elections (and 26 seats in 2019). By the end of 2019, the Parliament of Moldova repealed the mixed electoral system and switched back to a proportional one, introducing placement provisions under which 4 out of 10 candidates on the electoral lists should be of the same sex (voted into law on 31 July 2019). Despite this, political parties continue to designate women in less favourable positions. There are no quotas for women to be represented in the government. This weakens the opportunities for women to get ministry positions.

Following the 2019 local elections, women secured 21.8 per cent of mayor mandates (compared to 20.6 per cent in 2015), 36.5 per cent representation in local councils (compared to 30.0 per cent in 2015) and 27.1 per cent in district councils (compared to 18.6 per cent in 2015). Although this is a positive trend, representation of women is still below internationally agreed goals. **If the same trends continue, Moldova will**

Percentage of seats secured by women in parliamentary and local government in the last elections



Source: CEC

most likely reach a share of 40 per cent of women mayoral candidates in 2031, in just over three electoral cycles.

While women are well represented as judges, they continue to be underrepresented in law enforcement. The proportion of judges who are women is continuously increasing and reached 48.3 per cent in 2018, 3.4 percentage points lower than men judges. At the same time, only 19.4 per cent of police officers, including civil protection and border guards, were women in 2018. Despite the fair representation of women judges, the “price” they are paying for becoming and serving as a judge is higher than for men. They need to reconcile family life and gender-determined obligations with their careers, and there are no mechanisms to mainstream gender in the work of the judiciary.²³³

Disaggregated data are not available on the representation of ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities in the law enforcement agencies and in the civil service.

On **gender sensitive budgeting (GSB)**, the second National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) for 2017–2021 and its associated action plan (approved in early 2017) focused on 10 areas of interventions, with one dedicated to GSB: women’s participation in decision-making; the labour-market and gender pay gap; social protection and family policies; health; education; climate change; institutional mechanisms; stereotypes in society and non-violent communication; gender equality in the security and defence sector; and gender-responsive budgeting. Under the GSB intervention, the NSGE focused on the development, piloting and institutionalizing of GSB tools (gender sensitive indicators, expenditure strategies and concepts) by building the capacity of government Gender Coordination Groups/gender focal points to develop and promote gender-responsive fiscal laws, policies, national and sectoral action plans to enable specific budgetary allocations for advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Since 2008, some actions have been taken to develop a strategic vision for GSB implementation, to strengthen the capacities of stakeholders and to pilot GSB in three districts. UN Women has conducted a revision of the national legislation with proposals for amendments from the perspective of gender-responsive budgeting. Implementation of the recommendations and support

thus includes only half of the seats (Partnership for Development Centre, [Women’s Place in Elections](#) [2019]). In addition, according to international research and studies, another negative effect of mixed electoral systems on women’s political representation is that “under a single-member constituency system, the candidate selectors might be reluctant to pick a woman as the party’s sole candidate, using the excuse, genuine or otherwise, that they believe some voters will be less likely to vote for a woman instead of a man”. According to the statistics, the countries with the lowest levels of female political representation have either a mixed system of weak proportion (where there is voting for party lists and seats are distributed proportionately, but the leading party receives extra seats as a result of reaching a certain level or threshold of votes) or a majoritarian system. See [www.europarl.europa.eu/workingpapers/femm/w10/2_en.htm](#). The same observation was made by the [OSCE, “Handbook for Monitoring Women’s Participation in Elections”](#), and by the [Venice Commission Opinion No. 884/2017](#).

233 CRJM, Analiza dimensiunii de gen în sectorul justiției în Republica Moldova. [Prețul personal al prezenței femeilor în sistemul judecătoresc](#) (in Romanian) (2019).

for the achievement of the objectives in the NSGE remain a challenge where the United Nations can provide strategic support.

ETHNOLINGUISTIC MINORITIES PARTICIPATION

The Gagauz and Bulgarian minorities were underrepresented in the parliament elected in 2019 (with three members and one member respectively).²³⁴ At the same time, other numerically biggest minority groups were overrepresented. The government is mono-ethnic, with the exception of Gagauz minority representation.²³⁵ Other Central Public Administration bodies have a very low share of minority representatives with managerial positions, in particular Russians. In 2020, Roma were only represented in the State Chancellery as councillors to the prime minister. Minorities are underrepresented in the management of judicial bodies, except Russians and Bulgarians.

Due to the lack of regular, transparent and efficient communication with minority CSOs, the potential positive impact on ensuring minority rights is limited. Consultation mechanisms with minorities in matters affecting their communities are limited and inefficient at all levels²³⁶ and that were not effectively used during the COVID-19 pandemic. Genuine and inclusive consultation needs to become an integral part of national and local decision-making, including in developing crisis response measures.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM (PAR)

In 2016, the government launched the second phase²³⁷ of the PAR (2016–2020)²³⁸ intended to consolidate the Central Public Administration, improve decision-making processes and reduce bureaucracy and administrative costs. It did so by reorganizing ministries to optimize staffing, introducing a unified public sector salary system and digitizing and streamlining public services. The reforms continued by separating policy development and monitoring (by ministries) from policy implementation (by subordinate agencies), with the intention of improving the quality of policymaking and of setting clearer accountability targets for ministries and subordinate agencies. During the government restructuring, ministries delegated administrative management functions to the general secretaries, while the state secretaries focused on the policy process, sectoral strategic goals and monitoring results. This ultimately contributed to better policy development and budget drafting.

Gender equality mechanisms were not integrated into the reforming and restructuring processes, which led to virtually no mainstreaming of gender equality in the overall policymaking and budgeting process. Increased use of information technology by ministries and subordinate bodies also improved the efficiency of planning and budgeting, but this process is nascent and needs significant support with expertise, capacity development and resources. This would be a relevant entry point for the United Nations in the country.

The Centre for Reform Implementation (CRI) established in January 2017 and dissolved in January 2020 was tasked with implementing the PAR and evaluating its progress. The CRI coordinated the establishment of the new government structure and the creation of the Agency of Public Property, which was intended to improve the management of public property. The Agency of Public Services was also tasked with establishing a network of one-stop shops for citizens and businesses and with using e-Governance tools to make public services more accessible and transparent.

As a result of the reform, the number of ministries was reduced from 16 to 9, while the staff count fell by around 40 per cent overall. While the cuts enabled salary increases in the public sector and stronger financial incentives for civil servants, it critically and negatively hit the institutional capacities, leading to increased workload and overstretch of civil servants. Adjustment to the new structures was disrupted by the parliamentary elections of February 2019, which resulted in a half-year absence of a majority coalition in parliament and therefore in the inability to appoint a government. Once a coalition government was finally invested in June 2019, the subsequent reshuffling of top-level civil servants (a mass change not only of ministers – who are political appointees – but also of state secretaries, who according to the law are technocrat civil servants and expected to stay through government changes and ensure continuity and stability) proved that the Law on State Secretaries was being neglected. The same mass change was repeated following a new change of government in November 2019. The lasting political crisis negatively affected the delivery of sector strategic document objectives by the ministries and delayed the government's approval of the Moldova 2030 strategy for a year and a half. The strategy has still not been approved by parliament and therefore does not have legal power.

234 HCNM, *Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life in the Republic of Moldova: Establishing the Benchmark and Evaluating the Policy Framework for 2020* (2019).

235 The representation of the Governor of Gagauzia in the government as an ex officio member is stipulated by the law on the special legal status of Gagauzia (Gagauz Yeri) No. 344, 23 December 1994.

236 Burdelnii, *Final Report of the Assessment of the Implementation of the National Action Plan for 2017–2020*, p. 6.

237 The first phase focused on the Central Public Administration and was being implemented in 2005–2016.

238 Government of the Republic of Moldova, *PAR Strategy*, 2016–2020.

SUBNATIONAL GOVERNANCE

The local public administration in Moldova is based on local autonomy principles, the decentralization of public services and consultation with the citizens on local problems of special interest.²³⁹ The legal framework governing the functioning of local public administrations is based on two main documents: fiscal decentralization governed by the Law on Local Public Finance,²⁴⁰ and the Law on Administrative Decentralization.²⁴¹ The latter stipulates the division of powers between government tiers. The local government operates at two levels of administration. The first level consists of local communities, villages and towns, whereas the second level consists of 35 territorial administrative units (32 raions, the Chişinău and Balti Municipalities and the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia).²⁴²

The process of fiscal decentralization reform started in the early 2000s. However, local government bodies continue to be challenged by insufficient financial resources and capacities. Local governments rely mostly on grants and other transfers from the central government, limiting their autonomy. In 2014, local own budget revenues represented 13 per cent of the total for first-level units and 6 per cent for second-level units, as shared taxes and fees raised respectively 14 per cent and 24 per cent.²⁴³ Grants and direct transferances from the central government represented between 67 per cent and 68 per cent in 2014.

In addition, the effects of emigration and return are felt most at the local level and require paying particular attention to how local actors leverage remittances and support reintegration, requiring further support measures than currently available at the local level.

Local governments lack skilled staff and capacities to promote development in several sectors. Distribution of competencies between government levels is also not clear, and competencies are not connected with resource allocation. Considering the growing importance of local governments in supporting the SDGs achievement, UNCT support to these issues would accelerate development, particularly in rural areas.

E-GOVERNMENT AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES

As the digitization of public services was declared to be a priority of the PAR, the government established the e-Governance Agency to lead on the e-Transformation

About 40 public services were transferred online

process, to streamline governance through intensive use of information technology and to support the Public Services Agency to reform the delivery of public services through digitization for the benefit of the citizens. Since 2011, about 40 public services have been transferred online. However, this is just the start of the process, and many public services, particularly those delivered by local governments, still require face-to-face contact with the institutions and with public servants.

Public procurement was transferred onto an e-platform with support from the European Union. However, the transfer was only for processes with a high estimated cost, which left (for example) the procurement of medicines and medical devices under the National Health Programmes – such as HIV, Tuberculosis, cancer and diabetes – outside the e-procurement system. The Public Procurement Agency is supposed to monitor procurement processes on the platform and beyond, but low institutional capacity makes the effective performance of this function challenging.

While citizens now have better access to a number of e-services, in many cases the back end of service processing and delivery is still completed manually, using procedures and systems that have been in place for decades. Agencies in Moldova continue to use manual, paper-based processes to receive and process applications for administrative services and statistical data submission. These manual systems are sometimes inaccurate, slow and often present opportunities for fraud, error and corruption.

Multiple reports by NGOs and/or investigative journalists attest to a continuing high level of corruption in public procurement and misuse of public money. Also, users of the e-procurement system and observers have found that the system is far from perfect and needs significant adjustments.

The potential of digitalization to improve access to information and public services in Moldova has not been fully realized. At the same time, many older persons,

239 Article 109 of the 1994 Constitution of Moldova.

240 www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=106188&lang=ro.

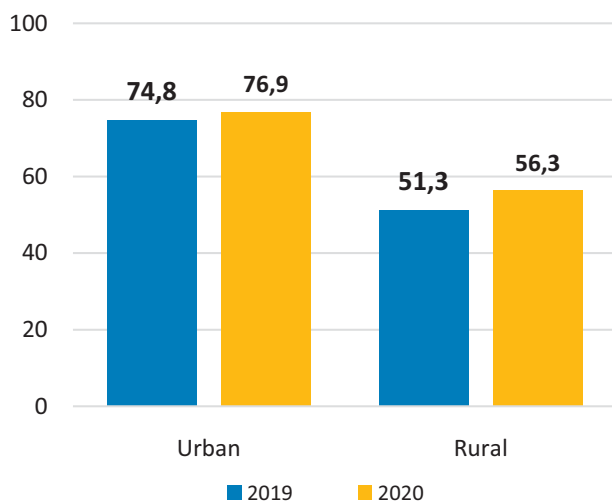
241 www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=83730&lang=ro.

242 According to Law No. 233, 16 December 2020, on amendments to the law on the administrative territorial structure of the Republic of Moldova, Law No. 764/2001, Gagauzia acquired a "special level of governance".

243 UCLG report on the Republic of Moldova, available at www.uclg-localfinance.org/sites/default/files/MOLDOVA-EURASIA-V3.pdf.

rural households (including children and young people in rural areas) and persons with disabilities and SEN are unable to access services and products because of poor digital literacy, lack of hardware and lack of infrastructure, as well as lack of, or limited, Internet access.

Households with access to Internet (per cent, 2019 versus 2020)



Source: NBS

In 2020, only 56.3 per cent of rural households had access to the Internet, compared to 77 per cent in urban areas, while in 2019 only 41 per cent of households in the lowest income quintile had Internet access.²⁴⁴ Ownership of computers and Internet use are higher in male-headed households (where 57.4 per cent have computers and 55.8 per cent have an Internet connection) than in households run by women (where 45.7 per cent have computers and 44.1 per cent have an Internet connection).²⁴⁵

JUSTICE

A well-functioning justice sector is critical for good governance, in reducing corruption and in the efficient delivery of public services. Therefore, given the importance of an efficient justice sector reform for the sustainable development of the country, the Government of the Republic of Moldova has pledged to further

strengthen the independence, efficiency and integrity of the justice system.²⁴⁶

In line with the UPR recommendations (2016), the 2018–2022 National Human Rights Action Plan²⁴⁷ lists the justice sector as an area of priority intervention and pursues the establishment of a human-centred justice system that is responsive to the needs of beneficiaries and accessible in terms of physical infrastructure and information.

68 per cent of businesses do not expect fair court proceedings

However, the latest European Union assessment under the Association Agreement²⁴⁸ underlined that “The reform of the justice sector remains to be addressed and (...) non-transparent judicial proceedings remain common”, concluding that “Robust progress is now essential on judicial reform, (...) on compliance with the rule of law and the democratic standards.”²⁴⁹

The 2011–2017 Justice Sector Reform Strategy was not fully implemented and delivered mixed results. Many targets in various priority areas were not achieved (for instance the rehabilitation of victims of crimes, such as torture and sexual and gender-based violence; the revision of the Constitution to increase the independence of justice system; and the improvement of the system for appointing and promoting judges).²⁵⁰ The slow progress in justice sector reform resulted in the discontinuation in 2017 of budgetary support from the

76 per cent of court users express negative views in terms of its performance.

244 UNDP and PWC, COVID-19 Social and Economic Assessment (2020).

245 NBS, UNDP, UN Women and SIDA, [Accesul și utilizarea de către populația Tehnologiei Informației și Comunicațiilor \(TIC\)](#) (2020).

246 Government of the Republic of Moldova, [Decision No. 636](#), 2019.

247 Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, [“Decision No. 89](#) on the approval of the National Action Plan in the field of human rights for the years 2018–2022”.

248 The Association Agreement signed with the European Union in 2014 confirms mutual commitment to support Moldova in strengthening the rule of law, democracy and human rights standards and principles. To achieve a steady progress on the implementation of the Association Agreement’s commitments, the Government of Moldova has adopted two consecutive National Action Plans for the implementing the Association Agreement, which transposed the provisions of the agreement into concrete actions for 2014–2016 and 2017–2019.

249 [Association Implementation Report](#) on Moldova, 11 September 2019.

250 N. Hriptievski, [“Justice Sector Challenges Undermine the Rule of Law in the Republic of Moldova”](#), April 2018; Council of Europe, Justice Sector Reform Strategy of the Republic of Moldova, [Review of Implementation, Assessment and Recommendations](#) (Council of Europe, 2017).

European Union to the justice sector (Phase 2, worth €28 million, was not funded).²⁵¹ This confirms that the main challenge in reforming the justice system of Moldova and ensuring equal access to justice is not planning and strategizing, but rather the implementation of reforms that have already started.

Although important efforts have been made in recent years to improve the efficiency, transparency, fairness and accessibility of the justice sector,²⁵² the justice system is still failing to deliver at the level of users' expectations. Even though justice reform is ranked fourth most important by citizens (after health care, pension and education reforms), results matching this expectation have not yet been achieved. Court performance is perceived to be poor, with 76 per cent of court users expressing negative views, while most respondents stated that there had been no changes on the ground between 2015 and 2017.²⁵³

CORRUPTION

Moldova scored 32 out of 100 points in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index in 2019, ranking 120 out of 180 countries (in the Corruption Perception Index 2018, Moldova, with a score of 33 points, ranked 117 out of 180 countries).²⁵⁴ Perceptions of corruption were highly influenced by the stagnation in the investigation of a US\$ 1 billion bank fraud.

The prevention of corruption should focus more on creating tools for efficient public financial management including through the establishment of mechanisms ensuring transparency, enhancing access to information about public finance and developing accountability mechanisms and incorporating them into the public finance management process.

Another important way to contribute to the prevention of corruption is to strengthen the role of public local authorities in corruption prevention through building their capacities to develop and implement local anti-corruption actions plans.

A number of actions took place in the area of the prevention and fight against corruption, fraud and conflict of interest in the context of the National Integrity and Anticorruption Strategy (2017–2020). These focused on strengthening institutional integrity and preventing, detecting and deter-

ring corrupt behaviour among civil servants.

The Impact Monitoring Survey of the strategy revealed that the majority of the public believed that women and men are equally exposed to acts of corruption, both in the public service in general (71 per cent) and in the institution where the respondents worked (60 per cent).

The Law on Whistle-Blowers, which established a mechanism for reporting integrity incidents, irregularities and abuses and provided protection for whistle-blowers, was adopted in July 2018 and entered into force in November 2018. The monitoring mechanism under the 2017–2020 National Integrity and Anticorruption Strategy was made operational through three monitoring groups consisting of key institutions and CSOs active in the anticorruption sector. The 2019 Monitoring Report for the strategy showed that, out of 118 actions, 53 had been fully implemented, 60 had been partly achieved or were ongoing, and 5 had not been achieved. The biggest challenge for implementation was that actions had to be implemented by several institutions in collaboration. The National Strategy was underpinned and further detailed in 9 sector-level anti-corruption plans and in 35 -level plans.

The National Integrity and Anticorruption Strategy is likely to be extended through 2021 to enable evaluation of the results and the development of the next strategy.

INCARCERATION RATE

The incarceration rate in Moldova remains high, with 186 cases per 100,000 population, and the number might be higher on the Left Bank.²⁵⁵ The reoffending criminal rate is 72 per cent: of every 10 people who are released from prison, 7 will return. Of the 17 penitentiary institutions, 6 are overcrowded and the occupancy rate might exceed 150 per cent in some instances. The European Committee on the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment visited prisons in Moldova in February 2020 and repeatedly concluded that the detention conditions in the establishments remained unsatisfactory, including in terms of the state of repair, hygiene, ventilation and access to natural light, as well as in terms of overcrowding in some cells and the strong influence of an informal prison hierarchy.²⁵⁶ Moldova lacks a mechanism to ensure

251 European Union, "Moldova: EU Cuts Budget Support Programme for Justice Reforms", 11 October 2017.

252 Introduction of a redesigned legal aid system, optimization of the court map, implementation of an Integrated Case Management System, audio recording of court proceedings, reform of the prosecution service, etc.

253 World Bank, Moldova – [Improving Access to Justice: From Resources to Results. A Justice Sector Public Expenditure and Institutional Review](#), Report No. 124516-MD (2018).

254 Transparency International Moldova, "[Transparency International Launches the 2019 Corruption Perception Index](#)", January 2020.

255 In the 2016 Hammarberg report, it was estimated that up to 3,000 people were detained in the left bank.

256 Council of Europe, Executive Summary of the Report to the Moldovan Government on the Visit to the Republic of Moldova Carried Out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) From 28 January to 7 February 2020 (Council of Europe, 2020), <https://rm.coe.int/16809f8fa9>.

Children are deprived of many rights in prisons, including the right to quality education. Providing these minors with the opportunity to study in regular schools could facilitate their integration in society and reduce recidivism rates.

(Notes from consultations with CSOs in Moldova)

an alternative to incarceration for people who have committed non-violent crimes, such as the possession of small quantities of drugs.

CAPACITY-BUILDING

Despite a recent government reorganization in 2017 aimed at enhancing institutional and human resource capacities and improving the efficiency of central authorities to design, implement and monitor reforms aimed at socioeconomic development and the attainment of SDG Agenda, **the high staff turnover, lack of financing for public investments and institutional capacity gaps, along with persisting public sector corruption, altogether reduce the overall government capacity to implement reforms.** Consequent-

ly, the implementation of certain reforms and programmes are often subject to external development assistance and support, while considerable resources are being allocated by the development partners for capacity-building and strategic planning.

The gaps in technical capacity to ensure effective decision-making are linked to the lack of information management systems and mechanisms for fast data collection. For instance, there is no unified health information management system capturing patient electronic health records to enable health needs analysis, nor is there a mechanism for liaison with small businesses to monitor the challenges faced by the private sector effectively at times of crisis. In addition, due to inefficiencies in data collection, the disaggregation of data is often lacking.

Furthermore, understanding the many positive links between migration and the SDGs can be complex, but it is necessary to support government capacities to collect and report disaggregated data on how the many Moldovan migrants and diaspora can help progress the SDGs.

To improve the oversight and monitoring of timely and diligent public spending, external assistance has been concentrated under the Ministry of Finance. However, the latter is facing human resources capacity issues.



Photo: OHCHR, Moldova

4

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL RISK ASSESSMENT

The risks to the sustainable development of Moldova are many. Although the country has shown progress towards achieving various SDGs in recent years, if not mitigated, the current vulnerability will put the country at risk of falling behind in its commitment to achieving the 2030 Agenda. Most of the identified risks are inter-linked and reinforcing.

POLITICAL STABILITY: MODERATE PROBABILITY/HIGH IMPACT

Moldova emerged from a severe political crisis at the beginning of 2020 following the 24 February 2019 parliamentary elections, after years of being controlled by oligarchic elements. Corruption runs deep in the country after many years of control by these elements. The political crisis highlighted the fragility of Moldova in general and emphasized many of the existing risks to sustainable development that continue to be substantial and can only be overcome by years of dedicated work. The election in July 2021 of a majority government led by PAS for the first time in several years allowed for the legislature and executive to pull together in unity and has the potential to ensure political stability and consistent pursuit of the government's reform and European integration agenda. However, the gas crisis that unfolded in October 2021 following the expiry of Moldovagaz's contract with Gazprom, as well as the terms under which the new contract was renegotiated accompanied by sharply rising market prices, has become a serious challenge for the leadership in Moldova.

SOCIAL COHESION, GENDER EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION: HIGH PROBABILITY/MODERATE IMPACT

The existing fragile social cohesion directly impacts on the achievement of SDG 16. Human rights protection also remains a key issue for the government. The United Nations and the international community continue to work to address these long-term risks.

REGIONAL AND GLOBAL INFLUENCES: HIGH PROBABILITY/HIGH IMPACT

Moldova remains vulnerable to geopolitical developments, in particular in the context of heightened regional tensions that developed through 2021. The

divisions between the United States/NATO and the Russian Federation over the European security architecture and the perceived risk of conflict in the region are likely to have impacts on Moldova, including in the context of the Transnistria Region settlement process and in relation to the country's energy security, trade and economy.

ENVIRONMENTAL RISK: HIGH PROBABILITY/HIGH IMPACT

Due to its geographic and economic features, Moldova is highly vulnerable to climate change while being exposed to disasters due to hydrometeorological phenomena and natural hazards. Landslides, droughts and floods are among the top hazards caused by climate events, with droughts posing the greatest risk to communities and economy. Non-linear processes govern ecological systems and interact with complex social systems, where geopolitical, cultural and technological developments are all but impossible to predict.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: HIGH PROBABILITY/HIGH IMPACT

The global pandemic has demonstrated the devastating impact that can be wrought by such "cascading risks" unfolding against a backdrop of a permanently altered climate system, ongoing internal conflicts and global financial pressures. In addition to the 7 per cent contraction of the economy of Moldova in 2020 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the agricultural drought, the economic recovery picked up pace in the second quarter 2021. However, the global energy crisis and growing inflation might have a strong impact on the economic situation of the most vulnerable groups.

SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND POPULATION DECREASE: HIGH PROBABILITY/MODERATE IMPACT

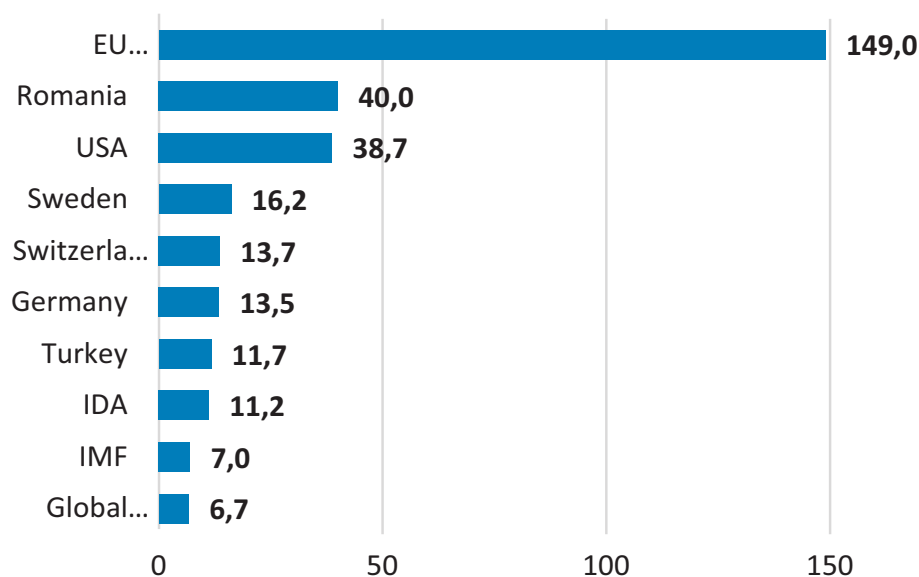
There is a moderate-to-high probability of rapid depopulation, especially in terms of outflows of youth and skilled workers, and this is negatively affecting human capital and slowing down the shift towards higher-skilled economic sectors and industry. In addition, increasing old-age dependency ratios pose a significant challenge to the ability of the state budget to cover future pension needs.



5

FINANCING
FOR
DEVELOPMENT

Top 10 donors by gross ODA for Moldova (US\$ million, 2018-2019 average)



Source: OECD

The country heavily relies on external assistance to finance emergency needs, but also for structural reforms and development priorities. In 2019, official development assistance (ODA) increased by 41 per cent compared to 2017, a large share of which (40 per cent) was provided by bilateral donors.

The graduation of Moldova from the Global Fund as one of the largest donors has contributed to the decline in ODA in recent years. Besides, the upgrade in the country's classification from International Development Association-based lending towards blended concessional financing made loans more expensive. The majority of development assistance comes from the European Union, which is largely used to finance recurrent budget needs.

During 2021, the Government of Moldova received budget support funds (both loans and grants) to the

amount of €180.9 million and US\$ 141.7 million, which were provided by international financial institutions (IFIs) and the European Union.²⁵⁷ Overall, budget support in 2021 was roughly 10 per cent–12 per cent less than in 2020.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the largest share of external support was dedicated to the financing of social infrastructure and services, followed by economic infrastructure and investments in education. However, during 2020–2021, a large share of financing was offered to minimize the consequences of COVID-19 and to continue supporting some structural reforms in the field of justice and fiscal administration.

The country's efforts to finance infrastructure investments from its own capital stock are limited by the large budget share of recurrent expenditures (92 per cent of total) and the significant under-ex-

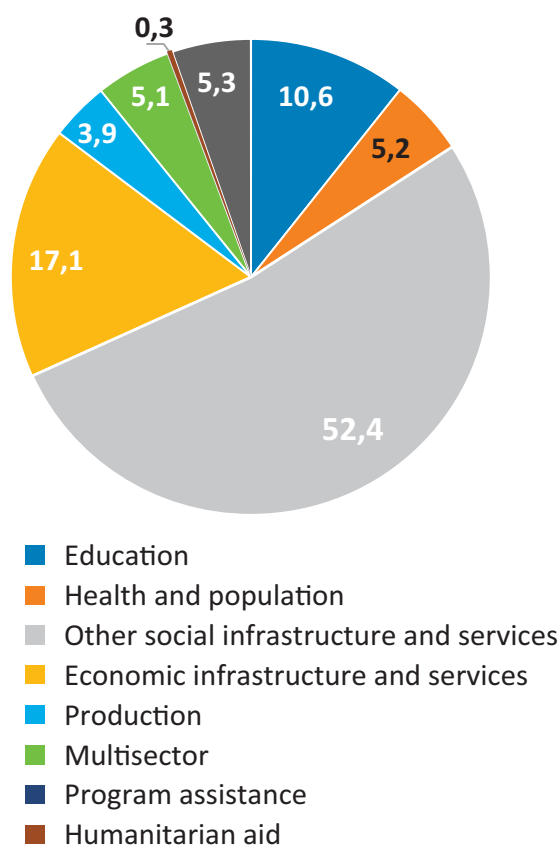
ODA provided to Moldova

Type of support provided to Moldova	2016	2017	2018	2019
Net ODA (US\$ million)	262	242.2	230.9	342.7
Net ODA/gross national income in per cent	3.1	2.4	3.9	
Gross ODA (US\$ million)	334.9	318.8	315.4	378.7
Bilateral share, gross ODA in per cent	39.5	41.6	50.2	42.1
<i>Total net receipts (US\$ million)</i>	392	222.9	281.6	463.1

Source: OECD, ODA Recipients

²⁵⁷ Ministry of Finance [data for 2021](#).

Bilateral ODA by sector for Moldova
(per cent, 2018-2019 average)



Source: NBS

duction of public investment, which in 2018 was 1.4 per cent of GDP.²⁵⁸ Over the last decade, budget allocations for public investment have been significantly reduced through budget revisions and usually under-executed during each year.

At the same time, **the government collects much lower amounts in taxes for budget revenues (as a share of GDP) than its peers**. Hence, to increase the public funding available for the SDG Agenda imple-

mentation will depend on the government's ability to generate additional revenue from the formal economy by better capturing of the activities currently in the informal, or "shadow", sectors of the economy and by enhancing the efficiency of government programmes. Furthermore, there may be opportunities to reduce spending on SDG negative activities: for example, subsidies for fossil fuel usage should be replaced with subsidies encouraging renewable sources of energy or the use of efficient transportation.

In addition to the lack of capital stock for public investment and the low absorption of external financing, the private sector role in impact investing through public-private partnerships (PPPs) is limited by inefficient legal frameworks, the lack of capacity to implement and monitor PPP projects and lack of trust in the judiciary system's ability to protect PPP stakeholders. The total investments of ongoing PPP projects were around 3.6 per cent of GDP in 2018, two-thirds of which pertained to the Chişinău Airport Modernization concessional agreement.

In terms of impact investment, the country lacks solutions for viable and efficient involvement of the private sector for contributing to the priorities of society in Moldova and for implementing the SDG Agenda.

The banking system is facing unprecedented volumes of unused liquidities (as per the National Bank of Moldova, more than 18 billion MDL at the end 2019; average liquidity per sector – 49.3 per cent²⁵⁹ – limit \geq 20 per cent), which the National Bank of Moldova is forced to sterilize to prevent inflationist pressures. With appropriate incentives and wise policies, the government could stimulate investments towards achieving the SDGs. Another issue is represented by the lack of an adequate capital market and the very limited financial instruments available to facilitate the productive investment of private capital.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE SDG AGENDA

As a lower-middle-income country, Moldova has limited capacity to generate revenues for investment and is in need of considerable resources to accelerate the achievement of the SDG Agenda. Despite this, there is potential for engaging with partners other than bilateral or multilateral donors (the private sector; academia; international alliances; foundations; and think tanks) in more efficient and sustainable de-

velopment. Leveraging such partnerships for a specific cross-sectoral objective can have a much greater impact in terms of maximizing development assistance.

The access of Moldova to external financing is subject to the country's institutional capacity to timely absorb and duly implement the limited development financing. Such administrative capacity is com-

258 IMF, Public Investment Management Assessment (2019).

259 National Bank of Moldova, Report on Banking Sector Financial Situation (2020).

promised by the high turnover of civil servants and, as a result, a weak institutional memory, often leading to a lack of consistency in public policies and reform implementation.

Moldova does not have an integrated system to track public spending alignment to SDG Agenda. Although the SDGs are nationalized, there is no information showing how the budgetary spending of Moldova is aligned with the SDGs, or how much public spending contributes to SDG attainment. Moldova, with support from the United Nations will start conducting an integrated national financial framework analysis by 2023 and will most likely adopt and institutionalize such an instrument in the medium term.

IFIs represent a major source of funding for the development priorities of Moldova, notably for social infrastructure upgrade, health care and education, and are increasingly linking their activities to SDG objectives. Despite strong commitments on enhanced cooperation, there is room for improvement, particularly in developing innovative projects with the purpose of co-investing with and leveraging IFI financing.

There is also an opportunity to encourage better behaviours of the **private sector**, as the SDGs cannot be achieved without commitment and contribution from investors and citizens alike. Furthermore, private sector managers in Moldova lack information both about the SDG Agenda and the opportunities for involvement in SDG-positive activities while ensuring financial re-



turns. The private sector in Moldova could play a stronger role in such partnerships for impact investing.

In terms of **thematic bonds**, some municipalities have launched them as an instrument for the development of local communities. In addition, crowdfunding platform legislation has been drafted to formalize its de facto implementation through different local initiatives, such as www.sprijina.md or www.fagura.md.

The capital market of Moldova remains underdeveloped, yet the banking sector has an excess of liquidity (approx. 50 per cent of all assets are cash and cash equivalents) and the economy is struggling with the lack of adequate capital and financing resources. There is a lack of adequate framework, incentives, policies, tools and instruments that would contribute to a functional capital market development.

Besides traditional partnerships, UNCT could also explore the possibilities and options for engaging in more innovative partnerships. These collaborations could allow accelerating achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Below are some of the opportunities identified by UNCT during the elaboration of the United Nations Moldova Resource Mobilization Strategy:

- Banking and financial sector organizations and companies – unlock the potential of the capital market and mobilize/leverage private capital into development.
- Private sector organizations – to engage them on SDG advocacy, inclusion, gender equality and promotion of circular economy.
- Chambers of commerce and other national bodies representing the private sector – establish partnerships for resources mobilization, as well as SDG aligned investments and financing.
- Academia, IT hubs and other knowledge and information-based organizations – development of partnerships for innovation policy options promotion for the SDG Agenda.
- Diaspora organizations, including the State Department on Interaction with the Diaspora – mobilization of support and facilitation of redirecting remittances for productive and sustainable investments.

Photo: UNICEF Moldova

6

CONCLUSIONS

The key findings on the political developments, regional context and economic situation in Moldova and within the region suggest that the Government of Moldova has initiated many important and necessary reforms to advance achievement of the SDGs and to foster development. However, the reform agenda remains largely unfinished and requires more rigorous prioritization.

To sustain economic growth and to guarantee the well-being of the population and the country's development, Moldova must address challenges on several fronts, with an emphasis on the following:

- Ensuring energy security through diversification of energy sources, notably development of the renewables sector, and energy efficiency.
- Strengthening the education system, which should contribute to generating more effective/productive human capital, particularly improving the quality of learning outcomes/results throughout all levels of education (from early childhood development to tertiary education).
- Enhancing the quality and efficiency of health care through the optimization of service provision in line with people's needs and demographic trends.
- Stimulating the labour-market, which will need to compensate for the decline in the working-age population, with the increased participation of women and older adults in high-productivity activities (financial/FinTech, IT, etc.) while attracting missing labour-force outside the country.
- Increasing and streamlining public and private investments towards strategic infrastructure and the accumulation of productive capital.
- Improving the productivity of the economy through increased support to innovation and fast adaptation to technological change.
- Taking a multilevel and multisectoral approach the needs of persons left behind, addressing the barriers they are facing and root causes of inequality.

CHALLENGES

- Regional instability and a protracted frozen conflict that undermines capitalizing on the existing backward and forward linkages between the two sides of the Nistru River.
- Landlocked nature of the country, with limited access to the sea through the port of Giurgiulesti.
- High energy dependency: Moldova is among the most vulnerable countries in the world in terms of energy security, owing to the frozen conflict and lack of stability in Ukraine (70 per cent of electricity is generated in the Transnistria Region).
- Ineffective border control, with a high share of counterfeit products (unfair competition).
- Poor transport infrastructure: the road networks are in a state of decay, with the lack of political stability driving away much-needed investment. The same applies to the rail network. The development of these is linked to European Union-wide initiatives, but implementation is slowed down by lack of political stability, among other factors.
- Climate change vulnerability: frequent droughts and other unfavourable/extreme weather conditions often heavily affect agriculture, which is one of the leading sectors of the economy with a high share of employment.
- High outmigration of economically active population (notably youth) leads to brain drain, shrinking of the labour-force and additional pressure on social budgets.
- High imbalances between Chişinău (the capital) and the rest of the country in terms of social and transport infrastructure, availability of jobs, etc., which contributes to internal and external migratory pressures.
- Political instability and lack of development vision in the country slows down reforms implementation and is not supportive of attracting FDI.

Photo: UN Women Moldova



7

ANNEXES

ANNEX A

HUMAN RIGHTS: ADDITIONAL REMARKS

Perception studies show a relatively reduced level of information regarding the human rights of population, with a slight increase of 7 points from 2016. According to the 2020 human rights perception study, 56.5 per cent of respondents declared that they were informed about human rights. The least informed were people from rural area, people living in poverty, people with a low socioeconomic status and level of education, and older persons. These groups continue to remain less informed about their rights over the years, resulting in the need for intervention by the various actors developing information campaigns, programmes and policies in that field.

For most people (69.7 per cent), the main source of information regarding human rights is the media (radio/TV/print media). For about 58.7 per cent, it is the Internet. For considerable weight the source of information remains close social circles (friends, acquaintances, neighbours – 30.2 per cent; close relatives – 25.9 per cent), and 11.1 per cent get that information from work. It should be mentioned that, in recent years, the Internet has become particularly popular, ranking second compared to other sources. This source of information was stated by more than half of the respondents in the 2020 and 2018 studies, compared to 2016, when it was mentioned by only 5.5 per cent of people.

Freedom of expression is generally respected, unless it relates to the expression of critical views regarding the ruling government. According to the Annual Report by the People's Advocate (Ombudsperson) Office for 2019, people were then able to enjoy their right to express their opinions freely, but at the same time (June 2019) rights holders feared that expressing critical views towards the ruling government would have negative consequences.

The right to access to information is formally well-regulated. In practice, in 2019, the People's Advocate noted that this right continued to be limited. For instance, information was not made routinely accessible to linguistic minorities. The People's Advocate Office found that the authorities in some cases refused to provide information requested by mass media and civil society in the public interest, justifying their refusal on the grounds of protecting personal data or state secrets. In some cases, authorities continued to treat requests for access to information as simple petitions.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, on 18 March 2020, the Commission on Emergency Situations extended the term for state institutions to respond to information requests from 15 days to 45 days. No official explanation was provided for the rationale behind this

change. The extension of the deadline for responding to requests for information compromised the ability of journalists in Moldova to provide citizens with vital and up-to-date information.

Freedom House highlighted that the lack of an official definition of “false news” and “misinformation” created a permissive environment for the authorities to apply restrictive measures against critical media and online resources.

In terms of media independence, according to Freedom House, Moldova scores 3 out of a total of 7 points. A new law on non-commercial organizations was drafted and adopted to standardize the regulatory framework with international standards on freedom of association. According to the draft national report in the context of the third UPR cycle, the new law simplifies the procedure for registering non-profit organizations, provides additional guarantees to protect freedom of association and removes territorial restrictions on the activities of non-commercial organizations. CSOs had lobbied for the legislation, publishing at least three appeals and requests during the first five months of the year 2021.

Numerous challenges in the field of securing the right to a fair trial and the right not to be subjected to torture and inhuman and degrading treatment persisted in 2019 and 2020. People deprived of their liberty did not enjoy all the fundamental legal safeguards from the outset of their detention, including being deprived in practice of access to a lawyer during court hearings. The need for further improvement of detention conditions, including by improving the quality of medical, psychosocial and mental health services, as well as effectively investigating complaints of ill-treatment, was confirmed in the national report in the context of the third UPR cycle. Intensification of efforts to implement non-custodial measures, especially under the conditions imposed by the pandemic and the degree of vulnerability of detainees to the risk of infection in prisons, was also included as a priority within the national report in the context of the UPR.

In recent years, the regulatory framework has been further amended to comply with international standards, including those for human rights and the rule of law. Nonetheless, major drawbacks remain in ensuring enforcement of those laws. According to the Annual Report of the People's Advocate Office, the highest proportion of complaints submitted to the office pertain to the right to a fair trial. The matters of concern, from the perspective of the complaints submitted, include the excessive length of proceedings in court and

cases when the decisions were issued without reasoning, or where the reasoning was weak.

The rights to health, to social protection and to a fair trial, are among the three least respected, according to the respondents of the human rights perception study. At the same time, the rights to health, to education and to social protection continue to be considered among the top three most current and important rights requiring increased attention from society in the Republic of Moldova, according to the human rights perceptions studies from 2016, 2018 and 2020.

About 80 per cent of respondents to the human rights perception study believe that improving the human rights situation depends largely on parliament, on the government, on ministries and on their departments. About 77 per cent believe it depends on the mayoralities and the President of the Republic of Moldova, and between 75 per cent and 70 per cent believe it depends on each citizen, but also on the institutions of law (prosecution, court and law).

Bureaucracy, corruption and a lack of trust in the justice system are considered important barriers to seeking remedies for the population when their rights are violated.

Studies on inequalities from 2017 and 2019 show that older people, persons with disabilities, children and women are among the poorest people in Moldova. People belonging to groups that are vulnerable to human rights violations enjoy even lower levels of access to economic and social rights than the majority of the population. This is particularly the case for people living in rural areas, older people, vulnerable women, Roma and persons with disabilities, among other groups. Also, the degree of personal, social and economic insecurity is higher among vulnerable groups. The share of people who do not feel physically safe is higher among Roma, people with disabilities, women, older people and non-Roma households in localities with predominantly Roma populations.

ANNEX B

A COMPLETE ANALYSIS OF SDGS 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 AND 16

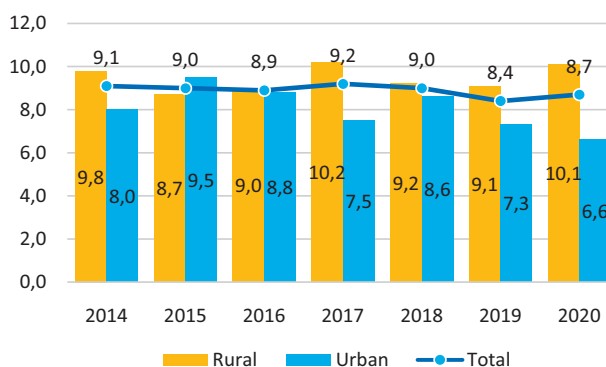


SDG 3. ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES

The prevalence of overweight and obesity in Moldova has been increasing in recent years. Among the adult population, 47 per cent of people aged over 18 are overweight and 15 per cent are obese. A health behaviour among school-age children survey (2014) indicated that only one-third of respondents (33 per cent) indicated that they eat fruit daily and one-fifth (21 per cent) reported that they eat fruit once a week or less often.²⁶⁰ People in rural areas consume more salt (25.2 per cent) than those in urban areas (23.4 per cent).

Despite steady progress in improving infant mortality, this is still over twice as high as the European Union average. In 2020, the infant mortality rate in Moldova was 8.8 per 1,000 live births,²⁶¹ compared to the European Union average of 3.4 per 1,000 live births.²⁶² **Infant mortality levels exceed those of neighbouring Eastern European countries** (Belarus,

Infant mortality



Source: NBS

Ukraine, Russia). Notably, infant mortality is higher in rural areas (70.1 per cent) than in urban areas (29.9 per cent). The lowest infant mortality rates are in Chişinău

²⁶⁰ The average daily intake of fruit and vegetables was 4.2 servings consumed in rural areas, versus 3.9 servings in urban areas.

²⁶¹ NBS data.

²⁶² EUROSTAT, "Infant Mortality Rates".

(5.4 per 1,000 live births) and in Balti (6.6 per 1,000 live births), indicating that impaired access to health care negatively affects health of children in their first year of life. The key causes of infant mortality are neonatal disorders (37 per cent), congenital diseases (30 per cent), respiratory system diseases (9 per cent), accidents, intoxication and trauma (4 per cent).²⁶³ **Under-five mortality** at 10.5 per 1,000 live births increased in 2020 and, while it is far below the **SDG 3.2 global objective**,²⁶⁴ it is still above the nationalized target and higher than in all other Eastern European countries.²⁶⁵ Conversely, **maternal mortality increased** to 16.3 per 100,000 live newborns in 2020.

Immunization coverage in Moldova continues to be an issue for all vaccine-preventable diseases and has been since 2013, when 91 per cent of children received the measles/mumps/rubella vaccine, compared to 95 per cent in the WHO European Region and in the CIS. This indicator is still fluctuating around 90 per cent (87.1 per cent in 2018; 90.3 per cent in 2019), leading to 90 cases of measles being registered in Moldova in 2019. The child immunization rate for poliomyelitis follows a similar trend; it was 92 per cent in 2013, three to four percentage points below the regional and CIS averages, while in 2019 there was a 90.9 per cent coverage rate with primary immunization and up to 96 per cent–97.3 per cent revaccination rates. Outbreaks of measles and rubella (2002), mumps (2008) and tetanus (2010) indicate a need for immunization programmes to be improved so that vaccine coverage reaches 95 per cent of the target population.²⁶⁶ With the deployment of COVID-19 vaccines worldwide, Moldova has been lagging behind in terms of vaccination rates, with only 31.6 per cent of total population being fully vaccinated. Such low coverage is due to a lack of trust in vaccine quality and safety, but it is also partially due to low health literacy of the population of Moldova.

Moldova has declining morbidity for infectious diseases (except for SARS-Cov-2) in different age groups. Infections accounted for approximately 1 per cent of all deaths in 201.

At the same time, **Moldova remains among the world's top 30 countries with high multidrug-resistant Tuberculosis (MDR TB) burdens and is among the WHO European Region's 18 high-priority countries for Tuberculosis control.** Estimated Tuberculosis incidence (80 cases per 100,000 population in 2019, the second

highest in the region) and mortality (5.5 deaths per 100,000 population in 2019) have been falling since the mid-2000s. However, rates are still very high, primarily due to high mortality among MDR TB patients. In 2019, there were 2,865 new and relapse Tuberculosis cases, or a case notification rate of 71.7 per 100,000 population (a 5 per cent reduction compared to 2018, and a 20 per cent reduction compared to 2015).²⁶⁷ Most people affected by the Tuberculosis epidemic in Moldova are aged 18–64 and there is higher notification in specific risk groups, including people in prisons, migrants and Tuberculosis-HIV co-infected persons. In Moldova, Tuberculosis mostly affects men: in 2019, 74 per cent of notified cases were men. The absolute number of new Tuberculosis cases notified in children (0–18 years) in 2019 was 136, or 4.7 per cent of the total number.

Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS remain a burden for prison institutions. One-third of all prisoners have a chronic disease and the main causes of death are injuries (including self-inflicted injuries), CVDs and cancer. Up to 40 per cent of all prisoners are registered as having mental health issues, 16 per cent have CVDs, 14 per cent have diseases of the digestive system, 5 per cent are alcohol or drug dependent, 4.5 per cent are HIV-positive and 1 per cent have cancer.

The HIV prevalence is among the highest in Europe, and the second highest after Ukraine, accounting for 9.4 per cent of years of life lost in the 15–49 age group. Moldova is experiencing a concentrated HIV epidemic, with the largest portion of new infections occurring among three key populations: (i) PWID; (ii) men who have sex with men; and (iii) female sex workers, their clients and their sexual partners. According to SPECTRUM estimates,²⁶⁸ the HIV prevalence in the adult population is 0.6 per cent (0.3 per cent among women and 0.6 per cent among men), and new infections occur mostly in the adult population aged over 24. The latest estimated number of people living with HIV in Moldova is below 15,000 (2021 estimates), which is lower than the previous estimate of 17,000 (2018). This decrease is attributable to recalculations based on 2014 census data.

According to national statistics, a total of 14,380 people with HIV, 4,632 AIDS cases and 4,420 deaths were cumulatively registered since 1,987 on both banks of the Nistru River. The readjusted prevalence based on new population estimates is 310 per 100,000 peo-

263 National Public Health Agency, Administrative data, 2020.

264 Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2017.

265 WHO, "European Health Information Gateway".

266 WHO Regional Office for Europe, [Republic of Moldova: Profile of Health and Well-being](#) (Copenhagen, 2016).

267 Such a big difference between estimated and registered Tuberculosis cases (i.e. a low case detection rate) should be interpreted with some caution, as WHO estimates are based on an overestimated general population size.

268 The UNAIDS-supported AIDS Impact module contains SPECTRUM software that assists countries in monitoring their HIV epidemics.

ple.²⁶⁹ In 2020, 674 new HIV cases were registered, including 141 new cases in Transnistria Region), as were 206 AIDS-related deaths. Of the new cases registered, 58 per cent were men and 42 per cent were women, with an almost 10 per cent increase of new cases in men since 2010 (49.4 per cent); 21 per cent were young people aged 15–24 years. There is significant variation in the HIV epidemic between the Right and Left Bank of the Nistru River: incidence was 20 cases per 100,000 inhabitants on the Right Bank and 47 per 100,000 inhabitants in the Transnistria Region (Left Bank). Mother-to-child transmission has been at less than 2 per cent in the past decade. In absolute terms, between 10–20 newborns are diagnosed with HIV every year. However, in 2019, the registered mother-to-child transmission rate was 4.8 per cent and in 2020 it was 2.34 per cent, with increasing trends in the first semester of 2021.

Women’s access to health

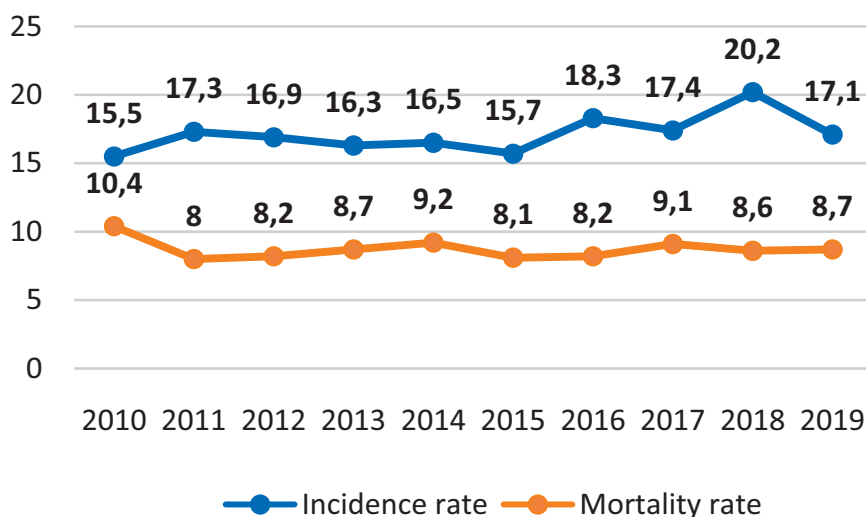
Cervical cancer is among the top leading causes of morbidity and mortality among women. Despite substantial progress in cervical cancer screening, 51 per cent of Moldovan women are diagnosed at a much later stage (III–IV) than in European countries: in the Czech Republic it is 37 per cent and in the UK it is even lower – only 21 per cent.²⁷⁰ **Nevertheless, Moldova has made progress in preventing cervical cancer among women:** screening programmes have improved, the capacities of health care providers have been strengthened, clinical protocols have been aligned with the international standards and laborato-

ries are better equipped to improve the accuracy of diagnosis. The incidence of cervical cancer has fluctuated in the last couple of years as a result of better screening, while the mortality rate has decreased in the last three years. Yet take-up of cervical screening services is still low compared to other European countries due to a lack of knowledge. Only 24 per cent of women aged 25–61 know about existing services and only 47 per cent are aware that the services are free, which also affects take-up. Additional efforts are required to sustain the investments and efforts that have been made, including increasing the demand for screening services as a prevention measure.

Among women, use of modern contraceptive methods is still fairly low, despite significant progress in ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services and information. Only 31.6 per cent of women use modern contraceptive methods, compared to an average of 52 per cent across the Eastern European countries. The highest rates of unmet need for modern contraceptives are among those living in rural areas, in the north of the country, those with the lowest levels of education and, significantly, the poorest 20 per cent of the population. The adolescent birth rate has decreased in recent years but remains three times higher than the European average at 28.64 births per 1,000 girls aged 15–19.²⁷¹ Most adolescent births take place in rural areas.

Girls and women with disabilities face particular obstacles to realizing their sexual and reproductive rights. Not all facilities that provide sexual and reproductive health services are physically accessible and

Cervical cancer incidence and mortality per 100,000 population



Source: Oncology Institute/National Public Health Agency

269 National Agency for Public Health, Administrative data, 2020.

270 WHO data.

271 NBS data.

often lack gynaecological examining rooms and equipment adapted to the needs of women with disabilities, particularly those with locomotor disabilities. Girls and women with disabilities also face discriminatory attitudes among health care providers regarding their rights to give birth to children; this particularly affects women with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities. Girls and women with disabilities also have limited access to information about their sexual and reproductive rights and about available services.

In 2020, the National Regulation ensuring the population of vulnerable groups of reproductive age receive free contraception²⁷² was revised and approved, allowing 12 groups²⁷³ to receive free contraception from the state budget, including people with disabilities. Some primary health care institutions have been equipped with gynaecological chairs adapted for people with physical disabilities. However, additional efforts are needed to equip all medical institutions and to increase the capacity of medical staff in providing reproductive health counselling and family planning services for people with disabilities, as well as to inform people with disabilities and their families about their sexual and reproductive rights.²⁷⁴

Young people's access to health

A network of 41 Youth Friendly Health Clinics has contributed to substantial progress in addressing adolescent health issues. The spectrum of health problems faced by adolescents and young people is diverse and includes the use of psychoactive substances; STIs and HIV; unplanned pregnancies; mental health problems; violence, trauma and stigma; and discrimination. The health status of adolescents and young people remains a concern regarding the following issues, among others.

- The incidence of HIV among young people aged 15–24 has increased. While there has been a slight decrease in incidence among girls and young women (26.8 cases per 1,000 women aged 15–24 in 2018 compared to 27.2 cases per 1,000 women in 2014), incidence among boys and young men has increased almost twofold,

from 12.4 cases per 1,000 men in 2014 to 22 cases per 1,000 men in 2018.

- Fewer sexually active adolescents (aged 15–17) are using condoms, with usage rates falling from 74 per cent in 2014 to 62 per cent in 2018.
- The incidence of nutritional disorders among adolescents has grown. In 2014, every fourth teenager aged 11–17 had an abnormal body mass index; in 2018, every third adolescent experienced nutritional disorders, primarily different levels of obesity.
- Smoking is on the rise among adolescents (especially among girls), including smoking cannabis. Seven per cent of adolescents aged 11–17 in 2018 reported that they smoked, compared to 5 per cent in 2014.
- Adolescents most frequently report bullying their peers or being bullied (4 out of 10 teenagers in 2018), including cyberbullying (every sixth teenager involved during the last two months).

These negative trends are partly explained by the fact that over one-third of adolescents have at least one parent working abroad, and about 10 per cent of adolescents have both parents working abroad.

These young people are at higher risk of developing unhealthy behaviours and should be supported to transition safely to adulthood. Access to information and education on human rights, life skills and health, including comprehensive sexuality education in schools, remains limited, leading to harmful misconceptions about gender equity and sexuality and risky health behaviours among young people. The undermining of the right of adolescents and youth to access age-appropriate, rights-based information on sexual and reproductive health and rights results in teenage pregnancies and abortions, the prevalence of STIs (including HIV), gender-based violence and bullying.

To ensure access to mental health programmes, there are currently 40 Community Mental Health Centres financed by compulsory health insurance funds in the districts and the municipalities of Chişinău and Balti.²⁷⁵

272 Order of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Protection No. 555, 16 June 2020.

273 1) adolescents and young people up to 24 years old; 2) women in the obstetric risk group; 3) women in the somatic risk group (suffering from chronic diseases at risk for pregnancy and childbirth); 4) women who have had an abortion on request during the last year; 5) people living with HIV and those in groups at high risk of HIV infection; 6) victims/survivors of sexual abuse, for emergency contraception; 7) victims/survivors of trafficking in human beings; 8) survivors of exceptional situations, humanitarian crisis or public health emergencies, persons with refugee status, beneficiaries of humanitarian protection in the Republic of Moldova, asylum seekers, stateless persons and migrants; 9) persons with disabilities, including persons with disabilities within residential institutions; 10) persons with mental health problems, on the records of a psychiatrist or of a family doctor; 11) drug users and users of other psychotropic substances, on the records of the narcologist; and 12) people with low incomes, or without income.

274 Government of the Republic of Moldova, National Report in the Context of the Third Universal Periodic Review Cycle (2021), available at [raport_upr_2021_dupa_consultari.pdf \(gov.md\)](#).

275 Government of the Republic of Moldova, [National Report in the Context of the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review \(Draft\)](#).

Despite the development of the network of Mental Health Community Centres, the number of suicide attempts has increased (especially among persons between the ages of 31 and 45), with 63 cases in 2020 versus 51 cases in 2019.²⁷⁶ Although there is not yet a clear linkage between the increase in suicides and the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychological and emotional condition of people worsened as a result of lockdown limiting their ability to socialize, the economic crisis, financial pressure on households and the inability to handle growing domestic and professional responsibilities.

Access to health services

The main barriers to accessing adequate health care include the lack of some primary health care services in rural areas; high emigration of the health workforce facilitating geographical inequality in the availability of specialized health care; high OOP payments; and a low *per capita* allocation for health care.²⁷⁷

A total share of 71.6 per cent of rights holders, participants in the 2020 human rights perception study considered the right to health as one of the most important rights that need attention from the authorities.

Persistence of the phenomenon of informal payments in medical institutions is still a preoccupation of rights holders that significantly limits the access of people with low incomes to medical services, regardless of whether they have a health insurance policy.²⁷⁸

Unequal access to quality medical services is still a preoccupation of rights holders. Only one-third of respondents (33.2 per cent in 2020 compared to 11.9 per cent in 2016) agreed that the state provides equal access to quality medical services for all; and only one-fifth (19.9 per cent in 2020 compared to 9.3 per cent in 2016) considered that the health insurance policy allows its holder an adequate level of medical services. People in rural areas, people over the age of 45 and people affected by poverty are less in agreement with the fact that the state provides equal access to quality medical services for all.²⁷⁹

Difference in the quality of medical services in rural and urban areas (as well as between public and private medical services providers), the lack of specialists (oncologists, endocrinologists and even paediatricians) in

some medical centres at district level and outdated or limited medical equipment in medical institutions affects the quality of the medical act.²⁸⁰

Some health care services are only partially covered by health insurance, are unavailable in public medical facilities or have very long waiting lines. Compliance with clinical treatment protocols can lead to patients bearing additional OOP costs to access treatment from private providers, even when they have health insurance. This situation is particularly challenging for vulnerable people. For instance, there are a lack of palliative care services, particularly for children, including a lack of control and adequate disease management in the terminal stages of illness. This increases children's suffering and leaves parents forced to cope with caring for their child without professional help, often administering opioids without any medical supervision. Rare diseases in children are often not properly diagnosed, and/or a lack of services specifically adapted to the needs of each child means that they do not benefit from rehabilitation support. The financial support for families raising children with disabilities is insufficient to provide them with an adequate standard of living. Similarly, a limited list of dental care services is included in the benefits package: adults pay the full price for dental care, with the exception of emergency services and preventive visits, while children up to the age of 12 benefit from free access to publicly financed dental care but must pay the full price for any dental restoration and orthodontics.

Access to health care for Moldovans is unequitable due to physical and geographical barriers in access to services, a limited benefits package and high OOP payments. Despite increases in public spending over time and a ratio of public spending on health to GDP (3.9 per cent in 2019) that is relatively high by lower-middle-income country standards, the OOP payment share of current spending on health remains

Physical accessibility of healthcare facilities for Roma and other minorities, and for people with disabilities and special needs, still represents a challenge.

(Notes from consultations with CSOs in Moldova)

276 Response letter from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, no. 34\17-3582, to OHCHR's information request, 29 September 2020, as part of the study on the impact of COVID-19 on human rights.

277 Mijatović, [Report Following Her Visit to the Republic of Moldova](#), para. 102, p. 27.

278 Ibid, p. 36.

279 Ibid, p. 37.

280 Ibid, p. 40.

high, at 35.1 per cent in 2019. However, the OOPs went down by roughly 10 per cent as a result of increased pharmaceutical reimbursement under benefits packages and other financial protection policies.

The use of outpatient and inpatient services continues to be strongly correlated with household consumption levels, indicating unequitable access to health care services. According to a WHO study, the share of the population visiting family physicians has grown to 65 per cent (2016). However, the use of family physician falls with income, while the use of specialists rises as income grows. The poorest 20 per cent of the population had worse access to both primary and hospital care in 2016 than they did in 2012.²⁸¹ People in the richest population quintile are twice as likely to use specialist outpatient care as people in the poorest quintiles, and five times as likely to use dentists. One reason for inequality in accessing specialist care is likely to be substantial variation in the supply of physicians across the country. Lack of doctors in rural areas, coupled with ineffective referral mechanisms, contribute to imbalances in accessing the health care system. Massive outmigration of health workers has also had an impact on access, and this is compounded by an uneven distribution of health workers in primary health care and in specialized care in particular. In 2020, the number of physicians per 10,000 population was 35 on average, but this falls to 14 in rural areas, compared to 25 in urban areas.²⁸² People living in rural areas are less likely to see specialists, pharmacists and dentists than people living in urban areas. Barriers to access in rural areas may also be linked to distance to facilities, poor road quality and lack of public transport. These types of barrier have a greater impact on some groups of people, including pensioners, unemployed people and people with disabilities.

Access to health care almost doubled across all population quintiles in recent years, but still largely depends on whether a person has health insurance. The majority of people who are uninsured reside in rural areas (31 per cent) rather than in urban areas (16 per cent).²⁸³

Accessibility of health care for Roma and other minorities²⁸⁴ remains an issue. Roma adults are often in informal employment or have been unemployed for a long time, making it difficult for them to access the health insurance scheme. The share of the Roma population with health insurance (56.2 per cent) is substantially

lower than the share of insured people who are not Roma (72.9 per cent).²⁸⁵ This translates into a Health Access and Quality Index score of 67.4 in 2016, the lowest among South-Eastern European Health Network (SEEHN) countries (the average for SEEHN countries is 76.1). The United Nations CESCR raised this as a concern in its review of the Republic of Moldova in 2017.²⁸⁶ The Committee also mentioned that Moldova faces other systemic problems relating to health care, such as (i) restriction of access to health care services for people from rural areas accentuated by the optimization process in the health care sector; (ii) poor overall quality of health care services and lack of mechanisms to monitor and oversee public health facilities; and (iii) discrimination in accessing health care services towards Roma, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV or AIDS, refugees and asylum seekers and other disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups.

Although a legal framework for integrated health care provision is in place, in practice there is insufficient integration of social and medical care, with the former focusing primarily on children and the latter on adults. Integration of social and medical care is particularly important for vulnerable population groups and people with disabilities or special needs of all ages.

The current health financing system does not guarantee universal health coverage for all, and consequently places a disproportional financial burden on the poorest groups of the population. As access to health services has overall improved, increasing people's use of health care, the financial protection has deteriorated over time and has increased a patient's exposure to OOP payments, particularly for medicines. It is worth mentioning that **every fourth person who is not**

Limited availability of health care services tailored to vulnerable groups and persons with special needs (e.g. integrated sociomedical centres) and the development of services and policies [does not happen] in strong collaboration with patient communities

(Notes from consultations with CSOs in Moldova)

281 World Bank, [Moldova Policy Notes 2019](#), p. 94.

282 National Agency of Public Health, Administrative data, 2020.

283 NBS.

284 Barriers to access to healthcare for Roma was also confirmed during the UN CCA consultations process, suggesting that Roma experience physical barriers to accessing healthcare facilities, among other things.

285 OHCHR, [Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova](#), p. 8.

286 CESCR, "[Concluding Observations on the Third Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova](#)", E/C.12/MDA/CO/3, 2017, para. 56.

insured reports that this is due to the high cost of health insurance and the poor financial protection it provides. Furthermore, patients report experiencing (sometimes catastrophically) high OOP payments in outpatient and inpatient care. About 17 per cent of all households experienced catastrophic health spending in 2016, up from 14 per cent in 2008, while nearly 7 per cent of households were impoverished or further impoverished after paying OOP for health care.²⁸⁷ Catastrophic spending is also heavily concentrated among people living in rural areas and pensioners.

While there is no up-to-date data, **informal payments are commonplace in Moldova, inevitably disproportionately impacting the poorest households** due to their regressive nature. Since poor health is directly correlated to reduced development and economic growth, it is imperative to focus on equitable access to

health. This will increase overall economic growth and development of the country and will ensure that no one is left behind.

In general, **people in Moldova believe that the right to the highest attainable standard of health is the right that is least respected in the country:** 71.6 per cent of the population consider that society needs to pay the right to health more attention.²⁸⁸ According to a United Nations survey (2021), the majority of Moldovans consider health care as a priority for government investment, while ensuring better access to health services by people as imperative for the country's recovery from COVID-19, and a key priority area for the country's socioeconomic development. Furthermore, health risks are considered likely to affect citizen well-being most of all in the near future.²⁸⁹

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ACCESS TO HEALTH

Since March 2020, when the COVID-19 outbreak reached Moldova, the total number of cases has reached 375,000 (31 December 2021).²⁹⁰ The mortality rate (case-fatality rate) stands at 2.3 per cent, lower than in neighbouring Romania (2.9 per cent) but higher than in Ukraine (2.4 per cent).²⁹¹

The health system in Moldova has performed relatively well, given the heavy strain placed on it by the pandemic. NCES declared a state of emergency in between March 2020²⁹² and May 2020, with strict quarantine and sanitary measures imposed. The Ministry of Health Labour and Social Protection developed a National Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan that was endorsed by the National Committee for Public Health Emergencies on 13 March 2020.²⁹³ An update to the plan was approved in September 2020.²⁹⁴ In order to effectively monitor the COVID-19 pandemic and to better inform the general population, an online platform was created providing real-time data on cases.

Initially, clinical case management of COVID-19 only took place in designated hospitals, with other hospitals continuing to provide regular medical care. However, as the outbreak evolved, hospital capacity for other services was reduced and regular health services were suspended to avoid in-person contact and to focus resources on the pandemic. This has caused delays and even a lack of care for a large proportion of the population that could translate into a deterioration of health outcomes, especially for most vulnerable population groups in the short term. For instance, preliminary estimations of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Tuberculosis and HIV services and Tuberculosis and HIV morbidity in the country show a 30 per cent–50 per cent decrease in accessibility for check-up/diagnosis purposes and health care, which is reflected in the total number of detected cases and mortality rates.

In 2020, the share of inpatient COVID-19 cases was only 13 per cent, while the number of COVID-19 hospital days represented 23 per cent of the total. In Moldova, 71.6 per cent of hospitals do not have an epidemiologist and the number of infection control specialists per 250 beds is only 0.8. The treatment of COVID-19 is twice as resource-intensive as other diseases with similar complexity.

287 WHO, "Can People Afford to Pay for Healthcare?", new evidence on financial protection in the Republic of Moldova, 2020.

288 UNDP Moldova, "The Population's Perception of Respect for Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova Has Not Changed Significantly in the Last Two Years".

289 The UN CCA survey conducted in September 2021 to identify citizens attitudes towards country's socioeconomic situation and to consult about development priorities for the future.

290 Worldometer, Moldova, "Coronavirus Cases".

291 Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, "Mortality Analyses".

292 Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, [Decision No. 55, 17 March 2020](#).

293 The Government of Moldova developed the [National COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan](#) with the support of the WHO.

294 Government of Moldova, [New Coronavirus Infection Preparedness and Response Plan \(COVID-19\) Republic of Moldova Version 2 \(2020\)](#) [in Romanian].

According to the WHO COVID-19 Intra-Action Review, the pandemic outbreak highlighted challenges relating to prolonged reform of the health care system; insufficient government funding of the public health system linked to limited human resources; a weak logistical supply chain for emergency goods; outdated preparedness plans in hospitals; and inadequate compliance with public health measures across different sectors. Additional challenges identified referred to the absence of national stockpiles for medical devices, medicines and personal protective equipment and limited digital health infrastructure and interoperable electronic registers. This hampered optimal data management and reduced analysis and timely response activities.

According to the OHCHR Moldova Report,²⁹⁵ during the first phase of the pandemic, when compliance with restriction measures needed considerable resources, access to medical services was limited. The OHCHR survey showed that 26.3 per cent of respondents on the Right Bank and 20.7 per cent of respondents on the Left Bank reported needing medical advice during the pandemic in relation to chronic illnesses and other conditions. More than 40 per cent of these on both banks of the Nistru River reported not receiving in full the medical treatment they might have required. The number who could not get any treatment was twice as high among Roma (47.1 per cent) as among non-Roma (23.7 per cent). Furthermore, 14.8 per cent of respondents (Right Bank, versus 18 per cent on the Left Bank) needed medical assistance and advice in relation to COVID-19. Fewer men than women asked for the medical advice they needed in relation to COVID-19 (19.7 per cent of men did not ask for medical assistance, versus 9.4 per cent women giving up on requesting medical assistance).

According to the OHCHR survey, during the emergency period, vulnerable groups (including older persons, persons with disabilities, Roma and others) reported having limited or no access to health care. About 69.6 per cent of respondents aged 45 to 59 and 62.9 per cent of respondents above 60 years of age mentioned having given up on medical assistance out of fear of getting infected with COVID-19. Of Roma respondents, 30 per cent did not have access to medical services compared to 11.8 per cent of the general population, and Roma women were more affected (35 per cent). The lack of access by Roma to information in their mother tongue about COVID-19 and methods to prevent infection was confirmed by 12.8 per cent of respondents, and among low-income Roma the rate was higher (21.9 per cent). The Alliance of Organizations for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Keystone Human Service in Moldova reported that 68 per cent of persons with disabilities had encountered difficulties in accessing medical services during the emergency period.²⁹⁶ Despite all the efforts of the health authorities to ensure access to HIV and Tuberculosis diagnoses and treatment services during the COVID-19 lockdown (including like home delivery of antiretroviral drugs through community-based organizations), 2020 saw a decrease of 30 per cent in HIV testing, of 40 per cent in enrolment in HIV treatment and of about 80 per cent in treatment adherence compared to 2019.

Limited accessibility to information about COVID-19

Especially during the first phases of the pandemic, information relating to COVID-19 was not made accessible to persons with hearing and intellectual disabilities. The Council for Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination and Ensuring Equality underlined that the efforts undertaken by state authorities were neither sufficient nor efficient in order to ensure equal access of persons with hearing disabilities to public interest information about the pandemic. The council stressed that communication of specific information by text only was not sufficient, and that the video and audio spots developed and disseminated to various TV stations did not include simultaneous translation into sign language. Therefore, the council found that the failure of the government to ensure communication in sign language amounted to discrimination.²⁹⁷ Half of respondents to the OHCHR survey were of the opinion that information was not accessible to people with intellectual and sensory disabilities.

TV remains the main source of information relating to COVID-19 for the population on both banks of the Nistru River. Of respondents to the OHCHR survey, 70.7 per cent on the Right Bank and 65.1 per cent on the Left Bank confirmed that they had received information about COVID-19 mainly through the TV. Those in higher age groups relied on TV as a source of information to a greater extent (90 per cent). The Internet was the second most important source of information for the general population. Of respondents to the OHCHR survey,

295 OHCHR, *Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova*, p. 6.

296 AOPD, "The Impact of the Pandemic of COVID-19 on Persons with Disabilities by the Alliance of Organizations for Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Keystone Human Service in Moldova", at <http://aopd.md/impactul-pandemiei-covid-19-asupra-persoanelor-cu-dizabilitati-studiu-sociologic>, p. 4.

297 Decision No. 118/20, 20 August 2020, available at http://egalitate.md/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Decizie_constatare_118_2020.pdf.

47.7 per cent took their information from Internet-based news agencies on the Right Bank, and 37.5 per cent took their information from social media on the Left Bank.

The lack of accurate and reliable information, as well as pandemic fatigue among the general public (and health professionals alike), led to suboptimal compliance with preventive measures and contributed to low population vaccination rates.

SDG 4. ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

At the beginning of the 2020/21 academic year, the education system of Moldova was made up of 1,241 primary and secondary general education institutions, including 106 primary schools, 787 gymnasiums, 338 high schools (lyceums) and 10 schools for children with intellectual, physical and sensory disabilities. Additionally, there are 1,485 early childhood educational institutions, of which 808 were creche-kindergartens, 568 were kindergartens, 90 were institutions combining primary school and kindergarten, 17 were community centres and two were creches. Most early childhood educational institutions (99 per cent) are publicly owned, while 15 are private.

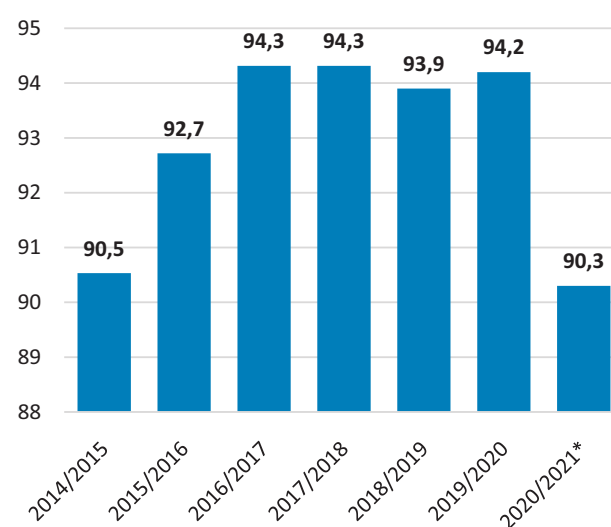
Besides 42 vocational schools providing secondary vocational training programmes, there are 36 colleges for post-secondary vocational training programmes and 13 centres of excellence providing both post-secondary and secondary vocational training programmes.

In the 2020/21 academic year, the number of students increased by 1,200 compared to the previous year, but this figure was still lower than in 2017/18; 334,400 students were enrolled in general and secondary education, representing 92.17 per cent of the population aged 7–18 and habitually resident in the country.

A. Preschool education

Moldova has one of the highest preschool enrolment rates among countries in the CEE-CIS²⁹⁸ Region. The preschool enrolment rate for children aged 3–6 is about 90.3 per cent²⁹⁹ (compared to just 44 per cent in 2000) and is relatively high compared to other countries in the region. Enrolment rates accelerated between 2010 and 2020 as a result of an 8 per cent increase in the number of preschool facilities, mostly in

Gross pre-primary enrolment rate (per cent)



* Preliminary data
Source: NBS

rural areas. That said, disparities in provision and access of preschool facilities between rural and urban areas continue to widen, increasing from 27 per cent in 2010 to 41 per cent in 2019.³⁰⁰ Almost one-third of children in rural areas do not attend early education facilities, compared to almost universal access to kindergartens in urban areas.³⁰¹

An increase in the number of preschools from 1,381 to 1,485 between 2010 and 2020 has not kept up with demand, with persisting shortages and urban-rural imbalances.³⁰² However, the number of children enrolled in early childhood education declined by 10.4 per cent in 2020 compared to 2019. Preschool occupancy in rural areas is below capacity, reaching 68.3 per cent on average; at the same time, there are approximately 150 villages without pre-

298 CEE-CIS.

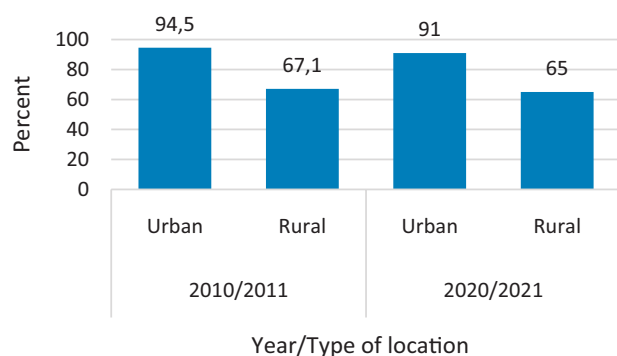
299 NBS, Education in the Republic of Moldova (2020/21).

300 NBS, Education in the Republic of Moldova (2018/19).

301 Preschool attendance is significantly lower in rural areas (64 per cent) than in urban areas (82 per cent), with highest enrolment in Chişinău (90 per cent). See UNICEF Moldova, "Early Childhood Development".

302 NBS, Early Education Institutions (2019).

Gross pre-primary enrolment rate by urban/rural location (2010-2011 versus 2020-2021)



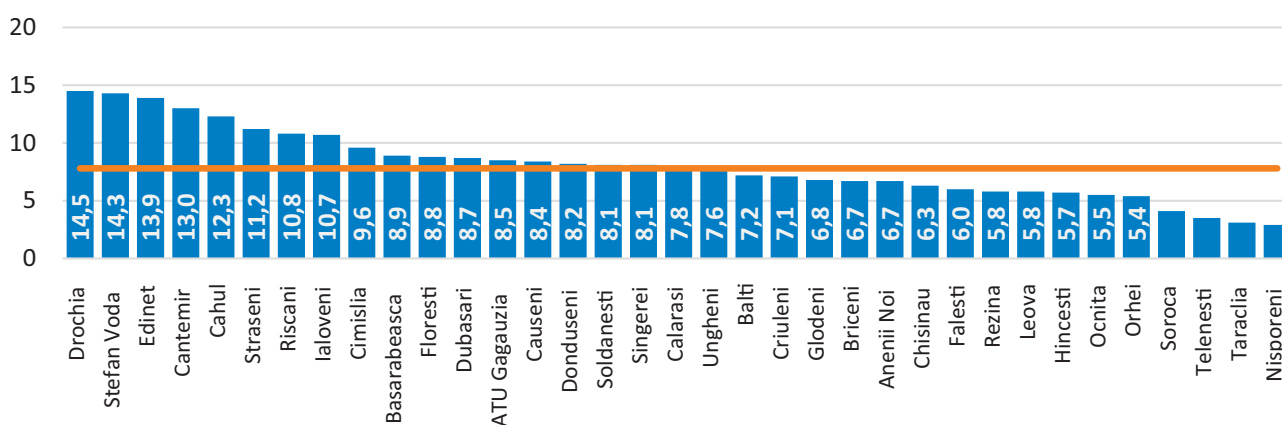
Source: NBS

school facilities at all. This represents a significant concern, given the importance of geographical proximity for educational facilities for very young children. Preschools in urban areas, particularly Chişinău Municipality, consistently operate over capacity, indicating a shortage of preschool facilities in urban areas.³⁰³ An increase in demand coupled with a lack of capacity leads to overcrowding in preschools, affecting the quality of education that is provided. Three-quarters of preschools have classes for children aged 3–6 that are larger than the standard student-to-teacher ratios for this age group as laid down by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research. These preschools are primarily in urban areas. In some cases, between 25 and 45 children are being taught in the same classroom.³⁰⁴ The standard established by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research is a maximum of 15 children per group for children aged 0–2 years, and 20 for children aged 3–6.

About 134,000 children were born in Moldova between 2017 and 2019. We can estimate from this that about 75,000 families failed to benefit from childcare services for children aged up to 3, making it more difficult for parents to return to work. Among the reasons determining this low rate of access to early childhood care services are the limited number of places in creches (or combined creche-kindergartens), the poor conditions of these institutions and the uneven distribution of early childhood care services across the country. In Chişinău, the enrolment rate of children up to the age of three in early education is below the country's average. At the national level, the average rate of access to early childhood care services for children up to the age of three was only 7.8 per cent in 2020. In Chişinău, where most of the employees in the country are registered, the enrolment rate was 6.3. These figures represent a significant drop compared to 2019: in this year, the overall re-enrolment rate was 11.2 and the enrolment rate in Chişinău was 9.7.

Roma children, children with disabilities and children from disadvantaged households still face barriers to access preschool education.³⁰⁵ Only 20 per cent of Roma children aged 3–6 attend preschool compared to 80 per cent of non-Roma children.³⁰⁶ Only 11 per cent of the 2,169 children aged 3–6 years registered as having a disability were enrolled in preschools in 2019.³⁰⁷ In Gagauzia, 45.58 per cent of children with disabilities aged 0–6 do not attend educational institutions (the vast majority of those not included in preschool education reside in the two of the three raions of Gagauzia: Ceadir-Lunga [39 out of 70] and Vulcanesti [8 out of 13]).³⁰⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected access to early

Enrolment rate in early education for children under 3 years old, by raion (per cent, 2020)



Source: NBS

303 UNICEF (2016).

304 UNICEF (2016c).

305 Comprehensive Education Sector Analysis, pp. 47–48.

306 UNICEF Moldova, "Roma Children".

307 UNICEF estimates, based on administrative data on children with disabilities provided by MLHSP in 2019.

308 Main Department of Education of Gagauzia (DEG) data, November 2019.

childhood education and exacerbated the existing problems.

There are relatively few privately run early childhood education facilities³⁰⁹ due to the absence of a legislative regulatory framework. Many private institutions currently operate as non-profit entities and are not subject to the same quality checks and educational standard requirements as public preschools.

There is a significant socioeconomic gap in access to early childhood education: 88 per cent of children living in the richest households attend preschool, while the figure drops to 50 per cent among children living in the poorest households, where the need for preschool education is the highest. Likewise, children whose mothers have higher education are more likely to be enrolled children whose mothers only have secondary education.³¹⁰ Another vulnerable group are children who have at least one biological parent residing abroad.

School readiness improved, reaching 97 per cent in 2019,³¹¹ as a result of the steady increase in the number of children attending preschool and improvements in children's learning outcomes.³¹² However, data show that Roma children are significantly poorly prepared for starting primary education compared to their non-Roma peers, mostly because very

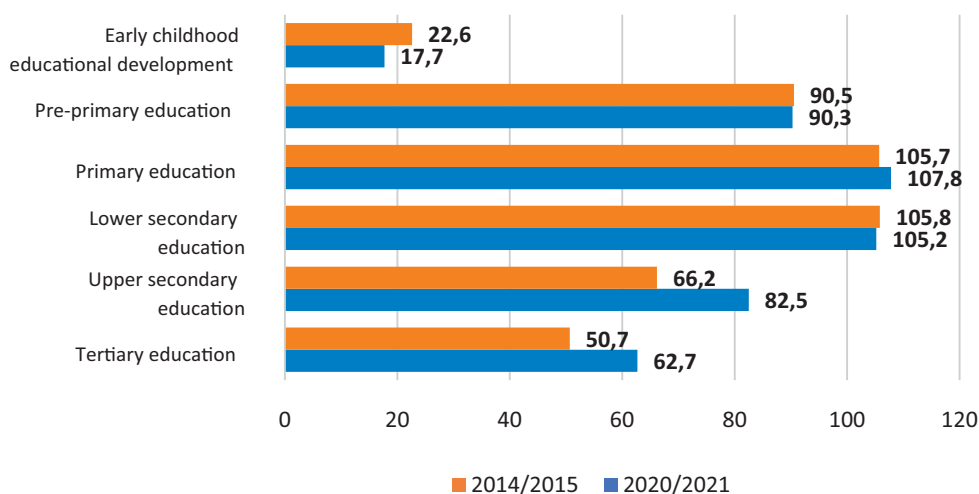
few are enrolled in preschool education (21 per cent in 2011).³¹³ Indeed, if Roma children attend preschool, they meet the requirements for enrolment in primary school, highlighting the importance of access to early childhood development services in ensuring improved learning outcomes for all children later in life.³¹⁴

B. Primary and secondary school education

Enrolment rates for primary, secondary and tertiary education improved between 2014–2015 and 2019–2020,³¹⁵ although access to good-quality primary and secondary education remains relatively low compared to other countries in the region.

Issues persist relating to the quality of education and barriers to access for children with disabilities and SEN. In 2017, CESCR expressed concerns over ensuring the right to education at all levels, in particular regarding the low level of school enrolment among youth in rural areas, Roma children's access to good-quality education and high dropout rates, including among children of Moldovan migrant workers abroad. CESCR also pointed to the insufficient provision of inclusive education for students with disabilities, limited opportunities for education in regional languages and the poor quality and condition of educational materials and school facilities.³¹⁶ Poverty also significantly im-

Enrolment rates by education level (per cent)



Source: NBS

309 Private institutions represent only 1 per cent of total number of preschools: NBS, Early Education Institutions (2019).

310 UNICEF, Analytical Review of Governance, Provision and Quality of Early Childhood Education Services at the Local Level in Countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS/Country Report for Moldova (Yale University and UNICEF, 2018).

311 NBS, brief analysis of primary and secondary general institutions in 2019–2020 school year, December 2019.

312 NBS, 2014/15 Education in the Republic of Moldova (2015).

313 United Nations Moldova (2013).

314 UNICEF Moldova, Participatory Assessment of Barriers Hampering the Access of Roma Children and their Families to Services (2015).

315 The gross enrolment rate suggests that the closer this indicator approaches 100 (or even if it exceeds it in some cases), the better the access to that level of education. Gross enrolment can be above 100 per cent as it is computed based on the total number of children of all ages, enrolled at an education level divided by the total number of children of the school age for that specific education level.

316 CESCR, "Concluding Observations on the Third Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova", E/C.12/MDA/CO/3, 2017, para. 70.

pacts enrolment, with the difference between the lowest and highest wealth quintiles being nearly 30 percentage points for preschools and 67 percentage points for upper secondary education.³¹⁷

C. Inclusion of vulnerable groups in the education system

Despite substantial progress, the inclusion of vulnerable groups – including people with disabilities – into the educational system in Moldova remains an issue. Although the proportion of students with SEN and disabilities enrolled in general education institutions increased from 83.3 per cent in 2014 to 94.5 per cent in 2020, most educational institutions are not adapted to meet inclusive education standards. In the 2020/21 academic year, overall nearly 9,800 students with SEN and disabilities were enrolled in educational institutions, including 9,246 students in general education institutions and 541 in schools for children with intellectual or physical developmental disabilities.

In Gagauzia, only one preschool institution is adapted for inclusive education and only 20 out of 49 primary and secondary schools have resource centres for inclusive education. Ramps have been installed in 27 out of 49 schools and in 10 out of 54 preschool institutions.³¹⁸ Notably, the majority of children with disabilities in Vulcanesti raion do not attend upper secondary educational institutions. Furthermore, **out of 174 children in a situation of risk** (children from socially vulnerable families; children from ethnic minority groups; children of migrants; children living on the streets; children with AIDS) in 2018–2019, **only six persons benefited from psycho-pedagogical support.**³¹⁹

Despite some progress in recent years, barriers to accessing education remain. These include a lack of physical infrastructure adapted to SEN and disability needs; a lack of appropriate teaching materials and specialized support; and the limited capacities of teachers to work with children with SEN, especially children with severe disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, learning and intellectual disabilities and sensory dis-

abilities. Stigma and bullying among peers also persist. CRPD expressed concerns relating to limited support for children with disabilities and SEN to access inclusive education in 2017.³²⁰ In 2020, also, CEDAW expressed concerns relating to the limited number of women and girls with disabilities in mainstream and inclusive education due to the lack of accessible school buildings and transportation facilities, as well as the lack of training on inclusive education for teachers and staff in schools.³²¹ Inadequate human and financial resources also create barriers to supporting the inclusion of children with disabilities in general schools. All children attending primary school receive free meals, but this does not routinely continue beyond primary level. Many secondary schools do not provide free meals to children with disabilities and with SEN, even though they often come from families in very poor financial situations.³²² The exception is in Gagauzia, where all children from preschool to secondary general education benefit from free meals.³²³

Issues faced by children with disabilities persist, despite the presence of a strong legislative and policy framework. These issues are addressed in a range of national strategic documents, laws and regulations. Moldova reformed its child protection laws and these are now aligned with international and European standards. A regulatory framework has been put in place, with emerging institutional capacities to implement these requirements. Challenges remain, however, as mentioned by CRPD in its Concluding Observations for Moldova (2017). CRPD expressed concern about i) stigmatizing attitudes towards children with disabilities; ii) the lack of community services; and iii) the fact that children with disabilities do not systematically participate in decision-making that affects their lives, as well as the fact that they lack opportunities to express their opinion on matters pertaining to them directly.³²⁴

Specific groups of children, notably girls in rural areas, including Roma girls and girls with disabilities, are at high risk of being out of school.³²⁵ For instance, only half of Roma children on average attend primary and secondary school, compared to 90 per cent of non-Roma children.³²⁶ The Roma minority

317 UNICEF Moldova, Children in the Republic of Moldova, p. 6.

318 Main Department of Education of Gagauzia, “[Inclusive Education](#)”, statistical data for June 2018–November 2019.

319 [Statistical data for inclusive education in Gagauzia](#).

320 CRPD, “[Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of the Republic of Moldova](#)”, CRPD/C/MDA/CO/1, 2017.

321 CEDAW, “[Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova](#)”, CEDAW/C/MDA/CO/6, 2020.

322 Free meals are offered to all children in primary education. Provision of free school meals to specific vulnerable groups beyond primary education is regulated through other mechanisms, implemented in consultation and with the support of the local public administration.

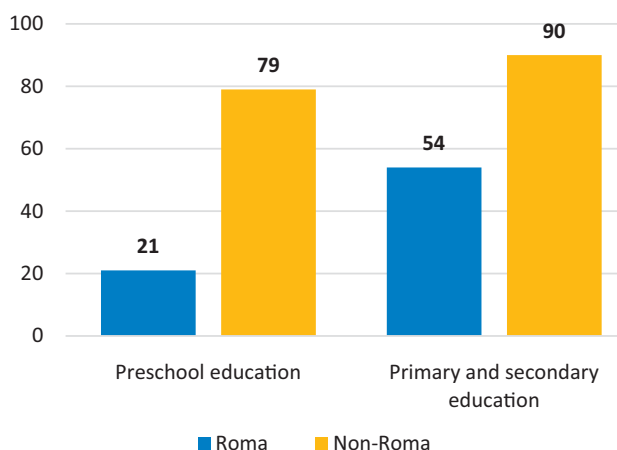
323 Local law of ATU Gagauzia on the [Fund “Healthy Generation” No. 13](#), 10 November 2017; [local law of ATU Gagauzia on compensation of parental fees for children's meals in preschool/preschool education institutions, general education institutions with combined educational programmes No. 49](#), 17 December 2019.

324 CRPD, “[Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of the Republic of Moldova](#)”, CRPD/C/MDA/CO/1, 2017.

325 In 2017, CESCR recommended that Moldova should address low enrolment rates among Roma children and young people in rural areas, as well as high dropout rates at all levels of education.

326 UNICEF Moldova, Children in the Republic of Moldova, p. 53.

Gross participation rate of Roma and non-Roma children in education (per cent, 2011)



Source: UNICEF, based on UNDP/World Bank/European Commission, *Situation of Roma in Roma-Populated Communities (2011)*

is one of the most vulnerable population groups, and often adult household members are illiterate and/or very poor. As a result, children from many Roma families need curricular and extracurricular support (e.g. afterschool homework groups) to ensure their learning outcomes keep pace with their peers. Sometimes, Roma children lack space or materials to do their homework (such as a desk and stationery), which can lead to not being able to meet the requirements of the school programme, or even to school dropout.³²⁷ For this reason, in 2020, CEDAW recommended the adoption of temporary special measures to accelerate equal access to education and to provide inclusive re-entry programmes for women and girls who have dropped out of school, including in rural areas and in Roma communities.³²⁸ To address some of the material needs experienced by Roma students, the local administrations in Chişinău, Calarasi, Balti, Glodeni, Drochia, Hincesti, Basarabesca and Riscani allocate resources for providing free meals to Roma children at all levels of education.³²⁹

School dropout is higher among girls (10.3 per cent) than boys (9.8 per cent).³³⁰ Just over a quarter of young women (25.2 per cent) and 30.2 per cent of young men are not in work or education.³³¹ Roma girls and boys make up a significant portion of these young people.

The number of children living in state institutions has decreased in recent years, while at the same time more children are legally separated from their parents. Children still face barriers to the realization of their rights. There are more than 6,000 children living in residential care (4,500 children in 49 large-scale institutions and 1,557 children in 27 small group homes). In its Concluding Observations on Moldova in 2017, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) acknowledged the results of the deinstitutionalization reforms and the adoption of legislative and policy measures on child protection. At the same time, the committee raised the following as growing concerns: the increasing number of children being legally separated from their parents; the high number of newborn babies being abandoned; the fact that a large number of children are still living in institutions, in particular infants under the age of three; and children left behind when parents migrate abroad.³³² Lack of individual care plans coupled with inadequate monitoring of the institutional placement of children minimizes the child's chances of reintegration within a family. Lack of adequate support for children leaving the care system when they turn 18 and move to independent living increases their vulnerability, as many of these young people do not have the basic resources to live independently, such as housing and/or the financial resources for survival. Furthermore, when young people enrol in professional studies, they no longer receive the monthly social allocation payment of 1,400 MDL (equivalent to US\$ 80 per month), as highlighted by their tutors and the Professional Parental Assistants who act as their guardians. Lack of access to housing for 18-year-olds leaving the care system is a considerable impediment to the protection of their rights: at 18 they are by definition no longer children, and hence are not eligible for housing support.

The CRC also raised concerns regarding the deinstitutionalization of children with disabilities from Temporary Placement Centres for Children with Disabilities in Hancesti and Orhei Districts. As highlighted in the People's Advocate Report, these facilities are designed to host children with severe disabilities. At present, however, a much larger number of adults than children live in these centres, contradicting international provisions on child protection and potentially endangering the life and health of children.³³³

327 The need to organize afterschool clubs for Roma and other ethnic minorities was highlighted during UN CCA consultations.
 328 CEDAW, "[Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova](#)", CEDAW/C/MDA/CO/6, 2020, Recommendation No. 19.
 329 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, "[Twelfth-Fourteenth Periodic Reports Submitted to CERD by the Republic of Moldova in Accordance with Article 9 of the Convention, expected in 2020](#)", CERD/C/MDA/12-14, June 2020 [in Russian].
 330 World Economic Forum, [The Global Gender Gap Report 2017](#), p. 239.
 331 Ibid.
 332 Committee on the Rights of the Child, "[Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova](#)", CRC/C/MDA/CO/4-5, 2017.
 333 Office of the People's Advocate of the Republic of Moldova, Report on Observance of Child's Rights in The Republic of Moldova in 2019. Report

D. Decrease in the number of students

According to baseline scenario projections made by the Centre for Demographic Research, by 2035 the population aged under 24 will have decreased by almost 33 per cent compared to the centre's estimates for 2014. The most drastic reduction (almost 50 per cent) is anticipated in the early education (preschool) population. The main factor behind this decrease in population is the anticipated decrease in fertility rates, compounded by the decrease in the overall female population.³³⁴

In line with overall population trends and due to the compounding factors detailed above, segments of the school-age population have suffered a significant decline. The number of people aged from 0 to 23 decreased from 1.38 million people in 2003 to 949,000 in 2018, or by about 31 per cent. The 16–18-year-old segment shrank by about 48 per cent and the 7–15-year-old segment fell by 38 per cent. The exception is the age group of 3–6-year-olds, which increased by 9 per cent. This is most likely a temporary effect of a generation of millennials (those born in the 1980s) entering their childbearing years towards the start of the twenty-first century.³³⁵

A continuous decline in the number students over the last decades has had a negative impact on the efficiency of the education system, forcing the optimization of school infrastructure and the introduction of *per capita* financing. This has led to a decrease in government spending on education as a share of GDP from 9 per cent in 2009 to 6.1 per cent in 2020. The *per capita* funding mechanism is based on the principle of "money follows the pupil", under which the allocated resources for each student are transferred to the educational institution where s/he is enrolled. The introduction of a new financing formula streamlined financing of "hub schools" and facilitated the upgrading of school infrastructure.

In recent years, the funding allocated to upgrade schools and for repairs has offset the savings from the optimization of the school network. However, the ongoing prioritization of upgrading school infrastructure reversed the trend and slightly increased the share of education spending in GDP in 2019.

Despite the implementation of efficiency measures, the reduction in class sizes and the shrinking of the child population, there has not been a resulting reduction in teaching and non-teaching school staff that might have been expected. In the last few years,

Actual and projected youth population reduction through 2035 (thousands)

Age group	Estimates			Projections		
	2004	2014	2020	2025	2030	2035
0 years	34.9	35.7	31.9	25.5	21.4	19.8
1–3 years	101.9	114.3	101.9	82.6	67.1	59.7
4–6 years	110.7	114.1	107.4	93.1	74.3	62
7–11 years	233.2	167.2	187	172.1	145.2	115.6
12–16 years	306.6	167.1	165.8	181.5	166.7	14.0
17–19 years	197.7	119.9	89.8	98.3	103.6	94.9

Source: Centre for Demographic Research, Analysis of population situation in the Republic of Moldova (Chişinău, 2016)

Government spending on education, 2018–2020

Expenditure type	2019	2020 ³³⁶
Expenditure on education as a share of total Government of Moldova expenditure (per cent)	18.4	17.2
Government of Moldova expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP (per cent)	5.8	6.1

of Ombudsperson for Children's Rights (2020), available at http://ombudsman.md/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Raport_anual_copii_2020-coperta-20.08.2020.pdf.

334 Centre for Demographic Research, Analysis of Population Situation in the Republic of Moldova.

335 Ibid.

336 NBS, Education in The Republic of Moldova Statistical Publication, 2019/2020 (Chişinău, 2020).

Moldova has improved its student-to-teacher ratio, which now stands at 11.9:1 in all segments of the education sector. However, this optimization in staffing levels would require more time and effort to further streamline efficiency through redistribution of wage bills towards higher salaries for more qualified and competent teachers and increased allocations for training and retraining of teachers.

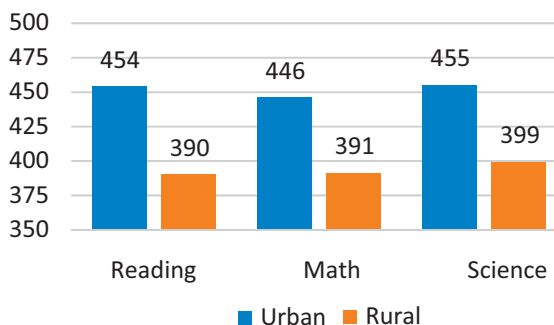
E. Student performance

The performance of Moldova in PISA³³⁷ is a substantive illustration of the challenges the system currently faces in terms of the quality of the education that children in Moldova receive. Despite some progress achieved in 2015, there have been few improvements since. **According to PISA 2018, students in Moldova scored lower than the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science.**³³⁸

Most 15-year-old Moldovans lack basic skills to participate effectively and productively in society: 43 per cent of Moldovan students are functionally illiterate (i.e. 4 out of 10 15-year-olds cannot effectively summarize and systematize information) and 43 per cent do not have minimum knowledge in science. Furthermore, only 2 per cent of students scored Level 5 or higher in mathematics versus the OECD average of 11 per cent, and far behind their peers in China (44 per cent), Singapore (37 per cent) and Korea (21 per cent). Disparities in learning are also linked to area of residence and socioeconomic status, with the latter being a strong predictor of performance in mathematics and science of Moldovan students. In terms of gender, girls outperform boys in reading and science, while they score equally in mathematics. Despite girls having a similar level of achievement in mathematics compared to boys, only 1 per cent of them want to continue their studies in the field of ICT, and every fifth girl expects to work in health-related professions (compared to about 1 in 10 in the case of boys).³³⁹ Women choose areas deemed “typically more feminized” and men choose areas that are “typically more masculinized”.

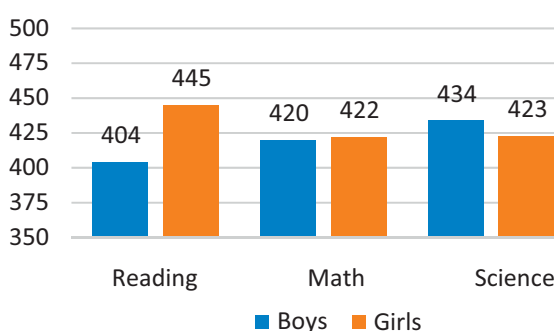
Over the last years, a slight increase in the share of women who choose to study ICT has been observed and Moldova has registered a positive trend in diminishing gender disparities in areas of education that are considered more masculinized (science, technology, engineering and mathematics [STEM]).

PISA scores by literacy area and urban/rural location (2018)



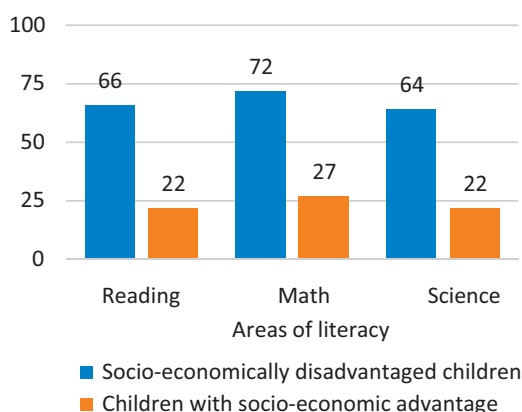
Source: PISA, OECD

PISA scores by literacy area and sex (2018)



Source: PISA, OECD

Percentage of children with poor performance on PISA tests by literacy area and socioeconomic background (2018)



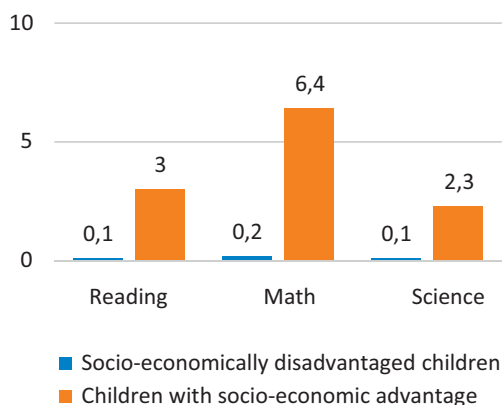
Source: PISA, OECD

³³⁷ PISA is a triennial survey of 15-year-old students that assesses the extent to which they have acquired the key knowledge and skills essential for full participation in society. The assessment focuses on proficiency in reading, mathematics, science and an innovative domain (in 2018, the innovative domain was global competence), as well as on students’ well-being.

³³⁸ OECD and PISA, Results from PISA 2018.

³³⁹ UNFPA and the Centre for Demographic Research Projections, Moldova Country Gender Assessment.

Percentage of children with top-level performance on PISA tests by literacy area and socioeconomic background (2018)



Source: PISA, OECD

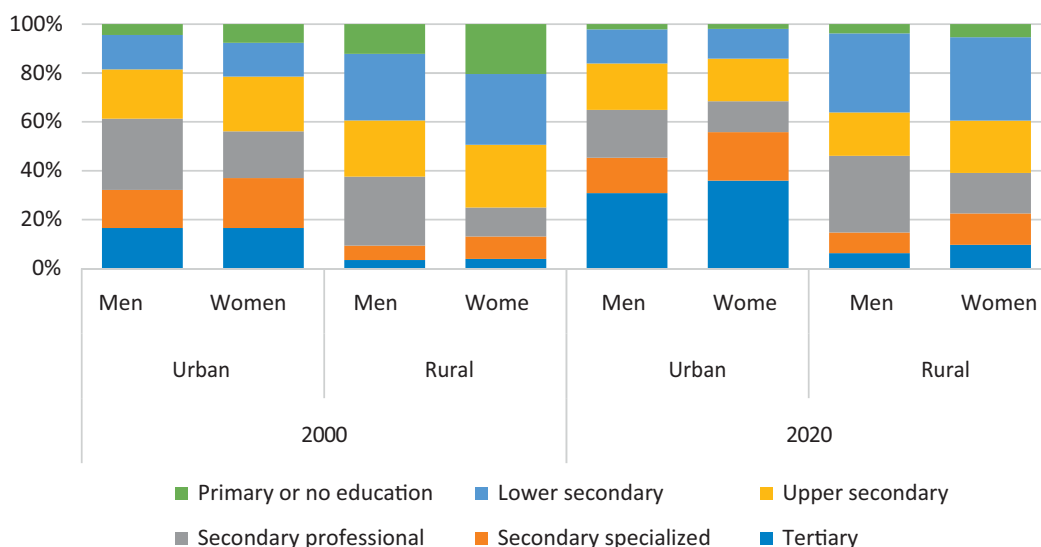
There are substantial disparities in all three areas (reading, mathematics and science) between students attending rural and urban schools:³⁴⁰ the gap between students from rural and urban settings is equal to roughly 1.4 years of schooling.³⁴¹

There are also clear disparities in performance according to the socioeconomic status of the child's family, while children in rural areas perform worse than their peers in urban settings and girls usually outperform boys.

Discrepancies in attainment related to socioeconomic status are linked to the ability of parents to pay for additional extra-school hours of tuition or other activities for their children. Estimates show that parents with school-age children pay about MDL 232.8 million annually for additional books and notebooks, MDL 332.6 million for individual lessons in or out of school, MDL 44.8 million for gifts offered to teachers, MDL 90.5 million for school events and MDL 77.9 million for sports circles and sections.³⁴² According to a recent survey financed by the Soros Foundation Moldova, for every MDL 1 spent by the government on children's education, parents are contributing MDL 0.9. It is noteworthy that, for 35 per cent of families, these additional payments represent a substantial financial burden, while for 37 per cent of families the amount paid is acceptable. Furthermore, the level of spending correlates with the availability of access to additional extracurricular activities. In rural areas these are often not available.

Despite some improvements in the perceptions of rights holders, there was still a preoccupation among 46.6 per cent of respondents to the 2020 human rights perception study with the fact that parents' financial possibilities influence the educational process of their children. At the same time, only 25 per cent of respondents considered that the state ensures equal access and conditions to education for all.³⁴³

Population aged 15 and over by level of education and sex (per cent)



Source: NBS

340 Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, [Republic of Moldova in PISA 2018](#) (Chişinău, 2018) [in Romanian].

341 World Bank, [Education Public Expenditure Review](#) (2018).

342 SOROS-IPP, [Study on Informal Payments in Schools](#) (2020).

343 Study of the perception on the observance of human rights, People's Advocate Office, 2021, p. 33.

Suboptimal PISA results are caused by inadequate curricula and poor teaching quality, and the latter is considered to be one of the most important contributing factors for improving student achievement. The latest school-level data from the NBS show that 27,400 teachers are employed in the country's general education institutions, two-thirds of whom hold some sort of pedagogical certification and 19 per cent of whom are of post-retirement age.³⁴⁴ The share of teaching staff of retirement age has more than doubled in the last decade, indicating a rapid ageing of the profession. Teaching staff engaged in pedagogical work for 20 years and over accounted for 57.7 per cent of the total number of people employed in the education system. Overall, 86.9 per cent of teachers are women, while women occupy 91.3 per cent of management positions.³⁴⁵

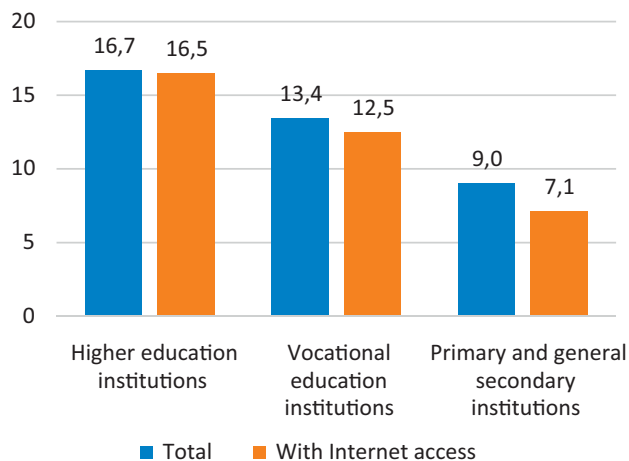
During the recent two decades, the educational background of Moldovan women has advanced significantly. Their educational attainments are slightly higher than those of men. The growing share of women with post-secondary and tertiary education is an indication of the improved human capital of women.

F. Infrastructure

The school network infrastructure in Moldova is obsolete, often putting children's health at risk. In particular, many rural schools are not connected to sewerage and do not have well-equipped sanitary blocks. Toilets are usually located outside the building and are not safe, particularly for young girls, who may easily develop chronic diseases of the reproductive system at an older age. Out of the total of 1,240 schools, 1,048 have sanitary facilities indoors.³⁴⁶ However, only 80 per cent (879) of them are compliant with sanitary requirements. Out of all schools, **only 24 per cent have sanitary facilities adapted to the needs of children with disabilities. In Gagauzia, 7 out of 45 schools (mainly in rural areas) have no sanitary facilities, while only 26 have good sanitary conditions.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that the education system does not have the tools and skills to provide good-quality education remotely. The majority of schools identified a shortage of necessary equipment and communication infrastructure and elementary IT skills as key challenges in responding to the new requirements of online training. About 16,000

Computers per 100 students (2020-2021)



Source: NBS

students (4.8 per cent), and 3,000 teachers (10.6 per cent of total) had no or limited access to ICT technologies (a laptop/tablet or access to Internet).³⁴⁷ This made it impossible to deliver or receive instruction (let alone organize lessons and monitor and assess learning progress) for a substantial share of students and teachers. Families with school-aged children living in areas where Internet connectivity rates are lower are potentially most affected, for instance those in rural areas (74.5 per cent of households have an Internet connection in rural areas, compared to 86.1 per cent in urban areas), families with lower levels of education (64.7 per cent of people who were not able to complete secondary education have an Internet connection, compared to 94 per cent among those with higher education) and households on low incomes (56.7 per cent Internet connectivity among those with a monthly income under MDL 3,000, compared to 96.5 per cent in households with an income of over MDL 6,000 per month).

Gender has an impact on access to a computer at home, as female-headed households are 11.7 per cent less likely to have a computer at home than households headed by men. Over time, these differences become accentuated: the number of male-headed households with access to computers and the Internet is growing faster than the number of households led by women who have access to these resources. In rural areas, 24.1 per cent fewer people have access to a computer at home than those living in urban areas. Public services are accessed more frequently by men (28 per cent in 2016) than by women (21 per cent).³⁴⁸

344 NBS, [The Activity of Primary and General Secondary Education Institutions in the 2019/20 Academic Year \(2019\)](#).

345 Ibid.

346 Administrative data from local public administrations as of 1 October 2020.

347 National Pupils Council from VET, [Assessment on Distance Learning Among VET Students \(2020\)](#).

348 NBS, [Population Access and Use of Information and Communication Technology \(ICT\) \(n.d.\)](#), available at https://statistica.gov.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/Femei_barbati_TIC/5_Accesul_utilizarea_TIC_de_populatie.pdf [in Romanian].

Consequently, students with no access to technology (as well as children and adolescents with disabilities) are most at risk of falling further behind their peers in terms of future academic performance.³⁴⁹

G. Young NEET people

In Moldova, 27.4 per cent of young people are NEET.³⁵⁰ This is more than twice the European Union average.³⁵¹ It is noteworthy that the share of NEET adolescents aged 15–19 (16 per cent) is lower than the share of NEET youth aged 20–24 (25 per cent). Girls and young women are more likely to be NEET than boys and young men: the figures are 35.5 per cent for girls and young women, and 19.4 per cent for boys and young men. Young people residing in rural areas are overall more likely to be NEET. In Chişinău, the region with the most opportunities for study and work, about a third of women aged 15–29 do not work, study or receive any training. In the Southern Region of Moldova, the share of NEET among young women is even higher – about 35 per cent.

Challenges faced by young people are not sufficiently addressed in policy-making: (i) youth programmes are underfinanced while local public authorities do not allocate resources for youth support and development, due lack of efficient implementation at local level; (ii) there is no mechanism for effective youth engagement in decision-making at local level (youth and CSOs representing them are not sufficiently consulted during the implementation of local policies)

A deeper analysis of the factors leading to such a high NEET rate in Moldova shows that the challenges are related to the lack of opportunities in the labour-market resulting from the economic and social crisis in recent years, as well as low incomes that do not provide a decent living and inequalities in the workplace. Many young people are discouraged or see no prospect of

future success in the domestic labour-market, and so choose to work or look for a job abroad.³⁵² Among students from the poorest backgrounds, 22 per cent are looking to enrol at university, compared to 77 per cent of students from higher-income groups. A significant number of young people do not have access to post-secondary education. According to PISA, in Moldova, about one in three high-achieving students from disadvantaged backgrounds do not expect to complete tertiary education, compared to one in 10 high-achieving students from advantaged backgrounds.

H. Higher education

Enrolment in the higher education system in Moldova has declined over the last decade. In 2020/21, only 59,033 students were enrolled in tertiary education in Moldova (excluding foreigners), 84 per cent of whom are studying at public educational institutions.³⁵³ About 58 per cent of enrolled students are women. The number of university students per 10,000 inhabitants decreased from 312 to 222 during the period of 2014–2018. The high outmigration of young people for educational purposes (accessing scholarship opportunities or taking advantage of dual citizenship to study at a university in the European Union) was one reason for this. In line with demographic trends and given behavioural changes relating to seeking a better quality of education elsewhere, the share of people enrolled as students at higher education institutions is expected to continue decreasing by an average of 8 per cent to 10 per cent annually.

The major challenge faced by the higher education system in Moldova relates to its internal financial inefficiency and poor quality of teaching. The share of spending for tertiary education as a share of Government of Moldova expenditure on education is roughly 11 per cent (2018), which is higher than in similar countries in the region (Belarus, Armenia and Georgia). Although the share of spending on tertiary education has declined in recent years, in real terms expenditure per student has increased, as fewer students are enrolling. These changes, however, have not translated into improvements in quality. Furthermore, 90 per cent of the total budget allocated for higher education is used to pay the salaries of teachers and non-teaching staff, while a very low amount is set aside for measures to improve academic performance. The number of students enrolled in universi-

349 United Nations Moldova, [Republic of Moldova Voluntary National Review Progress Report 2020](#), p. 31.

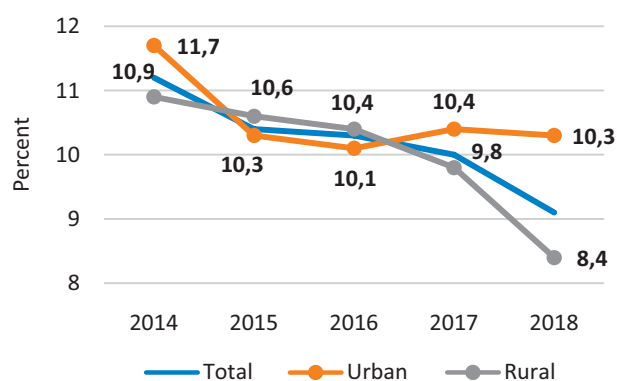
350 NBS, [Young People in the Republic of Moldova in 2019](#).

351 European Union average: 12.9 per cent of 15–29-year-olds and 10.5 per cent of 15–24-year-olds.

352 UNDP, UNFPA, CNTM and INCE, [Inclusion of Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training \(NEET Youth\)](#), p. 12.

353 NBS, [The Activity of Higher Education Institutions in the 2020/21 Academic Year \(2020\)](#), available at <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=6857> [in Romanian].

Participation rate of young people and adults in formal and non-formal lifelong learning by urban/rural location



Source: NBS

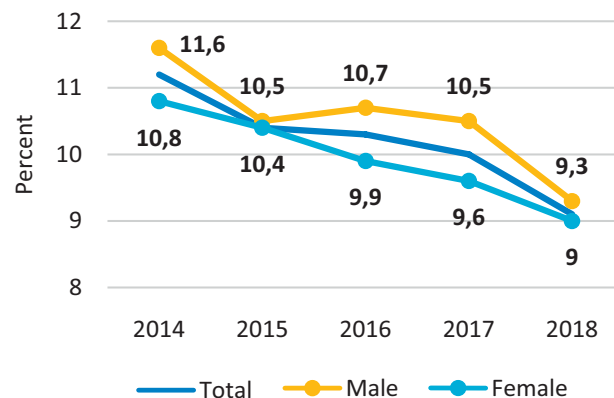
ties 2020/21 school year reached 59,033, about 30 per cent lower than in 2015/16.³⁵⁴ However, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, many educational institutions have registered a slight increase in the number of students, and this dividend should be used as an opportunity for improvement.

The higher education and VET systems in Moldova do not meet labour-market demands in terms of skills mix. In the past 10 years, overall enrolment in VET declined by 20 per cent and enrolment in secondary VET decreased from 24,270 students in 2008/09 to 15,077 students in 2020/21. Over the same period, post-secondary VET also saw a decline. Enrolment at these levels decreased from 32,683 students in 2008/09 to 29,766 students in 2019/20.³⁵⁵

The low quality of education provided in Moldova constrains young people's access to the labour-market. Barriers to the labour-market include: (i) longer and more insecure transitions from school to work; (ii) the inability to meet the requirements of employers who need a skilled, experienced workforce in a market economy environment; (iii) insufficient correlation between the educational offer and the requirements of the labour-market, which leads to young people being employed in jobs requiring lower qualifications than the qualifications they hold; (iv) the salary levels offered by employers being below the expected level; and (v) the default to migration that has shaped the society of Moldova over the last two decades.³⁵⁶

Lifelong learning has not yet been fully embraced, as society in Moldova has lost touch with the culture and traditions of volunteering and community service. In

Participation rate of young people and adults in formal and non-formal lifelong learning by gender



Source: NBS

addition, there are few opportunities and incentives to acquire new skills and knowledge, particularly for older adults.

Challenges relating to deficiencies in the education system, as well as the absence of a culture of lifelong learning, have resulted in a skills mismatch in the labour-market in Moldova. For about 40 per cent of companies in Moldova, the skills deficit represents a major or severe constraint for their business development, and this is one of the highest levels in Europe and Central Asia. Moreover, the current lifelong education model perpetuates structural inequalities in the labour-market and does not effectively ensure equal access to education for vulnerable groups, in particular Roma, young people (particularly young women), those engaged in agriculture and persons aged over 50.³⁵⁷

Adult participation in lifelong learning is decreasing among both men and women, as well as for people from both urban and rural areas. Very few adults participate in lifelong learning, particularly older adults. Only 0.3 per cent of people aged 55–74 are involved in lifelong learning activities. Family duties and financial costs limit access to lifelong learning, particularly for women: more than half of women reported that they could not access lifelong learning for these reasons. The barrier related to family duties is stronger in rural areas (52.3 per cent, compared to 28 per cent in urban areas). At the same time, a person's intention to access formal education is also influenced by several external factors, such as poor financial status, access in geographical terms or barriers to employment (either the work schedule does not fit with the timetable for

354 NBS, [Young People in the Republic of Moldova in 2019](#).

355 NBS, [The Activity of Secondary and Postsecondary Education Institutions in the 2020/21 Academic Year](#) (2020).

356 United Nations Moldova, [Republic of Moldova Voluntary National Review Progress Report 2020](#), pp. 29–30.

357 Centre Partnership for Development, [Uncertain Path to Adult Qualification: An Analysis of Lifelong Learning Inequalities in the Republic of Moldova](#) (Chişinău, 2020), p. 3.

studying, or an employer does not encourage these activities).³⁵⁸

Generally, Millennials (20–39-year-olds) are more educated than the “baby boomer” generation (55–74-year-olds): 13.7 per cent of the total number of people who have higher level of education are aged 20–39, while 5.4 per cent are aged 55–74. By contrast, 3.6 per cent of all people who have just a primary education or no education at all are aged 55–74, compared to 1.8 per cent who are aged 20–39.

Interest in cultural heritage is increasing in society in Moldova, even if progress in this sector requires alignment to the minimum standards in force in Europe and advancements in the implementation of the relevant international standards. These include the international conventions in the field of culture to which Moldova is a party. **The public funding allocated to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research for education and culture is quite modest,** representing 0.5 per cent of the state budget (approximately Euro 35 million in 2018). Local governments have extensive authority in the field of culture but invest and contribute modestly to the cultural sector.

Households’ cultural consumption is very low. Surveys show that 80 per cent of the population said that they had not attended or participated in a cultural event (cinema, performing arts, museum, art exhibition, etc.) in the past year. Romanian and Russian TV channels are more popular than local TV because of their greater capacity to invest in content. A specific (modest) funding programme has been set up to support the film industry and the Moldova Centre for Cinematography. International feature films are widely available for free via pirate web platforms established in neighbouring Russia, which contributes to the weakening of the audiovisual industry in the country.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research manages a considerable number of cultural institutions, which take up 80 per cent of its financial resources. These comprise 16 theatres and concert venues, 9 art institutions (education), 9 museums and 2 libraries. Most of these institutions remain underfunded and lack the capacity to invest in the development of the art, culture and recreation sector. Cultural infrastructure at local level has largely been inherited from the Soviet period and maintaining this is not given priority. Moldova has participated in the Creative Europe Programme since 2015.³⁵⁹ The country benefits from foreign financial aid from individual countries, as well as from the European Union, through different programmes (Creative Europe; Eastern Partnership; cross-border cooperation programme with Ukraine and Romania; Confidence-Building Programme related to Cultural heritage).³⁶⁰ However, there is a clear need to develop cultural education in Moldova in the sense of integrating culture, cultural heritage and arts into the educational system and cultural institutions, as well as in terms of harnessing culture in both formal and non-formal education settings.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial impact on the culture sector. Many cultural institutions and organizations, as well as independent artists, have transferred their cultural content online (films, recordings of theatre performances, concerts, museum and library collections, etc.), exploring new channels for communicating with audiences in order to promote their activities and distribute their products. Digital platforms such as Facebook or YouTube have become even more important distribution channels for cultural products. The cultural institutions under the management of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research made a series of concerts, shows, digital resources and online exhibitions available to the public. Most libraries have also redirected their activity to the virtual space, contributing to the development of online services for users.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION

In response to the outbreak, the Government of Moldova closed all schools on 11 March. Approximately 434,000³⁶¹ students in all academic institutions at all levels were asked to stay at home, and schools were tasked with providing distance learning opportunities.

The closure of early childhood education, preschool and school institutions meant that many parents – mothers especially – had to temporarily leave work or be released from work to care for young children.

358 United Nations Moldova, [Republic of Moldova Voluntary National Review Progress Report 2020](#), pp. 51–53.

359 Moldova has not yet become a member of Eurimages. Membership is not felt to be a priority considering the state of the local film industry, as well as the cost of membership (€130 000/year).

360 Council of Europe, [Cultural Policy Review of the Republic of Moldova: Towards a Strategy for the Development of Culture and Creative Industries](#) (Chişinău, 2019).

361 NBS, [Education in the Republic of Moldova, Statistics Periodical \(2019/2020\)](#) (2019).

This situation was aggravating the financial situation of families with young children and pushing young families deep into poverty, negatively affecting the well-being of children.

Pupils in all age groups did not have equal access to good-quality online education due to lack of devices, connectivity issues and many teachers being unfamiliar with online teaching methods. Over 150,000 children of preschool age were unable to attend kindergarten and pursue their schooling.

According to the OHCHR survey, 24.4 per cent of respondents had insufficient equipment to facilitate access to online education, and 10.3 per cent did not have any equipment. On the Left Bank, 77.6 per cent had sufficient devices, 14.3 per cent had some devices but not enough in number and 6.1 per cent had no devices at all.³⁶² Of respondents, 71.1 per cent in the Right Bank (71.4 per cent on the Left Bank) stated that their children had participated in all online classes, 17.1 per cent (18.4 per cent on the Left Bank) stated that their children had attended some online classes and 8.3 per cent (8.2 per cent on the Left Bank, and 50 per cent of Roma) stated that their children had not attended any online classes at all. Inequality in attendance of online classes was also highlighted regarding gender, socioeconomic status, level of education and location of residence (69.3 per cent attendance in rural area compared to 73.1 per cent attendance in urban areas). Parents (51.7 per cent of women versus 42.5 per cent of men) faced difficulties in supporting the education process of their children, while 7.1 per cent could not organize it at all.

The pandemic had a negative effect on the access to education of Roma children, of children with disabilities, of children in rural areas and of other vulnerable groups, and led to high levels of dropout from school. In particular, 40.7 per cent of Roma respondents with school-age children indicated that none of their children had attended school in December 2020, compared to 18.1 per cent before the pandemic.³⁶³ Of families of children with disabilities, 41 per cent used only one item of equipment for all the family, while 13 per cent did not have access to any technical equipment. The remote learning platforms were not accessible for children with intellectual and sensory disabilities and did not facilitate the design and implementation of individualized learning plans.³⁶⁴

According to data from the participants of the OHCHR survey, the pandemic affected the quality of education. Despite the fact that more than 50 per cent of respondents from Moldova properly appreciated that the quality of education was very good (5 per cent) or good (47 per cent), 28.6 per cent of the respondents still reported that the quality of education process was bad and 14.4 per cent of respondents perceived it as very bad. At the same time, data from the OHCHR survey show that **distance education did not respond completely to the needs of children:** 77.3 per cent of respondents from the Right Bank and 77.6 per cent of respondents from the Left Bank considered that education during the pandemic did not correspond at all, or sufficiently, to the education needs of their children. Moreover, 90 per cent of Roma respondents considered the quality of the education process of online education process to be bad or very bad.³⁶⁵ **Lack of a participatory approach in decision-making processes relating to the education process was also highlighted by the respondents of the OHCHR survey.** Despite the provision of the Ministry of Education ensuring a participatory approach in identifying the model of school reopening, 52.3 per cent of respondents mentioned that the representatives of the educational institutions had not consulted them.

In June 2020, almost 50 per cent of students in the VET system reported limited constructive feedback from their teachers, with 16 per cent reporting very limited feedback and another 7 per cent reporting no feedback at all. This has demotivated students and increased their levels of uncertainty and frustration.³⁶⁶

The COVID-19 pandemic is also having an impact on the psychoemotional well-being of young people. Young people already faced problems relating to psychoemotional well-being before the onset of the pandemic. Measured on a scale from 0 to 10, the perceived level of life satisfaction among young people aged 15–29 was only 6.5 points in 2015. According to a study conducted in 2018, about 36 per cent of young people in Moldova were deprived and dissatisfied with their situation in one or more dimensions of well-being: health,

362 OHCHR, [Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova](#), p. 16.

363 Ibid.

364 OHCHR internal document, "Ensuring Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Report on the Analysis of the Questionnaires of CSOs, Members of the Working Group on COVID-19 and Human Rights, Created at the Initiative of the United Nations Human Rights Office in Moldova", May 2020.

365 OHCHR, [Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova](#), p. 17.

366 National VET Students Council, Assessment on Distance Learning Among VET Students.

education, employment, participation and inclusion. Problems relating to psychoemotional well-being persisted in 2020: 1 in 10 young people were dissatisfied with living, from both a social and an economic perspective. With the spread of the pandemic, anxiety, depression and emotional turmoil worsened: 20 per cent of young people reported a worsening in their psychoemotional well-being during the pandemic crisis, compared to the first months of 2021 (January–February). The negative effects of the isolation measures were most pronounced for girls and young women, young people in urban areas and those with modest incomes. Young people also engaged in risky behaviours more intensely and frequently during the isolation period than before the onset of the crisis. Out of the total number of young people who consumed tobacco in the pre-pandemic period (24 per cent), about 38 per cent used it more often during the pandemic crisis. Of those who had previously self-harmed (6.5 per cent), about 13 per cent said they had made more attempts during the period of isolation. During the pandemic, rates of violence also increased. Changes in psychoemotional well-being and behaviour require urgent support: one-third of young people felt they needed help during the pandemic crisis to overcome or alleviate anxiety and depression, and also to maintain emotional integrity. The need for support was higher among girls, who were the most psychoemotionally affected by the pandemic crisis (43 per cent of girls and 17.9 per cent of boys reported feeling affected).³⁶⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the importance of digitalization in ensuring accessibility and inclusiveness of education services. Investment in ICT infrastructure, teacher training and digitalization of school management processes are important to support that process. Also, aligning to the global development context and ensuring a responsive labour-market requires preparing students for the professions of the future.

SDG 5: ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

Gender inequalities still persist in Moldova. Despite making up 51.8 per cent of the population, women continue to be underrepresented in parliament, district and local councils, as well as in central and local government. Women's labour-force participation (LFP) is still lower than men's, even though female students outnumber male students in tertiary education. As already mentioned, the limited availability and accessibility of childcare facilities for children below the age of three, the existing mismatch between qualifications and labour demand, as well as existing barriers and gender-based discrimination in access to employment limit women's full participation in the labour-market and their capacity to secure income. The gender wage gap is 14 per cent, which is slightly above the OECD average, but in some sectors, such as finance, it reaches 38 per cent. Women's engagement in the private sector and business development is predominantly in small and medium-sized businesses. Women continue to represent large share of survivors of gender-based violence.

Patriarchal social norms and gender stereotypes impact women's and men's, girls' and boys' lives differently. Socially constructed roles typically assign women and girls to the private, unpaid domestic sphere and men and boys to the public, paid working sphere. The 2017 Gender Barometer Study conducted

in Moldova found that only 20.5 per cent of respondents disagreed with common gender stereotypes related to family decision-making roles and perceptions on men's role as primary breadwinners. When disaggregated by sex, women were nearly five points less likely than men to hold stereotyped perceptions on gender roles. On the other hand, 58.3 per cent agreed with at least one of two of the following stereotypical gender roles: men have more responsibility to bring money into the house, and decisions should be taken predominantly by one gender (i.e. men). Overall, 21.2 per cent of respondents supported both statements with little difference between male and female respondents.³⁶⁸ Over the past 10 years, perceptions of traditional gender roles have not improved significantly. In 2016, 64 per cent of respondents agreed with the statements that "it's man's responsibility to bring money home" and "it's woman's duty to take care of the family and the household". In 2006, 67 per cent of respondents agreed with these statements, representing a change of just 3 per cent in perception over 10 years.³⁶⁹ Such perceptions and beliefs exert strong pressure on men and shape expectations of masculinity, contributing to unhealthy habits and shorter life expectancy.

Men face barriers in exercising their parental rights on an equal footing with women. On the other hand,

367 UNFPA and Centre Partnership for Development, in coordination and with the support of the RCO, SDC and Ministry of Education Culture and Research, *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Psychoemotional Well-Being of Young People* (Chişinău, 2020).

368 CPD, *Gender Barometer: Policy-Making and Decision-Taking by Women and Men?* (UN Women/UNDP, 2017), pp. 10 and 22.

369 Ibid.

women bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work in the home, which often impacts on their ability to secure economic independence and creates numerous barriers for women's engagement in public life. The unequal power relations that exist in the family and in the society lead to gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence. These inequalities reflect differently in the overall well-being of women and men.

Specific groups of women, such as **Roma women, women with disabilities, women from rural areas, women living with HIV and single mothers, face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on their gender and other characteristics** (e.g. age, ethnicity, health status, disability, place of residence, sexual orientation, etc.). While school dropout is recorded among both Roma boys and girls, the percentage is higher among girls. Women with disabilities face additional and different challenges in accessing sexual and reproductive health services and face stigma and discrimination concerning the recognition of their sexual and reproductive rights. Overall, 30.4 per cent of women and 38.9 per cent of men work in the informal sector. Men predominate among self-employed workers (60.5 per cent), and women among unpaid domestic workers (72.5 per cent).

Moldova has made progress in reducing gender inequalities in the past 10 years through the introduction of an improved normative and policy framework. The representation of women in the national parliament and government has improved (the number of women in parliament has risen by 5.1 per cent) but is highly dependent on political influences. At the local level, women's representation is steadily growing. For the first time, the political participation of women from excluded groups has grown: 16 Roma women and 8 women with disabilities ran in recent local elections, and 6 Roma women and 6 women with disabilities were elected as councillors.³⁷⁰ While political parties are still inclined to include men in winning positions on electoral lists, the application of a double quota (40 per cent gender quota and placement provisions) has positively contributed to increasing the share of women on electoral lists and in elected positions. However, women candidates in elections (along with women who are elected or appointed to office) face various forms of gender-based violence and harassment, such as hate speech, sexual harassment and being excluded from or placed lower down electoral lists without prior notification, as well as sexist stereotyping in the media.³⁷¹

The participation of women in business has improved by 6.4 per cent, although men still benefit more from state support for entrepreneurship. There are progressively more young women taking up roles in STEM, as well as entering the so-called 'non-feminine' sectors, such as law enforcement, security and defence.

National legislation has been amended in line with the global normative framework to eliminate discriminatory provisions, as well as to strengthen prevention, protection and prosecution of gender-based violence. Still, reporting rates for domestic and gender-based violence are very low: one in three women survivors of domestic violence and one in five women who are victims of violence at the hands of someone who was not their intimate partner never reported the violence.³⁷²

Progress is too slow, and at the current pace the country will not be able to meet the objectives, goals and targets regarding gender equality that it has set. Consequently, Moldova will not be able to meet the goals and objectives set in the 2030 Agenda, considering the centrality of gender equality to the Agenda.

40 per cent of women reported being victims of physical violence committed by their current or most recent husband/partner.

Data on violence in the family convey an alarming picture.¹³⁰ Almost 40 per cent of women report physical violence from a current or recent husband or partner over the course of their lifetime; 9 per cent experienced violence from a partner or former partner in the last 12 months. Rates of physical violence are particularly high in rural areas.¹³¹ Women aged 45–59 are most vulnerable to physical violence over their lifetime, while women aged 15–34 are more likely to have suffered violence in the last 12 months. Divorced and separated women reported higher rates of sexual abuse perpetrated by husbands or partners compared to married women and widows.

370 Improving the representation of women from different vulnerable groups is still at the initial stages. Forty-eight women with disabilities and 51 Romana women enhanced their confidence and skills to run for local elections through participating in a complex capacity-building programme. In total, 16 Romana women and 8 women with disabilities ran for elections, of whom 6 Romana and 6 women with disabilities were elected as local councillors.

371 Gender Equality Platform, Preliminary Report on the Violence Against Women During Local Elections (2019).

372 NBS, UNDP and UNWOMEN, Profile of Women Victims of Violence (2016).

The national women's machinery and gender equality mechanisms lack decision-making power and sufficient human capacities and financial resources to implement the country's commitments to gender equality. **Gender equality has not been mainstreamed into central and local-level processes for strategic planning, policy development and budgeting**, placing this issue at the periphery instead of at the centre

The average level of gender mainstreaming in public policies in 2015–2016 was 0.88 out of 4.

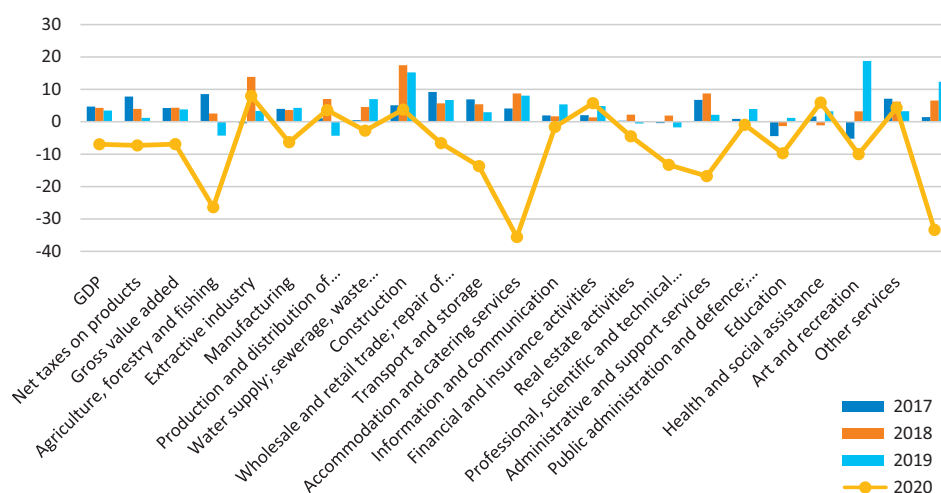
of decision-making processes. The average level of gender mainstreaming in public policies in 2015–2016 was low, scoring 0.88 out of a maximum of four possible points. According to the results obtained, out of 13 policies evaluated, eight were at an incipient level and five at an intermediate level of gender mainstreaming. Most of the public policies evaluated in this analysis did not integrate a gender dimension into the definition of the problem, did not address existing differences and did not present an analysis of the causes of those differences. At the stage of defining the problem and understanding its context, policymakers were not undertaking gender-specific needs analyses or collecting sex-disaggregated data for all relevant socioeconomic aspects. As a result, the gender dimension was not being integrated into implementation plans and was not appearing in the results of the policy development.³⁷³

SDG 8: PROMOTE INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL; AND SDG 9: BUILD RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE, PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIALIZATION AND FOSTER INNOVATION

Moldova remains one of the poorest countries in Europe, with the lowest GDP per capita in the region (approximately US\$ 4,551 in current prices). Between 2016 and 2019, the country's real GDP grew at an average rate of 4.15 per cent,³⁷⁴ propelled by consumption and fuelled by remittances. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economy contracted by 7 per cent. Although the economy of Moldova turned towards recovery in 2021, the rate of growth is likely to slow down as a result of the regional energy crisis.

In 2019, the GDP of Moldova grew by 3.6 per cent, mainly driven by investments and private consumption as a result of higher wages, social allocations and remittances. The slow-down in GDP growth in the pre-COVID-19 period was caused (among other factors) by deceleration in Europe and Central Asia (a 2.2 per cent growth rate) triggered by a slow-down in Russia and Turkey, two major regional economies.

GDP dynamics (percentage change)



Source: NBS

373 East European Foundation and Development Partnership Centre, Have We Reduced Gender Inequalities? Gender Mainstreaming Index in Public Policies 2013–2016 (2016), available at www.progen.md/files/3229_index_dimensiunea_de_gen_in_politici_2013-2016.pdf.

374 GDP in real terms increased from MDL 160.1 billion to MDL 210.1 billion between 2016 and 2019.

The COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by severe drought, led to the disruption of supply chains and negative growth (notably in the services and agriculture sectors), cumulatively contracting the economy by 7 per cent in 2020.

The COVID-19 crisis has hit the economy of Moldova sharply, decelerating economic activity, weakening public finance and challenging macroeconomic stability. The COVID-19 lockdown contributed to supply chain disruptions and the contracting of production and domestic trade. However, the economy has been showing signs of recovery, having grown by roughly 21.5 per cent year-on-year in the second quarter of 2021. Compared to a 14 per cent decline in GDP during the same period of 2020 (versus 2019), this rate of growth is quite high. The economic expansion was fuelled by government spending (29.1 per cent), household consumption (20.7 per cent) and gross fixed capital formation (24.5 per cent). The highest contribution in terms of value added to the GDP formation comes traditionally from trade (18.1 per cent), followed by manufacturing (including extractives), the public sector (including defence, social protection and health care and education) and construction. The most dynamically developing emerging sector is ICT. Agriculture is still an important sector of the economy and, despite lagging during the second trimester, has since witnessed good weather conditions and is therefore expected to return to the overall positive trend. However, in the context of globally growing energy prices, it is likely that positive dynamism could be slowed down by the impact on economic activity and consumption levels of higher fuel prices.

The COVID-19 related measures and the reduction in remittances in the first quarter of 2020, led to a decline of 9.7 per cent in household consumption in the first half 2020, pushing GDP down by 8.1 per cent. Similarly, fixed capital formation was reduced by 6.4 per cent while contributing to a fall of 1.7 per cent in GDP.

Between 2016 and 2019, performance in the banking sector improved substantially, leaving Moldova better positioned to face the COVID-19 crisis than other countries in Europe and Central Asia. Before the crisis, the share of non-performing loans more than halved,³⁷⁵ suggesting that banks' portfolios had become healthier; their liquidity was continuing to grow as the volume of deposits from individuals

increased;³⁷⁶ and their capital and overall profitability were improving. Although the number of loans issued has been growing steadily in recent years, overall lending to the real sector of the economy is still low due to rigid risks policies and a deficit of bankable projects. At the same time, lending from non-financial institutions grew from 14 per cent of all loans in 2016 to 20 per cent in 2019, offsetting the effects of the more rigid regulatory requirements for commercial banks and reflecting the demand for finance in the economy. COVID-19 has affected the sector, with the share of non-performing loans increasing slightly; Small commercial banks are more likely to be affected by the crisis, while the stronger financial standing of the largest banks will allow them to maintain their positions.³⁷⁷

Before the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, **the fiscal space available for the financing of capital spending was limited due to the large share of recurrent expenditures and low absorption capacity on investment projects.** To stimulate the economy, the government doubled investment in the road fund, while expansion of lending under the "*prima casa*" programme stimulated an increase in private investment in construction by approximately 18 per cent.

In recent years, **the current account deficit narrowed from 10.6 per cent of GDP in 2018 to 9.7 per cent in 2019.**

Between January and June 2020, weakened demand from key trade partners³⁷⁸ of Moldova reduced exports by 14 per cent, while the contraction in local consumption led to a 14.8 per cent decline in imports. Exports of engineering components (such as cables, wires, generators, and so on), which are part of European automotive supply chains³⁷⁹ and account for 20 per cent of total exports from Moldova, were most affected.³⁸⁰ Falls in exports of apparel and clothing – another leading export sector that makes up approximately 11 per cent of total exports – also significantly contributed to the contraction in exports in the first half of 2020. However, in July, external trade showed signs of recovery: exports increased by 10.3 per cent compared to June 2020, while traditionally imports being higher than exports by almost double (20.2 per cent) compared to June 2020.

375 The share of non-performing loans declined from 18.5 per cent in 2017 to 8.8 per cent by June 2020 due to stricter and prudent risks policies implemented by the commercial banks.

376 The volume of bank deposits reached MDL 40 billion, while deposits in foreign currency reached US\$ 1.6 billion by the end of 2019.

377 There are four large commercial banks in Moldova, all of which have foreign capital: MAIB, MICB, Victoriabank and Mobiasbanca.

378 The key trading partners of Moldova are Romania, Italy, Russia, Germany, Poland and Turkey.

379 Some affiliated companies had to scale down or suspend production, with spill-over effects for the exports of Moldova.

380 Exports of electrical components such as cables, wires and component parts of household appliances declined by over one-third, while exports of textiles fell by a quarter during the first semester of 2020.

Remittances continuously fuel the economy

Moldova is the country most reliant on remittances in the whole of Europe. This income reached its maximum level in 2010, when remittances accounted for one-quarter of GDP. Since then, remittance levels have fallen, partly as a result of loosening ties between migrants and their families. Although declining, personal remittances still represent a large share of GDP – 13.22 per cent, or approximately US\$ 1.876 billion in 2020.³⁸¹ One other explanation to the remittances declining pathway since 2010 is that, after the introduction of the visa-free regime with the European Union and in parallel to the banking fraud crisis that undermined trust in the banking system of Moldova, migrants switched to remitting using informal money transfer channels, or brought the money with them when travelling back to Moldova for vacations.

With the pandemic, free movement of people has been restricted, and remittances are once again being sent via formal channels. In 2020, Moldovan migrants transferred US\$ 1.876 billion, more than twice as much as the total amount of FDI in 2020 (US\$ 589 million) and exceeding the total net ODA to Moldova in 2019 five-fold (US\$ 342.7 million).³⁸² However, as uncertainty from health pandemics has severely impacted economies worldwide, the FDI outflow plummeted in Moldova to -0.03 per cent of GDP in 2020.

In Moldova, a quarter of households (approximately 237,000 households) **receive remittances** and, for over a half of these households (approximately 118,000 households: 52.4 per cent in 2018), remittances constitute more than 50 per cent of the disposable income available. In rural areas, the share of remittances in disposable income is particularly high, reaching 59.7 per cent in 2018, 7.9 per cent higher than in urban settlements. Almost a quarter of households (23.4 per cent, or 224,000 households) would fall below the poverty line if deprived of remittances. In rural areas this share reaches 30.5 per cent.³⁸³

The number of young people who depend on financial transfers from abroad is increasing. About 15 per cent of men aged 23–38 (about 5 per cent more than in 2009) and 18.2 per cent of women aged 23–38 (5.8 per cent more compared to 2009) rely on transfers from abroad as their main source of income.

According to a recent IOM survey, **the amount that migrants remit home every month is equal to an average of €350 per person**, with a variation in the

range of €30 to €1,500. Most migrants (42 per cent) send at least €1,000 every year; 14 per cent regularly send €500–€1,000 per month; while every third migrant (34.9 per cent) sends home amounts ranging between €100 and €500. Funds received from migrants are used for house repairs and construction (24 per cent), food (24 per cent), health (21 per cent), children's education (17 per cent) and to purchase consumer goods (10 per cent). Small amounts of transfers are spent on financing agricultural production (1 per cent) and investments in land or agricultural equipment (3 per cent).

Evidence shows that a significant amount of remittance transfers to Moldova are spent on household consumption. Much of the remaining remittance flows are household saving. Given the right circumstances these remittances could, to a much larger extent than is possible today, be invested and significantly leveraged for co-financing development in Moldova. Nevertheless, in order to achieve this, several factors are crucial, such as reducing the administrative and regulatory pressure in business operation (especially in case of small business); simplifying the process of fiscal administration; adopting as many as possible IT solutions in the provision of state services needed by entrepreneurs; reforming the justice system; harnessing in a maximum transparent framework the resources disbursed through state programmes for business support; simplifying the procedures related to insolvency and execution of the collateral; and maintaining the macroeconomic and political stability.

However, contrary to initial projections, the money transfers from abroad to Moldova have been increasing since July, which leads to two assumptions: (i) although many Moldovan migrants returned after being affected by COVID-19 and loss of jobs in the destination country, emigration recovered once the lockdown was relaxed, and (ii) many migrants have settled in destination countries and continue to remit in the same amounts, yet via formal channels due to unfavourable epidemiological situations preventing them from travelling and bringing the money themselves. **Consequently, remittances will likely remain one of the key features of the economy of Moldova in the medium term, but demographic trends are likely to continue declining up to 2030.** Consequently, reaping the “diaspora dividends” in the short term represents a challenge.

Although figures on remittance flows are calculated at the national and international level, these only capture

381 World Bank, “[Personal Remittances, Received \(Current US\\$\)](#)”, data for Moldova.

382 OECD, “[ODA to Moldova](#)”.

383 Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova Migration and Asylum Office, [Extended Migration Profile Report](#). See also Government of Moldova, [Analytical Note: Labour Force Migration](#).

a small fraction of the multitude of ways in which migrants and diasporas impact their countries of origin and residence. This lack of data on other types of contributions has had a direct impact on the ability of Moldova to develop evidence-based policies. With an increasing number of diaspora engagement policies, the still-general scarcity of data means decision makers have little evidence on which to base and monitor their strategies and programmes, which often end up being overly focused on remittance flows due to their prominence in analytical literature. Migrants create bridges that allow the sharing and dissemination of knowledge, ideas, values, technology and other resources. They are agents of change who can have a profound impact in reshaping the worlds they inhabit. As such, these communities are important actors that can accelerate the achievement of sustainable development as framed within the 2030 Agenda and beyond.

FDI and the challenges of low productivity

FDI increased steadily between 2016 and 2019, but is still suboptimal. Moldova lags behind peer countries, both in terms of the volume and number of projects. FDI inflows rose from US\$ 84 million in 2016 to US\$ 589 million in 2019. The surge in FDI is mainly explained by integration into regional chains from Eastern European countries and from Germany, as well as by several inbound FDI projects that target export-oriented automotive production, as well as tourism. These sectors are particularly likely to face severe consequences as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on global and regional value chains, and this positive FDI trend will likely be affected.

Despite recent increases, FDI remains low compared to other countries in the region. In relative terms (i.e. *per capita*, per US\$ 1,000 GDP and as a percentage of fixed capital formation), FDI inflows to Moldova remain lower than several comparator countries, including Albania, Estonia, Romania and Ukraine. The data also show that these statistics for Moldova are lower than the average for countries with economies in transition. The weakness in FDI inflows can be partly explained by the underutilization of the country's export potential, notably due to the low competitiveness of companies in Moldova, and also to political instability, weak protection of foreign investments, and insufficient knowledge of the country's potential.

The implementation of the European Union free trade agreement (DCFTA 2014) has improved trade relations between the European Union and Moldova in recent years, and the European Union now buys close to two-thirds of the total exports of Moldova and accounts for 54 per cent of its total trade. That said, the full trade potential of this agreement has not been exploited. Authorities in Moldova have achieved substantial prog-

ress in harmonizing trade legislation with the requirements of the European Union *Acquis Communautaire*, including non-tariff measures. At the same time, the capacity of different state agencies has lagged so that they remain ill-equipped to ensure proper implementation of DCFTA requirements. At the same time, enterprises have weak technological capabilities that make it difficult for them to comply with European Union regulatory requirements. These two weaknesses have created bottlenecks throughout the international supply chain for small and medium-sized enterprises in Moldova. Small and medium-sized enterprises face regulatory and procedural difficulties when obtaining trade documents, as procedures for submitting information remain repetitive and paper-based. Consequently, products that are integrated into regional co-operation agreements are primarily agricultural products with low value added. The underutilization of export potential can partly be explained by low total factor productivity and innovation shortfalls, resulting in the low competitiveness of companies in Moldova. Political instability and weak protection of foreign investments are also factors.

Over the last decade, the agrifood industry grew at an annual average rate of 4.5 per cent, which was slower than the average annual growth in the manufacturing industry (5.2 per cent). In addition, between 2015 and 2019, average annual growth rates for the two sectors were much lower, at around 1.1 per cent and 2.9 per cent respectively. Despite the country's commitment to industrialization, the contribution of the industry to GDP remains one of the lowest in the region. After steady growth between 2010 and 2015, there was a clear downturn between 2015 and 2019, when the industry's contribution to GDP fell to 14.2 per cent, including 11 per cent in manufacturing. The gross value added created by the industry is caused primarily by narrow specialization throughout its value chains with low-resource intensity.

Activities of low and medium technological intensity make up between 80 per cent and 85 per cent of manufacturing, dominating the sector. These include food and beverage manufacturing and the manufacture of non-metallic mineral products, textiles and clothing and products from rubber and plastics.

The last five years has seen a significant increase in the share of industries of medium-to-high technological intensity in the total volume of production of the manufacturing sector (from about 7 per cent in 2014 to about 15 per cent in 2019). These mainly produce electrical equipment and motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers, and manufacture substances and chemicals. This increase is due to the Free Economic Zone (FEZ) development policy. Continuous improvements to the fiscal Customs framework in place in the FEZs have attracted foreign investors and enabled already estab-

lished companies to consolidate their investments. The increase in FDI in these areas has had positive impacts on the volume of production, employment and exports, with one direct result being a slight change in the distribution of exports geographically and by product category. At the same time, these activities are largely based on local production schemes that generate little local added value. In addition, it is unlikely that growth in these sectors will continue due to availability of FEZ and relatively low labour costs.

Manufacturing activities that are highly technology-intensive (the production of medicines, the manufacture of computers and electronic products) make up a very small share in the value of production (1.6 per cent), and this has declined over the last five years.

The total value of goods produced in Moldova in the last five years has increased at a higher pace than in previous years, including the share of products exported to foreign markets (which rose from 37.9 per cent in 2014 to 42.3 per cent in 2019). At the same time, the share of foodstuffs produced in Moldova and exported to foreign markets fell in the same period, from 28 per cent in 2014 to 21 per cent in 2019.

The distribution of types of goods exported from Moldova reflects the situation in the production sector. In 2019, about 31 per cent of exported goods consisted of primary commodities (unprocessed agricultural products), slightly more than in 2010, while the share of resource-intensive products (mainly food) was only 15 per cent, 6 per cent lower than in 2014 and 10 per cent lower than in 2010. The share of goods produced through medium- and low-intensity technologies has increased in the last 10 years, from 42 per cent to 52 per cent; these mainly consist of products generated by the automotive industry, electrical machinery and equipment, clothing, textiles and furniture. The share of highly technology-intensive products in the total value of exports is very small (2 per cent).

The supply of goods for export is poorly diversified and reflects a high degree of concentration on products with very low added value. This makes exports and the revenues obtained from exports vulnerable to domestic shocks (for instances, shocks generated by climate conditions, or the financial crisis of 2015), as well as to external shocks. In 2019, Moldova had the narrowest range of export products among Balkan countries.

The increase in the number of preferential trade regimes that Moldova now enjoys has had an ambiguous effect on exports. Easier access to the European Union market following the signing of the European Union–Moldova Association Agreement was offset by a reduction in access to another important economic partner, Russia, which has issued embargoes on key export goods. Against the background of the geopoliti-

cal and economic crisis in the east, these trends have led to a reorientation of exports towards Western Europe, and the sophistication of the sales markets in these countries is likely to have positive effects on exports and investment. At the moment, however, the small range of exported products, their low added value, the large gaps in quality and in infrastructure and the limited progress in eliminating these gaps are just a few of the major impediments to capitalizing on the opportunities offered by preferential trade regimes.

External demand for goods from Moldova is small and not stable. Exports of goods totalling US\$ 2,779.2 million provide Moldova with a very small share in world exports (0.01 per cent), which has held steady since the beginning of the transition of Moldova to a market economy. Other states in the region are advancing at a faster pace, such as Georgia, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Baltic countries.

MSMEs represented approximately 98.6 per cent of all enterprises in Moldova in 2019

In recent years, the manufacturing sector in Moldova has grown by 3.4 per cent year-on-year on average. The expansion in manufacturing has been driven by the activity of FEZs, especially in the automotive industry, and by an increase in external and internal demand for domestic products. Manufacturing of spare parts for the automotive industry has been the main driver of growth, reaching a share of 3.5 per cent in the sector. At the same time, as construction grew on average by 10 per cent during 2019 compared to the previous year, the production of goods in this supply chain – products from plastic, metal and wood – has also risen.

Growth in the food processing industry has been generated by beverages, processing of fruits and vegetables, production of vegetable and animal oils and fats, bakery goods and meat processing. By contrast, the dairy industry is declining, affected by depletion of farming related to reduction in livestock. This was a result of a lack of adequate infrastructure and technologies in livestock farming, as well as a lack of knowledge regarding quality and marketing standards for basic dairy products. There is insufficient production of meat and milk both for both local and international markets.

The gender distribution within economic sectors reveals a **higher share of women employed in the service sector** (59.0 per cent women and 41.0 per cent

men in 2018). Fewer women are found in the agricultural sector (45.5 per cent), industry (44.4 per cent) and construction (6.9 per cent). Rather, women predominate in activities such as trade (55.8 per cent), hospitality (69.2 per cent), education (78.0 per cent) and health and social assistance (79.8 per cent).

MSMEs³⁸⁴ represented approximately 98.6 per cent of all enterprises in Moldova in 2019 and employed 61.6 per cent of all economically active people. **Micro-enterprises accounted for 85.1 per cent of the MSME sector.** MSMEs are unequally distributed across the country, with about 65 per cent operating in Chişinău and 4.7 per cent in Balti (the second largest city).

The return of migrants to Moldova as a result of the COVID-19 crisis is an opportunity to boost the MSME sector, as up to 9 per cent of migrants who participated in a survey conducted by IOM in July–August 2020 expressed an interest in starting a business or being self-employed if they were to return to Moldova.

Despite many challenges, almost a quarter of MSMEs are owned by women. In 2017, about 33.9 per cent of enterprises were owned or operated by women, 6.4 per cent more than in 2009.³⁸⁵ Women only own about 1.3 per cent of medium and large enterprises. Obstacles such as a low level of initial capital and access to finance, as well as lack of time, mean that women are half as likely as men to start businesses. This fact translates into a lower level of profitability (lower than men's by approximately 60 per cent) and productivity (by about 18 per cent). Women predominate in retail and services, while men dominate the ICT sector. Lack of access to finance means that younger women mainly open microbusinesses (92 per cent). Combining family and professional life can be a challenge for many women, and this is reflected in the fact that, among entrepreneurs, the share of married women is 10.2 per cent less than the share of married men, while women entrepreneurs are twice as likely to be divorced as men entrepreneurs. The share of women with children under the age of seven is 7.9 per cent less than men with children under seven. Women entrepreneurs were 1.4 per cent more likely to use early childhood education services and 2.5 per cent more likely to employ nannies. Sometimes they leave the children alone without supervision during working hours.

There are various support programmes for female entrepreneurship, but knowledge of these among entrepreneurs it is not very high (only about 15.4 per cent). The number of beneficiaries of support programmes offered by the state and other organizations at national level is limited, with only 5.2 per cent of enterprises making use of these. The share of women beneficiaries is also lower than that of women who are nationally registered as entrepreneurs (23.8 per cent compared to 33.9 per cent), and this serves to deepen gender differences in entrepreneurial activities. The biggest gender difference is registered in the agricultural sector, where women's businesses are 11 per cent less likely to receive support.

In 2016, MSME productivity³⁸⁶ was around €6,700 per person per year, only 16 per cent of the European Union average.³⁸⁷ **The proportion of MSMEs that offer green (environmentally friendly) products or services halved between 2015 and 2017 from 35 per cent to just 17 per cent.** In 2017, 2 per cent of MSMEs benefited from public support measures for the production of green products. While this is an increase, it is still below the European Union average of 25 per cent.

e-Commerce is still not used by most local companies, and most of their transactions are conducted in traditional ways. The fact that there is limited competition among delivery and transportation services in the country increases costs and has led to an overload of orders for companies that have started making one-off sales using e-commerce. The COVID-19 pandemic has particularly underlined the need for stimulating the digitalization of operations and skills development in this regard that would enable a possible increase in commerce at national and international levels. **Accelerating digital transition** and innovation require a proper normative framework, incentives for and efforts to be made by the government and the private sector and the support of the development community to ensure equity and inclusiveness of this process. **Moldova lags behind its peer countries in terms of labour productivity and innovation, reducing the overall competitiveness of the economy.** In order to converge to European Union income levels, Moldova will need to improve its total factor productivity, find new sources for growth, stimulate job creation and private sector investment and increase exports. The labour productivity of Moldova is one of the lowest in

384 The official definition of a MSME is as follows:

A micro-enterprise is a company with no more than nine employees, with an annual turnover of no more than MDL 9 million or with total assets not exceeding MDL 9 million.

A small enterprise is a company with up to 49 employees, with an annual turnover of no more than MDL 25 million or with total assets not exceeding MDL 25 million, and that is not classified as a micro-enterprise.

A medium-sized enterprise is a company with up to 249 employees, with an annual turnover of no more than MDL 50 million or with total assets not exceeding MDL 50 million, and that is not classified as micro or small.

385 NBS, UNW and UNDP, [Informe analítico sobre la participación de mujeres y hombres en el emprendimiento](#) (2020).

386 Small and medium-sized enterprise productivity is calculated by the ratio of value added to employment.

387 European Commission, "[2018 SBA Fact Sheet Moldova](#)", 2018.

Europe. The score of Moldova under the Global Competitiveness Index for 2019 was 56.75 (out of 100),³⁸⁸ below neighbouring Romania and Ukraine, and Moldova also performs worse than its other peers. The country's lowest scores are for innovation capacity.

At national level, too few enterprises integrate innovations into their activity (only about 19 per cent of enterprises). More large enterprises (61 per cent) than micro (17 per cent) and small enterprises (29 per cent) innovate, implicitly limiting the efficiency of the smaller businesses. Certain gender differences have also been identified: 19.7 per cent of enterprises owned by men reported introducing new products and services, compared to 18.3 per cent of enterprises owned by women. Women-owned enterprises were slightly more likely to make changes to existing products and services (4.4 per cent versus 5 per cent), which generally entails less expense. Introducing innovative solutions into company activities is directly related to improving their financial possibilities, as well entrepreneurial knowledge and skills.

Substantial progress was achieved in the reduction of state interference in the activity of private companies: 40 per cent of businesses felt **less pressure** from inspections, while the number of companies complaining about the abusive **requests for additional documents decreased threefold** according to the World Bank Cost of Doing Business Survey 2019. The annualized and quantified compliance costs savings reached US\$ 1.9 million in 2018. Notably, the share of companies paying bribes declined by 3 per cent. In addition, the implementation of electronic one-stop shops substantially reduced the amount of time for bureaucratic procedures by almost half. However, import procedures have worsened, along with overall worsening in the business environment and challenges relating to a personnel shortage and the tax system. The construction sector has been the most vulnerable, where entrepreneurs were still facing the problem of obtaining building permits. In 2020, Moldova made dealing with construction permits easier by enabling quality control by supervising engineers and by no longer requiring clearances from health and environmental agencies for low-risk structures.³⁸⁹

Energy dependency and growing importance of renewables

The country's dependence on energy imports is high, at 87 per cent. Around 74 per cent of the primary energy supply and 75 per cent of its electricity needs is covered from imports.

This dependency contributes, among other things, to high energy prices and large debts to foreign suppliers, making affordability of energy a primary concern. As a result of recent energy crisis, the gas price for Moldova have almost tripled. This is not only a huge economic burden, but also affects the country's energy security, making it vulnerable to risks related to fuel supply disruption.

The residential sector is the largest energy user, with a 40 per cent share of national energy consumption. **The energy use per capita in Moldova is about one-fourth of the one in OECD countries and is likely to increase** further as incomes rise. Improving energy efficiency is one of the most cost-effective options for meeting growing energy demand. It contributes to energy security, a better environment, improved quality of life and economic well-being. Out of all sectors of economic activity, the buildings sector has the largest potential for cost-effective improvement in energy efficiency and emissions reductions.

The energy performance in residential and non-residential buildings is low in the Republic of Moldova.

In Moldova, deployment of renewables has so far been limited, except for the use of biomass in the heating sector. The newly created solid biofuel production industry (briquettes and pellets) has already created about 400 new jobs in rural areas and had an assessed turnover of USD 6 million to USD 8 million in 2017. However, much more shall be done to further stimulate biomass energy production.

Around 70 per cent of energy consumption for heating is dependent on connection to the electricity grid. Since 2012, Moldova has been developing a legislative framework to stimulate the industrial use of non-biomass renewable energy sources, which presents great opportunities for investments in energy efficiency to deliver both cost savings and reductions in GHG emissions. Even though the new law on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources (Law no. 10 of 26 February 2016) came into effect in March 2018, additional pieces of legislation are required to ensure smooth implementation of the new support mechanisms. Furthermore, the increased use of solar PV and wind presents a new challenge, as the country does not have sufficient capacity to balance its generation.

Moldova is one of the most carbon-intensive and energy-intensive economies in the region, with energy consumption twice as high as the European Union average and accounting for 65 per cent of GHG emis-

388 Covering 141 economies, the Global Competitiveness Index 4.0 measures national competitiveness (defined as the set of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level of productivity). World Economic Forum, [The Global Competitiveness Report 2019](#) (2019).

389 World Bank, [Cost of Doing Business Report](#) (Moldova, 2020).

sions. The government is making efforts to remedy this by modernizing and reforming the energy sector, while substituting fossil energy imports, increasing energy efficiency and diversifying primary energy sources to at least 17 per cent use of renewable sources in gross final energy consumption by 2020 and achieving at least a 10 per cent share of renewable energy in final energy consumption in the transport sector by the same year. Households in Moldova have high and inefficient consumption of electricity due to outdated home appliances, incorrect behaviour and lack of tools and information on ways to decrease electricity use and become more efficient. A recent experiment³⁹⁰ indicates that households could reduce their electricity use by up to 2 per cent if the most inefficient are compared to their most efficient neighbours. Moreover, during the pandemic, during which consumption has significantly increased, continuous nudging of households has proved to be an important instrument to improve consumption behaviour.

The potential for biogas power plants in Moldova is about 134 MW in terms of installed capacity and 805 GWh per year in terms of electricity produced, equivalent to about 20 per cent of the annual national demand for energy. The volume of electricity that can be generated is limited by the availability of raw materials for biogas production. Capitalizing on these opportunities will not only promote and finance the sustainable management and treatment of waste but will also generate revenues through the secondary products produced. There are currently five biogas cogeneration stations in Moldova, with a cumulative installed capacity of 5.6 MW of electricity. Existing facilities produce biogas from animal (livestock) manure, agricultural residues, sugar industry residues (sugar beet) and solid municipal waste (landfill).

As part of the Association Agreement, the Moldova 2030 strategy, NDC2, the LED programme and other relevant national policy frameworks, Moldova has committed to greening its economy through decoupling economic growth from use of natural resources, low-carbon and resource-efficient development, sustainable (circular) production to consumption, biodiversity protection and deforestation and overall ensuring a healthy and safe environment.

As government takes actions to cope with COVID-19 crisis and its related impacts, it shall ensure that the recovery process is not jeopardizing sustainable development and green growth commitments, but is rather presented with an opportunity to accelerate transition to green and resilient economy and invest in a cleaner and more resilient future.

Moldova is as an example of a country and nation that is making socioeconomic progress and, at the same time, its carbon and material footprint is relatively and comparatively limited, underlining that lighter pressure on the planet is possible.³⁹¹ Yet there are many areas for improvement. Consumption behaviour is just one important aspect – modelling such behaviour by reducing inefficiencies is relevant. Energy and food security are equally extremely important topics for the country as Moldova is extremely vulnerable and affected by climate risks as it develops.

To ensure green growth Moldova is implementing relevant horizontal tools, such as environment impact assessment and strategic environment assessment. Environmental impact assessments (EIA) and strategic environmental assessments (SEA), in accordance with the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA (to which Moldova is party),³⁹² enable the integration of environmental and green economy considerations into development planning and making production patterns more sustainable. UNECE is assisting Moldova to fully align its primary and secondary legislation on SEA and transboundary EIA with the provisions of the Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA. The assistance provided is intended to build adequate capacities for the effective and systematic application of SEA and transboundary EIA. Beyond legislative assistance, this assistance includes extensive capacity-building activities, including a pilot project on transboundary SEA or EIA, a training workshop on SEA and transboundary EIA, development of issue-specific guidelines, awareness-raising activities and materials. This will help to prevent and mitigate the environmental and health impacts of economic growth and improve environmental governance by enhancing the transparency of decision-making, cross-sectoral cooperation and public participation.

A programme on promoting the Green Economy 2018–2020 and its implementation action plan were adopted in 2018. An Interministerial Working Group on Promoting Sustainable Development and the Green Economy was established in March 2019.

In Moldova, there are about 500,000 small and medium-sized enterprises, representing around 97 per cent of the total enterprises, 50 per cent of employment and generating more than 30 per cent of the country's income. The Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Development Strategy 2012–2020 and its Plan of Actions for 2018–2020 foresee green economic development for small and medium-sized enterprises. The Programme on the Promotion of Green Economy for

390 UNDP, “#StayAtHome, but #SaveElectricity – Behavioral Experimentation Continues in the Era of COVID-19”, September 2020.

391 UNDP, [2020 Global Human Development Report](#).

392 For more information, see www.unece.org/env/eia/welcome.html.

2018–2020 and its action plan set as an objective the greening 30 per cent of small and medium-sized enterprises by 2020. Moldova is currently working on a new strategy.

It is widely acknowledged that financial tools are critical enablers for large-scale and transformative changes. This is also true when it comes to changes needed for the ability of societies to transform and transition to green and sustainable economies. In Moldova, the use and application of fiscal instruments designed to promote sustainable practices and values are broadly unexplored.

Innovations and R&D as drivers of sustainable economic development

Moldova spends a modest amount on R&D (0.24 per cent of GDP in 2019), eight times less than the European average of 2.18 per cent and around half as much as neighbouring Romania (0.51 per cent, 2018) and Ukraine (0.47 per cent, 2018). Moldova ranked fifty-ninth out of 131 countries and economies in the GII ranking in 2020, accumulating a total of 32.98 points out of possible 100.³⁹³ According to the 2020 global ranking on the Innovation Input Sub-Index, Moldova stands in seventy-fifth place, while in the Innovation Output Sub-Index it is ranked forty-eighth. In terms of infrastructure, Moldova took eighty-eighth place; in human capital and research, it is seventy-fifth; in creative activity outputs, it is fifty-first; in market sophistication, it is forty-second; in business sophistication, it is eighty-eighth; in terms of institutions, it is eighty-first; and in terms of knowledge and technology outputs, it is fifty-first. Among lower-middle-income countries, Moldova ranked sixth, after Ukraine, India and the Philippines.

In 2019 expenditure on R&D amounted to MDL 498 million (approximately €25.5 million), or 0.24 per cent of GDP. Most expenditure is on operational costs and capital investments. This low level of spending on R&D leads to an innovation shortfall and losses in the country's competitiveness and productivity. Moreover, weak linkages between research institutions and the private sector makes innovation transfer rather difficult and sporadic, with many R&D products not reaching the market and lower value added subcontracting developing.

In 2019, about 31 per cent of the total value of exports from Moldova pertained to primary goods, substantially higher compared to similar countries. The proportion of resource-intensive products in exports that

would imply the processing of raw materials (primary commodities) is quite low. The opposite of primary commodities are goods produced with a high intensity in technologies, whose share in the exports value is low. This includes some re-exported products, such as pharmaceuticals and medical products.

Moldova faces difficulties in adjusting its export-oriented production to the resource-intensive technological change. Comparative analysis of the share of gross expenditure on R&D in GDP in comparable countries suggests that Moldova underinvests in science and technology, innovations and knowledge transfer. The GII shows Moldova declining ranking of expenditures on R&D by 35 places, being surpassed by Georgia and North Macedonia in 2019.

Labour productivity is very low in all three sectors of the economy of Moldova, which is evident in international comparisons. Compared to the averages in the countries of Central Europe and the Baltics, the value of this indicator does not even reach 50 per cent.

Boosting productivity is a necessary condition for economic development, but not the only condition, as the economy of Moldova is being affected by structural changes related to population ageing, emigration and macroeconomic and fiscal stability. All of these need to be addressed with equal attention.

Moreover, it should be noted that low labour productivity is a result of the concentration of employment in activities that require low or low-to-medium intensity knowledge and technology, especially in rural areas. Low incomes, poor living conditions, reduced access to good-quality infrastructure and services, including education and medicine, and poor business conditions in the country limit opportunities for the rural population to engage in non-agricultural businesses. The outcome is a reduced demand for labour, including educated and highly qualified labour.

Emerging IT sector and the digitalization agenda

Moldova has a dynamic and competitive telecommunications market characterized by high Internet access speed, good mobile services accessibility and technological development.

In recent years, the ICT sector has become one of the most dynamically developing sectors in the economy of Moldova. In 2019, the ICT sector contributed 4.7 of GDP, while its gross value added was 9.2 per cent higher than in 2018. This was a result of govern-

393 In the GII, Moldova scored 35.5 points in 2019, the lowest since 2013. For comparison, the world average in 2019 based on 129 countries was 36.31 points. The Global Economy, Moldova, available at www.theglobaleconomy.com/Moldova/.

ment policy measures to stimulate growth in the ICT sector and in innovation, through the establishment of the Moldova IT Park in 2018. The Park³⁹⁴ is virtual, and residents of the Park can operate in any region of the country³⁹⁵ while benefiting from a specially simplified business model that includes a single tax of 7 per cent on sales income. At present, there are 567 companies³⁹⁶ in the IT Park, a quarter of which are companies with foreign capital, and more than 80 per cent of the products and services delivered by these companies are exported to developed markets. It is worth noting that in 2019, the IT Park companies that have foreign capital registered 60.45 per cent of total exports, compared to 39.55 per cent of those that just have domestic capital. The average salary of an IT Park employees grew by 22 per cent from 2018 to 2019, reaching MDL 29,766, and IT Park residents' real revenue reached US\$ 210.7 million (MDL 3.69 billion) in 2019.³⁹⁷

The combined ICT services market was valued at approximately US\$ 154.4 million in 2018, growing from about US\$ 107.5 million in 2016. The domestic ICT market grew from US\$ 27.5 million to US\$ 33.5 million in the same period, while the value of the export market grew from around US\$ 80 million to US\$ 120.90 million.³⁹⁸ Nevertheless, Moldova is still behind Ukraine and Belarus in the development of its ICT sector. The domestic ICT market has been developing at a slower pace than the export market. However, the increasing migration-to-Cloud technologies in the domestic market and implementation of a digitalization road map, as well as the growing demand for ICT products spurred by the COVID-19 crisis will increase the demand for ICT consulting and support services.

Over 76 per cent of the population use the Internet,³⁹⁹ digital literacy is one of the most advanced in the region and access to the Internet is ubiquitous. More than 98 per cent of localities in the country have access to fibre-optic networks and to high-capacity mobile Internet. However, Internet penetration at household level is still relatively low: only 49 per cent of households had access to broadband Internet in 2018, substantially lower than the average in the European Union, and lower than in neighbouring Ro-

mania. Furthermore, only 51.3 per cent of households in rural areas have Internet access,⁴⁰⁰ and access is much lower for vulnerable groups living in poverty. Among these groups, Roma households are least likely to have Internet access.⁴⁰¹

Agricultural sector challenges

Agriculture was traditionally a key sector in the economy of Moldova and the largest contributor of exports. In the pre-COVID-19 period, the contribution of the agricultural sector to GDP was often negative,⁴⁰² but it has still maintained an average growth rate of 2 per cent. This negative contribution was amplified in 2019–2020 by the severe drought, and its intensity offset the positive dynamics of previous years. This sector is still one of the main drivers of economic development, although its share in GDP has been decreasing in recent years from 11,5 per cent in 2017 to 9,5 per cent in 2020⁴⁰³ Furthermore, the impact of the drought in 2020, which accounted for more than one-third of the observed decline in output, is a wake-up call to remind about vulnerabilities resulting from the lack of economic diversification.

Agricultural output is affected by climate change and faces challenges related to the underutilization of modern technologies and innovations. The year 2020 was particularly difficult for agriculture and farmers due to the severe drought in the country which affected both the northern and southern part. Thus, the agricultural production volume index in households of all categories (agricultural enterprises, farms and households) in 2020, according to NBS estimates, was 73 per cent compared to 2019. The decrease in global agricultural production was determined by the decrease of plant production by 35.9 per cent and of animal production by 3.8 per cent.⁴⁰⁴

The livelihood of people living in rural areas depends mainly on agriculture activities, as **approximately 57 per cent⁴⁰⁵ of them are working in agriculture or related sectors.**

394 Eligible activities include software development, data processing, IT consulting, hardware management, R&D, animation and digital design.

395 In 2019, the majority of companies (495) were registered in Chişinău, followed by Gagauzia (5), Balti (4), Cahul (2) and Ialoveni (2).

396 Out of all companies resident in the IT Park, 44 per cent are micro-enterprises and 32 per cent are small enterprises.

397 Moldova IT Park, [Annual Report 2019](#) (2019).

398 European Union Mayors for Economic Growth, [Market Research of the IT Sector of Economy in the Eastern Partnership Countries](#).

399 World Bank database, "[Individuals Using the Internet \(Per Cent of Population\)](#)", Moldova.

400 NBS data for 2019.

401 V. Toarta, Profile of Roma Women and Girls (UNDP and UN WOMEN, 2016), p. 25.

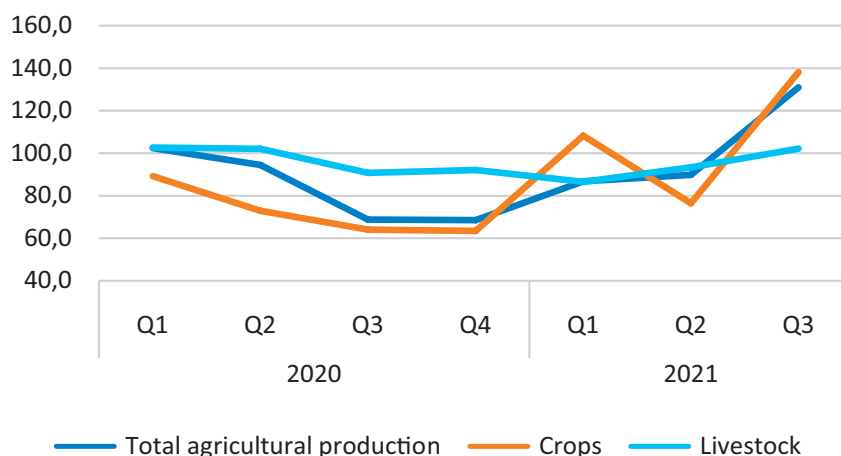
402 Between 2000 and 2016, the share of agriculture in GDP almost halved from 29 per cent to 14 per cent, while in contrast the share of the service sector increased from 49 per cent to almost 70 per cent of GDP.

403 https://statistica.gov.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/Moldova_in_cifre/2021/Breviar_2021_eng.pdf.

404 https://statistica.gov.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/Moldova_in_cifre/2021/Breviar_2021_eng.pdf.

405 NBS data for 2019.

Agricultural production dynamics (per cent, corresponding quarter from the previous year = 100)



Source: NBS

Climate change is increasingly affecting the agriculture of Moldova, resulting in the degradation of arable lands and decreases in production, among other negative effects. The main climate adverse phenomena occurring in Moldova over the last decade are **increasingly severe droughts, intense floods**, torrential rain, hail, strong winds and landslides. In Moldova, the area affected by water erosion is about 840,000 ha, one-third (33.6 per cent) of the total area of arable lands in the republic.⁴⁰⁶

In 2020, there was a drought that lasted for almost six months, affecting both spring and autumn crops and significantly decreasing the plant production figures. In this sense the yield per hectare of main agricultural crops (wheat, barley and grain maize) decreased almost halved in 2020 compared to 2019.

All this is weakening the food system in Moldova, with losses in food production leading to a deteriorating in human health and living standards. Agriculture is recurrently affected by weather conditions. Extreme events occur regularly and have a significant impact on rural livelihoods, and on the economy as a whole. **The economy of Moldova already bears significant costs from climate extremes and foregoes potential benefits and these real and opportunity costs will continue to grow with a future changing climate.** Potential savings from better protection against current harmful climate impacts are estimated to be substantial, amounting to more than US\$ 100 million per annum in total. These are mostly due to damages caused by flooding and a variety of weather impacts on agri-

culture, as well as the cost of climate-related health impacts (extreme heat mortality and food-borne disease). Projections for the future indicate that the frequency and duration of hot days with temperatures above 30°C will increase.⁴⁰⁷ The probability of heavy rainfall and damage from hailstorms will also increase. The frequency of wet days in summer is projected to decrease, but the intensity of extreme events is projected to increase. These changes in heavy rainfall events have implications for crop damage.⁴⁰⁸ The present total cost of inaction on climate adaptation is estimated at around US\$ 600 million, equivalent to 6.5 per cent per cent of GDP. This value is expected to more than double in real terms by 2050 to around US\$ 1.3 billion. The forecast is that there will be substantial water shortages for the Prut and Nistru River basins in the future, leading to insufficient water available to irrigate crops.⁴⁰⁹ The agricultural sector would need to improve adaptive techniques such as mainstreaming agro-ecology approach and introducing climate-smart water efficient technologies.

Moldova possesses large areas of agricultural land as a share of the total land in the country, (76.05 per cent) being in the top five in the region, second after Kazakhstan, followed by United Kingdom, Ukraine and Turkmenistan (the European average is 45 per cent), **but this land is not efficiently utilized.** Pastures (land suitable for hay and grazing) occupy around 14.8 per cent of the total land used for agriculture in Moldova.

In recent decades, there has been an intensification of multiple forms of soil degradation, especially erosion.

406 FAO and ITPS, Status of the World's Soil Resources – Main Report (2015).

407 These simulations are produced by the HIRHAM model. The HIRHAM model is a numerical short-range weather forecasting system developed by the international HIRLAM Programme (<http://hirlam.org>) and is used for routine weather forecasting by a number of meteorological institutes.

408 World Bank data for 2018.

409 World Bank data for 2016.

According to the data of the scientific institutions in the field, the soils affected by surface erosion occupy about 981,560 ha, including 558,170 ha with a low degree of erosion, 288,070 ha with a moderate degree of erosion and 135,320 ha with a strong degree of erosion. Thus, the direct and indirect damage caused by erosion is MDL 2.723 billion. About 80 per cent of the country's arable land is located on slopes, so work to prevent and combat surface erosion is a priority for the sustainable development of agriculture.⁴¹⁰ At the same time, 48 per cent of the pastures are affected by different levels of degradation while the current productivity of pastureland has been estimated at 20 per cent–50 per cent of its potential. Climate change is expected to further reduce the plant and livestock production, as well as the productivity of pastures.

Every fifth employed person in Moldova is engaged in agriculture, forestry, or fishing (61 per cent of men, 39 per cent of women, and 38 per cent of youth), **but the share of informal employment in agriculture is high** (around 59.1 per cent in 2020, according to the NBS).⁴¹¹ According to the Agricultural Census (2011), only 36 per cent of agricultural farms are managed by women, and most of these women (57 per cent) are of pre-retirement or retirement age.⁴¹² Together, women farmers administer just 19 per cent of the total farmland in the country. Most people working in the sector – 73 per cent of men and 84 per cent of women – are employed informally.⁴¹³ In particular, women work more in low value added agricultural production subsectors, operate on a smaller scale and are more likely to work as family workers. Women entrepreneurs face constraints getting access to concessional loans and to state-funded business and entrepreneurship development programmes.⁴¹⁴

Wage levels in the agricultural sector are 34.1 per cent lower than the national average due to the seasonality of labour demands and the low level of qualifications among agricultural workers. The government provided tax incentives in attempt to increase the level of qualifications and knowledge among agriculture workers, but this had little impact.⁴¹⁵

Younger people in rural areas have seen their income from agricultural activity decrease by half in

recent years, while at the same time more and more are now earning part or all of their income in other areas of the economy. Statistical data reveals a change in the distribution of income sources in young households (aged 23–38) during the period 2009–2018. In 2009, over 22 per cent of men and 20.3 per cent of women aged 23–38 were solely reliant on income from agricultural activities. By 2018, this had decreased to 10.4 per cent for men and 10 per cent for women. Over the same period, the number of young people with sources of income in other sectors of the economy than agriculture increased by over 3 per cent for both women and men, from 23.0 per cent in 2009 to 26.6 per cent in 2018 for women, and from 29.0 per cent in 2009 to 32.4 per cent in 2018 for men. Young men and women are trying to engage in very diverse forms of agro-based enterprise development in rural areas, but they face many challenges. These include the lack of (i) access to consistent extension services, coaching and support to develop business plans to identify feasible options; (ii) access to capital and collateral to access institutional credit; and (iii) technical knowledge, information and access to markets.

A figure of 29,200 people changed their residence place inside the country during 2020. The population mobility index in 2020 registered a value of 11.1 per 1,000 inhabitants. Migration flows from rural to urban have the highest share in the structure of internal migration.

Young people living in rural areas are constantly migrating in other countries for a better income and labour conditions. Between 2014 and 2019, about 70,000 youth migrated⁴¹⁶ yearly from Moldova for better incomes and life standards.

The share of agrifood sector production within the wider processing industry has declined by 3.5 per cent in recent years (from 37 per cent in 2014 to 33.5 per cent in 2019). Over the same period, the volume of production within the food industry increased by more than 40 per cent. Wine production accounts for one-third of the food processing industry. The makeup of the food processing industry did not change very much, but there have been noticeable improvements in quality in vegetable and animal oil processing, meat

410 MARDE, Program de îmbunătățiri funciare în scopul asigurării managementului durabil al resurselor de sol pentru anii 2021–2025.

411 NBS data, available at <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=6952>.

412 Vremis, Women in Rural Areas.

413 UNDP Moldova, [Inequalities in Urban and Rural Moldova](#).

414 The government and donors have initiated several initiatives targeted at women, such as the Ministry of Economy's initiative to help women in business and the special initiatives for women to access AIPA resources. The European Union-funded Business Academy for Women assists women to start and manage their own businesses. The project, implemented by the Organization for Development of the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Sector, has contributed to the formation of a community of entrepreneurs and the creation of a National Network of Women Mentors.

415 NBS, [Earnings, Labour Costs and Number of Employees in 2019](#) (2020) [in Romanian].

416 [Emigranti si imigranti in baza traversarilor frontierei de stat](#). SiteTitle (statistica.md).

processing and bread and patisserie processing. Sugar production has fallen by about 46 per cent, as a result of the impact of climate conditions and a lack of labour.⁴¹⁷

Horticulture has been emerging as a priority sub-sector, generating higher added value, yet traditional agricultural crops (wheat, corn, sunflower) and viticulture still predominate. Orchards, vineyards and vegetable crops occupy around 11 per cent of total agricultural land. In 2020, the production of vegetables decreased by 22 per cent. As a consequence of spring frosts in 2020, the harvest of fruits, walnuts and berries declined by 21 per cent, and the grape harvest fell by 28 per cent.

Livestock production is still largely underdeveloped and emerging slowly, due to the poor management of the genetic resources and high costs associated with breeding and processing. There is also a lack of required infrastructure, and Moldova cannot export meat and dairy products to European Union markets due to its poor production standards. In 2019, the production of cattle and poultry (live mass) decreased by 5 per cent, while figures for 2020 register a small increase of 9 per cent. Milk production of all types has fallen by 12.4 per cent compared to 2019, while production of eggs has fallen by 8.6 per cent. Livestock continues to be mainly determined by the well-being of the households that own it. Around 215,000 ha of crop surface were affected by low levels of precipitation between autumn 2019 and spring 2020 in the centre and southern part of the country, leading to a shortage of cereal production and higher costs for animal feed. The output of main cereal crops decreased in 2020 over 2016–2019 by 51.08 per cent for wheat, 35.14 per cent for barley and 72.85 per cent for maize.⁴¹⁸ This was one of the main factors of the fall in milk yields in 2020.

The wine industry contributes 3 per cent to the national GDP and is responsible for around 7 per cent of total exports. It is one of the most important sub-sectors providing jobs and income in rural areas. The total area of vineyards is 126,000 ha, including 119,000 ha of yielding vines. The volume of wine produced in 2019 was 14.6 million decalitres (3 per cent less than the average for 2001–2018). There were 199 wineries listed in the National Vine and Wine Register in 2019 (6.41 per cent more than in 2018). Wine from Moldova is currently exported all over the world. Key markets include the CIS (especially Belarus, Kazakh-

stan and the Russian Federation) the European Union (Poland, Czech Republic, Germany and Romania), China and the US.

Moldova has good potential for organic agrifood production, currently substantially underdeveloped. The total area under organic farming in Moldova has grown steadily during the last decade and continues to increase; it now covers around 4 per cent of agricultural land. Organic areas are mostly under arable crops (95 per cent), while permanent crops occupy only 3 per cent, with most production being oriented towards exports.

Farms in Moldova are largely dominated by smallholders, who play an important role in the country's agricultural and rural development, and who generate over 62 per cent of the total volume of agricultural outputs.⁴¹⁹ The share of smallholders and family farms out of the total number of agricultural holdings is 98.2 per cent, with 168,100 family farms of below 10 ha registered in 2020. Only 3,265 farms are bigger than 10 ha, equal to 1.9 per cent of the total.⁴²⁰ Family farms utilize 43.4 per cent of the total agricultural land in Moldova, while the larger corporate farms utilize 56.6 per cent of agricultural land. The smallholder farms face constraints in accessing state subsidies and support programmes due the current unequal treatment of the subsidy regulation and multiple barriers in competing with larger farms.

Irrigation systems for agriculture are not sufficiently developed and are outdated. There are 88 central irrigation systems in the country (built during the Soviet period). Of these, 10 were renovated during 2010–2015, while the other 78 are functional, partially functional or non-functional. Access to irrigation, including small-scale irrigation is very limited (around 9 per cent of total agricultural land, or 222,190 ha), which is one factor among others contributing to reduced crop productivity.

Exports of agrifood products account for about 80 per cent of goods traded by Moldova . In 2020, trade in agrifood products reached US\$ 1.9 billion, of which US\$ 1.1 billion were exports and US\$ 0.8 billion were imports. The export of agriculture products is dominated by oil seeds and oleaginous fruits (20.6 per cent), cereals (10.4 per cent), fruits and vegetables (20.8 per cent) and beverages (20.5 per cent). Agrifood products made up 44 per cent of total exports. Exports of agrifood products with higher added value

417 NBS, [The Value of Manufactured Industrial Production, by Types of Activity, 2014–2019 \(n.d.\)](#) [in Romanian].

418 FAO, Crop Assessment Report: Republic of Moldova Drought Response. 2021

419 FAO, Country Study on Smallholders and Family Farms in Moldova.

420

are still limited due to the inadequate storage and post-harvest infrastructure, as well as poor marketing capacities. Access to European Union market for export of animal products (poultry meat and eggs) remains one of the biggest challenges of the government and producers.

The key comparative advantage of Moldova relates to trade benefits of the DCFTA agreement facilitating access to the European single market, as well as the country's geographical proximity to the European Union. Furthermore, high level of e-readiness and recent infrastructure development are additional factors creating preconditions for FDI inflow. However, the low level of innovation, brain drain and persisting dependency on technology transfer is not prevented from taking full advantage of trade benefits with the European Union, nor the CIS.

Tourism

As the service sector makes up over 57 per cent of the economy of Moldova, at the same time it is one of the most affected by COVID-19, the overall economic impact was high. Furthermore, although the contribution of tourism and hospitality to GDP is low (below 1 per cent), this sector has emerged as one of the fastest growing in recent years; affected by the containment measures, the sector lost its dynamism in 2021. Restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic led to a decline of over two-thirds in the tourism sector: outgoing tourism declined by 84.3 per cent, domestic tourism fell by 46.3 per cent and incoming tourism went down by 20.2 per cent. This led to a substantial fall in revenues for tourism companies (-81.4 per cent versus 2019), with the largest decline for outgoing tourism (-86.1 per cent) and incoming tourism (-82.5 per cent), followed by a decline in domestic tourism of 60.6 per cent between January and June 2020. Similarly, hospitality employees were among the most affected in the overall economy especially the ones working in the urban areas. The average number of employees decreased in the second quarter of 2020 (compared with the similar period of 2019) with more than 60 per cent.⁴²¹

Labour-market perspectives: barriers and disincentives to employment

Ongoing processes of economic transition, volatile growth,⁴²² population ageing and the shrinking labour-force have all strongly affected the labour-market of Moldova.⁴²³

In 2020, the population of Moldova stood at 2,640,400. This means that, in just six years since the last census in 2014, the country lost nearly 8 per cent of its inhabitants. Low and decreasing fertility and losses in high net emigration have taken their toll. Population decline is even sharper for the working-age population (aged 15–65), whose numbers have contracted by nearly 12 per cent over the last five years.

Outward migration⁴²⁴ has made a dent in the LFP and employment rates, as emigration and remittances feed the reluctance of Moldovans to participate in the labour-force. At 42 per cent as of 2019, the LFP rate is worryingly low compared to the European Union average of 70 per cent and is also below the regional average of 68 per cent for Europe and Central Asia. In addition, a gender gap of roughly 8 per cent between the women's and men's LFP has been reported consistently over the last few years. Low employment rates have led to labour-market inactivity and discouragement that further kept people outside the labour-force. By 2019, the number of people employed in Moldova had dropped to 990,000.⁴²⁵ High rates of inactivity (53 per cent for men and 62 per cent for women in 2019), underemployment, and pervasive precarity further compound the already gloomy labour-market, and make the working-age population of Moldova, and their families, extremely vulnerable to shocks.

Outmigration and economic growth in recent years have given rise to record low levels of unemployment, although high levels of inactivity persist. The unemployment rate was 5.1 per cent in 2019 (women: 4.4 per cent; men: 5.8 per cent). Unemployment among young adults aged 15–24 is a more pressing problem and reached nearly 8 per cent in 2019. Moldovans, however, are more likely to be inactive than unemployed. One in every three young people is not in the labour-force.

421 UNDP, [Social and Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Republic of Moldova](#).

422 The growth model, propelled mainly by consumption and remittances, has been unsustainable and is losing strength

423 NBS, [Number of Population with Habitual Residence in the Republic of Moldova, 1 January 2020](#).

424 As of 2019, one third of the labour force was reported to be working abroad or looking for work abroad. Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova Migration and Asylum Office, [Extended Migration Profile Report](#).

425 The decline registered in 2019 was due mostly to a methodological change in the definition of employment. Beginning in 2019, households producing food for their own consumption are no longer included in employment statistics. This category of people represents a significant and rising component of the population outside the labour force in Moldova. Due to these changes, labour market indicators in 2019 are not comparable with previous years.

There is a downward trend in the proportion of young people (aged 15–24) who are NEET. The share of young people who were NEET fell from 28 per cent in 2014 to 20 per cent in 2019,⁴²⁶ still a high proportion that needs to be tackled through public policies. The proportion of NEET individuals with family responsibilities increased by 5 percentage points between 2014 and 2019, correlating with a spike in inactivity in the labour-market among women aged 25–44.

The COVID-19 crisis is driving some Moldovan migrants to return from abroad. Some of these returning migrants are unemployed, and this requires a policy and services response (in the form of unemployment benefits and social assistance) to take advantage of their skills and ensure their absorption into the labour-market.

According to IOM estimates, roughly 150,000 labour migrants will likely return to Moldova during 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, equivalent to around 10 per cent of the domestic working population of Moldova. Based on the results of an IOM survey conducted in July–August 2020, 22.7 per cent of returning migrants will try to find work; this could lead to a doubling of the unemployment rate.

Educational attainment has improved, while employment opportunities for many seem not to have changed appreciably. Rising educational attainment is typically associated with powering labour productivity. That has not been the case in Moldova. Better educated young people, particularly young women, face significant challenges in finding jobs outside the agricultural sector, implying a lack of sufficient professional and high-level technical jobs to absorb the number of skilled individuals in the labour-force. As a result, first-time jobseekers more often than not end up in informal employment and/or with unstable employment contracts.

Informal employment exposes both structural deficiencies and a deficit in decent work. The share of informal employment has escalated, reaching nearly 40 per cent of total employment in 2018. In 2019, this figure declined to 23 per cent, following the adoption of a new definition of employment by the NBS that is in line with international best practice.⁴²⁷ Men are 6 per cent to 10 per cent more likely to be employed infor-

mally than women, as men dominate in agriculture and construction, where informality is more pervasive. Women, on the other hand, are mostly affected by occupational segregation, inactivity due to family responsibilities, little support to reconcile work and family, limited economic power, as well as lack of security and pay differentials for work of equal value.

People in Moldova perform an average of 3.9 hours of unpaid work a day, higher than the average in OECD countries (3.4 hours a day). Most unpaid work is done by women, with 4.9 hours a day, representing 66 per cent of their total working time, while men allocate half that, undertaking 2.8 hours of unpaid work a day, or 46 per cent of their total working time. The differences between men's and women's burden of unpaid labour are the most visible in the case of unemployed parents with children: mothers in this position undertake 8.4 hours a day of unpaid labour, compared to 5.9 hours a day undertaken by fathers.⁴²⁸

Approximately 25 per cent of women and 15 per cent of men reported that they spent more time on at least three unpaid domestic activities during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Married women, as well as women with children have taken on an even greater share of additional unpaid domestic work compared to men. The data from UN Women reveal a higher burden for married women, with a score of 3.6 on the household burden index, followed by single women, with a score of 3.0.⁴²⁹ Furthermore, women with children scored significantly higher on the household burden index than women without children (4.1 and 2.3, respectively). Similarly, women in households with three or more people scored higher than women in households with one or two persons.⁴³⁰ In Roma families made up of adults with a low level of education (or no education) living in rural areas, women spent 70 per cent of their time on domestic activities during the pandemic lockdown.⁴³¹

Labour productivity has started to recover in recent years, but it is critical not to lose momentum. High levels of informal employment, as well as education and skills shortfalls along with an economy dominated by agriculture⁴³² have dampened productivity perspectives in Moldova for many years.⁴³³ In 2019, however, labour productivity appeared to be showing some signs of improvement. Growth in labour productivity of

426 The drop in these figures stems primarily from new population estimates and methodological changes.

427 In 2019, households engaging in production for their own consumption have been removed from the employment figures.

428 NBS, Time Use Survey Data (2012).

429 UN Women, [The Impact of COVID-19 on Women's and Men's Lives and Livelihoods in Europe and Central Asia](#), p. 27.

430 Ibid.

431 UN Women Moldova, Impact of COVID-19 crisis on Roma population in the Republic of Moldova, p. 10.

432 Half of all Moldovans still live in rural areas (57.1 per cent), and about a third of the labour force works in agriculture, a sector where productivity is lower than the national average.

433 World Bank, [Moldova Policy Notes 2019](#).

0.5 per cent was mainly due to a reduction in unproductive labour, and firms being more innovative and adapting to market conditions.⁴³⁴

While labour productivity is rising on a par with the increase in net wages, high inequalities still prevail.

In 2019 labour productivity rose on a par with the increase in net wages. Wages have registered a significant increase in real terms, but gender disparities persist. From 2014 to 2019, the average wage in the economy rose by roughly 30 per cent in real terms. This growth was driven by wage hikes in the budgetary sector, a growing demand in several sectors, and the falling supply of labour. Increases in real wages gave rise to unit labour costs and depressed labour demand. Despite this positive trend, more than 60 per cent of all employees receive a wage that is lower than the mean value in the national economy. Moreover, in 2018 the gender pay gap was 13.5 per cent and is much wider in better-paid sectors like ICT (32.5 per cent) and finance (38. per cent).⁴³⁵

Poor working conditions, work insecurity and rising inequalities are salient features of the labour-market in Moldova.

A growing proportion of jobs are in less productive firms.

Despite an increase in the number of people out of work in Moldova, net job creation improved recently, with most of the jobs created being middle-skilled roles in retail and service sectors.⁴³⁶ The ratio of economic activities in tradable sectors (i.e. production of goods or services that are or could be traded internationally) remains very low, nevertheless. Only 30 per cent of employees in Moldova were employed in tradable sectors in 2019.⁴³⁷ Strikingly, nearly half of the workforce in Moldova are in jobs that require low levels of qualification,⁴³⁸ this further confirms that the most productive (small, young, foreign, and private) firms have the most productive jobs, but they are not increasing their share in employment.⁴³⁹

Skills mismatch and the shortage of skilled workers rank among the top obstacles (along with access to finance, absence of the rule of law and corruption) to enterprise performance, according to employers in Moldova. In 2019, the job vacancy rate (jobs registered with the Public Employment Service) grew by 83 per cent (i.e. roughly 5,000 available jobs), coupled with a fall in registered unemployment.

Equal opportunities and equal treatment in employment are still issues in Moldova.

Women in Moldova have good educational outcomes, but are less active in the labour-market, confront high occupational segregation, seniority and pay constraints and low levels of security. Women are also less likely to be engaged in market-related activities. Lack of access to childcare for children aged 0–3 makes it hard for young mothers to return to work or to re-enter the labour-market. Among women aged 25–49 with at least one child (aged 16 or under), the employment rate in 2018 was 53.8 per cent, and for women without children, it was 59.5 per cent. For women belonging to minority groups, constraints to LFP related to education and skills, the impact of care and domestic responsibilities, and domestic violence are exacerbated by their marginalized status. One outcome of this is that employment rates for Roma women were only around 15 per cent in 2018.⁴⁴⁰ Persons with disabilities confront low employment opportunities and limited workplace adaptation, as well as limited access to employment support services.

According to the respondents of the human rights perception study from 2020, the state ensures the right to work especially in case of women (53 per cent). The groups for which the right to work is less ensured by the state, according to the respondents of the perception study are: persons with disabilities, LGBTI+ persons, persons from Transnistria Region, detainees and ex-detainees and drug users.⁴⁴¹

Moldova needs to unlock the potential of its workforce to enhance livelihoods and business performance.

This untapped potential is to be found in people who are not currently active in the labour-force, such as those living in households engaged in subsistence agriculture, women who are currently out of the workforce, short-term migrants and/or people intending to migrate, and migrants returning as a result of the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. In total, these

434 World Bank, [Moldova Special Focus Note: Are Moldovan Firms Ready for Fast Recovery?](#) (2020).

435 ILO, [Wage Regulations and Practices in the Republic of Moldova](#) (2017).

436 Ibid.

437 Expert Group, [Labour Market of the Republic of Moldova: A Comprehensive Analysis](#), 2020.

438 Ibid.

439 World Bank, [Moldova Poverty Assessment 2016: A Jobs Diagnostic for Moldova – 10 Key Facts](#) (2016).

440 ILO, [Roma Women and the World-Of-Work](#).

441 Human Rights Perception Study. People's Advocate Office, 2021, p. 42.

groups amount to more than 150,000 people. Structural reforms could additionally enable some 50,000 people to move across into more productive sectors. The COVID-19 crisis is likely to make an additional workforce available; that said, the labour deficit is projected to spike again by 2024, as a result of increases in labour demand.⁴⁴²

Moldova currently reports on some of the 10 migration-relevant SDG indicators, however the indicator 10.7.1 about recruitment costs is the only one that Moldova currently does not cover. Collection, compilation and dissemination of data and methodological development, coordination and capacity-building for the improvement of international migration statistics is needed for Moldova, including SDG data disaggregation.

The last two years have seen an increase in the number of people who are self-employed or contributing family workers, indicating that precarious employment is on the rise and that prospects for decent work are daunting. The share of workers in unstable employment (employees with temporary or short-term contracts) increased from 7 per cent in 2014 to 10 per cent in 2018. This trend has mostly affected women, among whom rates of unstable employment rose from 6 per cent to nearly 10 per cent. There are also worrying trends in regard to occupational health and safety, most likely resulting from institutional changes and liberalization reforms. The number of workplace accidents surged to 62 cases per 1,000 employees in 2019, up from 49 cases per 1,000 employees in 2016. This might have been driven by a temporary ban on business inspections and controls, including those related to occupational health and safety, along with institutional reform of the State Labour Inspection. The high incidence of occupational accidents leading to death and severe injuries are cause for concern, as are ineffective labour inspections.⁴⁴³ The legislative framework for labour inspections is weak, as Law No. 131 on state control over entrepreneurship activities limits labour inspection visits to no more than one per year and provides for employers to be notified five days prior to the inspection. In addition, insufficient financial and human resources are allocated to the labour inspectorates. The minimum wage fails to protect the lowest-pay workers resulting in serious inequality constraints. Unrevised since 2014, the national minimum wage in 2019 was MDL 1,000. The minimum guaranteed wage in the real sector reached nearly MDL 3,000 in the same reference period. The minimum salary in the budgetary sector is as much as 75 per cent of the subsistence level.

The wage disparity between men and women reached **14.4 per cent** in 2019

The labour-market of Moldova is characterized by substantial gender and age-based discrimination.

Age discrimination in the labour-market is quite common in Moldova, affecting not only the youngest, newcomers to the labour-market, but also older workers over the age of 50. The main form of discrimination that older employees face relates to the right to work: older employees are encouraged to give up work voluntarily, have limited access to training, and face difficulties in finding employment.⁴⁴⁴ The employment rate for women was 41.4 per cent in 2018, compared to 48.1 per cent for men.

In 2019, the wage disparity between men and women reached 14.4 per cent, the equivalent to an annual financial loss for women of MDL 14,490, the highest in six years. The OECD average is 13 per cent. For old-age pensioners, there is a significant gender disparity in income of 21.6 per cent, which is 4 per cent higher than it was in 2018. In urban areas, the gender gap in pensioners' income is even more pronounced, reaching 32.6 per cent in Chişinău. These discrepancies lead to significant financial losses for retired women.

The factors affecting the pay gap between women and men include: level of education (which actually benefits women and reduces pay inequalities), number of hours worked, and employer profile (all of which benefit men and increase pay inequalities). These factors are calculated as accounting for 8.7 per cent of the gender pay gap. However, the gender pay gap is greater than this due to the persistence of discrimination against women in the labour-market. Although women generally have an educational advantage over men, their salaries are typically lower than men's, regardless of whether they work in the public or private sector and regardless of the field of activity.⁴⁴⁵ Hence, more needs to be done to close the gender pay gap further and to adopt a legislative framework to enshrine the principle of equal pay for work of equal value and to combat gender role stereotypes.⁴⁴⁶ CEDAW recommended reviewing wages in all sectors, applying gender sensitive analytical job classification and evaluation methods,

442 Expert Group, [Labour Market of the Republic of Moldova](#).

443 CESCR, "[Concluding Observations on the Third Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova](#)", E/C.12/MDA/CO/3, 2017, para. 36.

444 Help Age International Moldova and Platform for Active Ageing, Monitoring Report of Measures Taken During COVID-19 Pandemic.

445 Eastern Europe Foundation et al., [Gender Inequality in Wages: How and Why Women Lose Financial Loss in Front of Men](#) [in Romanian].

446 CESCR, "[Concluding Observations on the Third Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova](#)", E/C.12/MDA/CO/3, 2017, paras. 34 and 35.

conducting regular labour inspections and implementing regular pay surveys as measures to narrow and ultimately to close the gender pay gap.⁴⁴⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic has further shocked the labour-market. New data reveal a nearly 9 per cent decline in employment in the second quarter of 2020 compared with the previous year. The relative decline in employment is greater for women (10.1 per cent) than for men (7.7).⁴⁴⁸ **A decline in employment in the second quarter of 2020 has been accompanied by large increases in inactivity as well in unemployment in many parts of the world. Contrary to this trend, in Moldova, unemployment has decreased.** However, focusing on changes in unemployment alone can be misleading. The rise in inactivity has important policy implications. Experience from earlier crises shows that activating inactive people is even harder than re-employing the unemployed, so higher inactivity rates are likely to make a recovery in employment levels more difficult. Moreover, younger and older people have been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 crisis: since these two groups are normally at a higher risk of becoming inactive, there is a danger that they will face long-term labour-market disadvantages. The most affected older persons on the labour-market were the pre-pensioners, of whom about 16.7 per cent lost their salary income.⁴⁴⁹ According to the OHCHR survey, only 26.1 per cent of respondents with disabilities were employed in December 2020. Just over 5 per cent of respondents with disabilities had lost their jobs between March and May 2020. The OHCHR study⁴⁵⁰ also suggests that the labour situation of Roma has aggravated since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of Roma respondents, 7.3 per cent were employed from March to May 2020, and Roma was the only group that continued to lose jobs until the end of the year, having an employment rate of 5.5 per cent in December 2020. Only 2.4 per cent of young Roma reported having employment (compared to 43.5 per cent non-Roma). Almost all Roma with only primary or no education lost their jobs (from 3.4 per cent to 0.9 per cent).

With Roma men mainly being employed in the informal sector (66.7 per cent), they became even more vulnerable during the pandemic. Roma men in 84.6 per cent of cases lost their job, because their work could not be done remotely, compared to 37.4 per cent among non-Roma, with 46.2 per cent indicating their lack of capacity to work remotely. **The COVID-19 crisis has given rise to categories of “newly vulnerable” workers and**

During the second quarter of 2020, the employment rate declined by 9 per cent

jobseekers.⁴⁵¹ The crisis is likely to increase the skill fragmentation of NEET individuals and decrease their resources. Many people who are self-employed have found themselves in a difficult position. Migrants have been forced to return home or re-evaluate their work prospects, with informal workers having low legal protection and falling outside of the social safety nets available in the countries where they are employed. Several tens of thousands have returned to Moldova since the beginning of the crisis.⁴⁵² Travel restrictions have meant that seasonal migrant workers have been prevented from taking up employment abroad for which they have contracts, and for which many may have paid high recruitment fees and expenses. The crisis threatens to dry up remittance flows – a vital source for nearly 22,000 households in Moldova.⁴⁵³ Some returning migrants are ready to invest and create jobs in Moldova, but to do so, they need financial support and mentoring to open new businesses. The others bring skills and knowledge but require support to adapt and gain employment.

The deluge of unemployment claims due to the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and an unparalleled inflow of new jobseekers are placing unprecedented pressure on private and public providers of employment services (PES), which have an important role to play in keeping labour-markets functioning during this crisis. Underdeveloped digital services are likely obstructing PES agility and effectiveness in service delivery. PES need to adapt their operating models, use resources efficiently and maintain cooperation and communication with the key stakeholders and partners.

A quarter of households in Moldova receive remittances

447 CEDAW, “Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova”, CEDAW/C/MDA/CO/6, 2020, para.33 (a).

448 ILO Monitor, “COVID-19 and the World of Work” (sixth edition), 23 September 2020.

449 Help Age International Moldova and Platform for Active Ageing, Monitoring Report of Measures Taken During COVID-19 Pandemic, p. 6.

450 OHCHR, [Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova](#), p. 25.

451 UNDP, [Social and Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Republic of Moldova](#).

452 IOM, [IOM Rapid Field Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 on the Wellbeing of the Moldovan Diaspora](#).

453 Ibid.

Freelancers, while not being considered part of the traditionally vulnerable groups, have found themselves in a difficult position. Craftspersons, individual entrepreneurs and small farmers have been affected by a decrease in sales, restricted access to raw materials and decline in domestic demands and have serious concerns about declines in their cashflows.⁴⁵⁴ The average income of self-employed persons in agriculture is only 53 per cent of the national average salary and 82 per cent for those self-employed in sectors outside of

agriculture.⁴⁵⁵ About 13 per cent of the freelancers were affected by income loss between in the amount of 75 per cent to 100 per cent, while the 40 per cent of surveyed individual entrepreneurs stated that their income and savings are not enough to cover their monthly bills. Freelancers showed exceptional worries over the period of the next three months, with 73 per cent being very concerned about the evolution of the socioeconomic situation. It is worth noting that they were also the most indebted group in the sample.⁴⁵⁶

SDG 16: ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE JUSTICE SECTOR

The justice sector of Moldova offers a stark picture of lack of public trust,⁴⁵⁷ coupled with a troubling internal snapshot: in a detailed 2017–2018 survey of court users,⁴⁵⁸ 56 per cent of citizens reported either no change or a deterioration in the work of courts. Only about 20 per cent of citizens believed the courts were fair and impartial, and almost 50 per cent of lawyers shared these concerns. Of businesses, 68 per cent did not expect fair court proceedings.

Only 20 per cent of citizens believe that courts are fair and impartial.

Furthermore, the respondents broadly felt that an ordinary citizen was unlikely to get a fair trial (more than 62 per cent shared this opinion). Citizens stated that the rights of persons with disabilities and of those with lower incomes were least observed in the justice system.

Access to justice for vulnerable groups remains a key concern. Access constraints for vulnerable groups and the lower mobility of the rural population, com-

bined with longer distances to travel and poor transport networks have increased concerns about the impact of the planned court consolidation on access to justice services.⁴⁵⁹

Vulnerable groups continue to face challenges in their access to justice. The act of justice seems to be expensive, with approximately 29 per cent of people claiming that the costs linked to going to court were impossible to cover.⁴⁶⁰

Ethnolinguistic minorities have their access to justice limited when filing lawsuits. The Equality Council⁴⁶¹ issued a range of decisions stating that courts not accepting lawsuit requests in Russian amounts to discrimination. In 2019, 22.5 per cent of the decisions of the council were related to discrimination based on the spoken language.⁴⁶² The Russian language is used to a large extent by ethnic minorities for inter-ethnic communication as well as in their interaction with the state authorities. Public documents and legislation are not routinely translated into minority languages. This becomes particularly relevant for women and girls⁴⁶³ who have experienced psychological, sexual or physical violence from their husbands or partners. The path for survivors of sexual violence through the justice system is cumbersome and discouraging, as sometimes they are also re-victimized by the contacted professionals, including police officers, criminal investigation officers, forensic experts, prosecutors and judges. In spite of

454 Expert Group, Needs Assessment and Evaluation of COVID-19 Impact on MSMEs. 2020

455 NBS, Household Budget Survey (2019), estimations by PwC, [Social and Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Republic of Moldova \(2020\)](#).

456 UNDP, [Social and Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Republic of Moldova](#).

457 Judiciary: 22 per cent (as of June 2020); General Prosecutor's Office: 26 per cent (as of December 2019). Institute of Public Policy, [Public Opinion Barometer](#), p. 21.

458 World Bank, [2017–18 Surveys of Court Users](#) (2018).

459 Ibid.

460 See the study on Improvement of access to justice, from resources to results available in Romanian at <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/295451537501885223/pdf/UPDATED-Moldova-JSPEIR-Final-Romanian.pdf>, p. 75.

461 The Council for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination and Ensuring Equality.

462 Equality Council, [General Report on the Situation in the Field of Preventing and Combating Discrimination in the Republic of Moldova](#).

463 A 2011 [United Nations study](#) found that 63 per cent of women had experienced psychological, sexual or physical violence from their husband or partner. Rural residents, older people and separated or divorced women were at higher risk of experiencing violence. In 2017, 89 per cent of family-related crimes registered by the police were domestic violence cases; 80 per cent of the victims of domestic violence were women, and 90 per cent of the aggressors were men.

their guaranteed material and procedural rights, survivors of sexual crimes face a bureaucratic system that is not prepared to accept in full the status of survivors of such crimes, to grant them protection, support and the opportunity to exercise their right to a fair process. **Persons with disabilities are often denied procedural accommodation in court**, while the accessibility of court buildings, communications and services remain a serious challenge.⁴⁶⁴

Only 50 per cent of the citizens feel free

The same survey suggests that low-income groups have lower awareness than higher-income groups about the functioning of the court system, and state that the judicial system is least accessible in terms of cost and information. Only 1 in 10 citizens are satisfied with the efficiency of courts, prosecutors and bailiffs, while unreasonably long proceedings and lack of thoroughness of proceedings are major concerns of citizens. On access to court services, respondents said more attention should be paid to making information about cases and court decisions available to the public and making complaint-filing procedures simpler and clearer. Less than half of the respondents reported being able to find the court decision they needed. Of citizens, 57 per cent are not aware of court reforms, while those who are aware complain about having insufficient information about them.

Therefore, despite the ongoing reforms, little progress is perceived at the local level by citizens, and coherent coordination mechanisms among law enforcement, security and justice institutions for effective administration of justice seem to be lacking at both national and local levels. Men and women, particularly from marginalized or minority groups, are not able to claim their rights and access justice effectively.

On the same note, the 2018 Human Rights Perceptions Study from 2018⁴⁶⁵ and 2020⁴⁶⁶ that the right to a fair trial is among the most violated human rights. Vulnerable and marginalized groups experience a low level of en-

joyment of their right to a fair trial: older people (23.4 per cent), persons with disabilities (23.3 per cent), people from rural areas (20.5 per cent), people with low incomes (19.5 per cent), unemployed (18.4 per cent); and other vulnerable groups (including Roma, religious minorities and LGBTI+ individuals) (18.5 per cent). According to the respondents of the 2020 human rights perceptions study, the right to a fair trial is more assured for children and women. Respectively, about 47.7 per cent consider that this right is ensured to children to a very large extent, followed by the group of women who accumulated about 43.5 per cent such statements. At the same time, they consider that the rights of other vulnerable groups (Roma, religious minorities, LGBTI+, etc.) are only weakly secured with only 27.6 per cent affirming a positive connotation, followed by those of the poor (29.2 per cent) and the unemployed (30.4 per cent).

A basic precondition for citizens to participate in the decision-making process (apart from access to relevant and accurate information) is a feeling that they have the freedom to criticize the authorities without any repercussions. In other words, criticism of the authorities must be cost-free. Data from nationwide surveys indicate that, although the proportion is increasing, only half of the country's citizens feel they can exercise this right freely.⁴⁶⁷

The lack of effective and fair justice service delivery, coupled with low trust in governance institutions, reinforces a culture of civic passivity, while weak social cohesion feeds deep societal divides and inequities along urban-rural, income-level, ethnic and linguistic lines. This is particularly relevant at the subnational level where the levels of civic engagement and legal empowerment are low and CSOs are weak, not being capacitated to ensure proper monitoring and oversight of justice delivery in their communities and unable to engage with the justice chain actors in a constructive manner.

The promise to institute an independent judiciary is one of the recurring leading reforms committed to by each government. Substantial efforts and resources have been deployed in recent years to achieve this goal. Many legal reforms have been enacted, yet their implementation lags behind and often lacks political will and conviction.⁴⁶⁸ The result is a judiciary that could be, but is not yet, fully independent, as the full meaning of judicial independence is not yet sufficiently rooted in the minds of the judges. Achieving judicial inde-

464 In February 2016, the United Nations Special Rapporteur stated that "persons with disabilities are often denied procedural accommodation in court, while the accessibility of court buildings and services themselves remains a serious challenge" in Moldova. CEDAW, "[Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova](#)", CEDAW/C/MDA/CO/6, 2020, recommended that the country address physical and communication accessibility in courts of law, including the lack of procedural accommodation in court procedures and the deprivation of legal capacity on grounds of disability.

465 United Nations Moldova, [Perception of Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova](#) (2018).

466 People's Advocate Office, [Perception of Human Rights in the Republic of Moldova](#) (2021).

467 United Nations Moldova, [Republic of Moldova Voluntary National Review Progress Report 2020](#), p. 120,

468 International Commission of Jurists, "[Only an empty shell](#)". [The Undelivered Promise of an Independent Judiciary in Moldova](#) (2019).

pendence requires a change in attitude towards the judiciary from the executive and other sources of state and private power but, most importantly, from the judiciary itself. The process may not always be smooth or speedy and may involve tensions with other state institutions. Such tensions, open or latent, are inherent in all societies based on the rule of law.

Challenges remain in securing an independent justice system. Even though the share of public spending on justice sector in Moldova is higher than the average in the region, given the low level of the budgetary spending, the expenses for the judicial system are not enough. Judges in Moldova have the lowest salaries in the region, except for young judges in Ukraine. The judicial personnel received even lower salaries.⁴⁶⁹

The United Nations Human Rights Committee recommended that the Republic of Moldova ensure the suf-

ficient remuneration of judges and a sufficiently long tenure to guarantee their independence and integrity. Another measure recommended by the treaty body was to ensure prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into any allegations of interference with the independence of the judiciary and prosecute and to hold responsible those found guilty, including judicial officers who may have been complicit.⁴⁷⁰

The independence of judges is also weakened by the way they are appointed, as well as by the existence of Article 307 in the criminal code. The judges are appointed for an initial period of five years, with the possibility of prolonging that mandate until retirement. Article 307 provides for criminal sanctions for the issuance of an unlawful court decision. This provision in fact annuls the principle of issuing a decision based on the intimate convictions of the judge.⁴⁷¹

ANNEX C

RISK ASSESSMENT TABLE

POLITICAL STABILITY		
Probability: Moderate	National capacity to cope: Moderate	Impact: High
<p>The election in July 2021 of a majority government led by PAS for the first time in several years allowed for the legislature and executive to pull together and has the potential to ensure political stability and a consistent pursuit of the government’s reform and European integration agenda. However, the gas crisis that unfolded in October 2021 following the expiry of Moldovagaz’s contract with Gazprom and the terms under which the new contract was renegotiated, accompanied by sharply rising market prices, has become a serious challenge for the leadership in Moldova. Popular frustration with rising energy prices has undermined some of the government’s initial support, while also distracting the government from critical anticorruption and judicial reforms. The continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic presents an additional layer of problems. Challenges in the gas and energy sector, which could also be aggravated by ongoing geopolitical tensions, have the potential to continue through 2022 and could impact the government’s capacity to implement its reform agenda.</p> <p>UNCT capacity:</p> <p>UNCT has demonstrated ability to manage a crisis situation (the political crisis beginning in early 2019 and the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 and 2021). UNCT is continuing to use the Crisis Risk Dashboard to assist in monitoring risks. Additionally, UNCT is assisted by a Human Rights Adviser, a Peace and Development Adviser and a National Peace and Development Officer.</p>		

469 LRCM, [Moldovan Justice in Figures – A Comparative Perspective](#) (2019).

470 Human Rights Committee, Concluding Observations on the Third Periodic Report of the Republic of Moldova, para. 30.

471 International Commission of Jurists, [“Only an Empty Shell”](#).

SOCIAL COHESION, GENDER EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Probability: High

National capacity to cope: Moderate

Impact: Moderate

Discrimination and continuing inequalities are a moderate risk for the country's development. Although poverty has been reduced in the country, other inequalities persist, such as unequal access to public services throughout the territory. Economic disparities and discrimination against vulnerable groups are among the obstacles that affect social and economic rights and the cohesiveness of society. In a survey conducted by the RCO on social cohesion and COVID-19, low social tolerance was observed in the perceptions of people with opposite geopolitical views. Immigrants also seem to be badly perceived by the Right Bank survey participants, with 9 per cent stating that they would prefer them to leave their communities. More concerningly, 20 per cent of respondents from the Right Bank are still reluctant to have any interactions with Muslims, Roma and people living with HIV. The perception of LGBTI+ individuals, sex workers and drug users – who seem to be accepted by less than 60 per cent of respondents from the Right Bank and about 70 per cent from the Left Bank – is much worse. In terms of gender, the survey also highlighted continuing worrying trends.

UNCT capacity:

UNCT has conducted a number of assessments, surveys and reports to gather updated information on this issue. Using this information to better inform programming needs more support. UN Women, UNDP, OHCHR, IOM, UNAIDS, WHO, UNFPA and others have been engaging in this area, contributing with policy recommendation and direct interventions.

The United Nations has continued its confidence measures and human rights-focused programming in the Transnistria Region. These programmes aim at strengthening relationships between the banks, building platforms and mechanisms to bring the two banks together and begin to address some of the factors and dynamics driving the protracted conflict. The results and analysis from SCORE and the recent survey on the impact of social cohesion were mainstreamed into United Nations advocacy and programming work to ensure that the United Nations better addresses some of the underlying causes of weak social cohesion in Moldova. More specifically, they have been used to strengthen United Nations strategic documents such as the UN CCA, the Socioeconomic Response and Recovery Plan and the Socioeconomic Impact Assessment, as well as programming such as the UNFPA youth project and UNAIDS work with marginalized groups.

REGIONAL AND GLOBAL INFLUENCES

Probability: High

National capacity to cope: Moderate

Impact: High

Moldova remains vulnerable to geopolitical developments, in particular in the context of the heightened regional tensions that developed through 2021. The July 2021 parliamentary elections allowed for the establishment of a parliamentary majority and government that shares the vision of, and works in unity with, the presidency, with an ambitious reform agenda, plans for European integration (that have already seen increased support from the European Union and IFIs) and the potential to ensure a degree of political stability that has eluded Moldova for years. However, divisions between the United States/NATO and the Russian Federation over the European security architecture and the perceived risk of conflict in the region are likely to have impacts, including in the context of the Transnistria Region settlement process and in relation to the country's energy security, trade and economy.

UNCT capacity:

The United Nations is an impartial actor, and as such sometimes finds it challenging to manoeuvre through regional and global dynamics.

ENVIRONMENTAL RISK

Probability: **High**

National capacity to cope: **Moderate**

Impact: **High**

Due to its geographic and economic features, Moldova is highly vulnerable to climate change, while being exposed to disasters due to hydrometeorological phenomena and natural hazards. Landslides, drought and floods are among the top hazards caused by climate events, with floods posing the greatest risk to communities and the economy. Due to current and projected unusual high temperatures leading to water scarcity, incidence of forest fires is increasingly posing a threat to natural ecosystems, agricultural systems and human settlements. Economic losses due to climate-induced disasters have caused economic losses to the value of US\$ 4 million per year. Climate scenarios indicate the country could progressively trend towards a more arid environment, with the possibility of intensified droughts as well as fires.

UNCT capacity:

UNDP has been working to increase the use of renewables in Moldova. UNDRR, UNDP, FAO and other agencies have also been supporting disaster risk reduction and urban resilience building in Moldova. UNDRR in particular has supported Chişinău in strengthening local resilience to disaster risks with the Making Cities Resilient 2030 Initiative.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: POVERTY IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19-RELATED MEASURES, INFLATION AND GAS CRISIS

Probability: **High**

National capacity to cope: **Moderate**

Impact: **High**

The impact of the increase in the inflation rate (13.94 per cent), in producer's prices (over 16 per cent) and energy prices (over 60 per cent) will likely push more people into poverty. Unemployment and informal work are also factors to be considered as determinants for lowering the current trend of poverty reduction.

UNCT capacity:

A number of actions have been identified by UNCT in the COVID-19 Social and Economic Response and Recovery Plan to respond to this risk. At the same time, UNCT is closely monitoring the progress of the economic situation. UNCT could support the development of a comprehensive analysis to identify key measures to address the root causes of the risk.

SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: POPULATION DECREASE

Probability: **High**

National Capacity to cope: **Moderate**

Impact: **Moderate**

There is a moderate-to-high probability of rapid depopulation, especially due to outflows of youth and skilled workers, and this is negatively affecting human capital and slowing down the shift towards higher-skilled economic sectors and industry. In addition, increasing old-age dependency ratios pose significant challenges to the ability of the state budget to cover future pension needs.

UNCT capacity:

UN Women, OHCHR, IOM, UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF and other United Nations entities continue to lead on issues of migration and population decrease in Moldova. UNCT could support the development of a comprehensive analysis to identify the impact of the population decrease in different aspects of development.

ANNEX D

ADDITIONAL TABLES, CHARTS AND FIGURES

Chart 1. The population of Moldova by ethnic characteristics (NBS data, 2014)

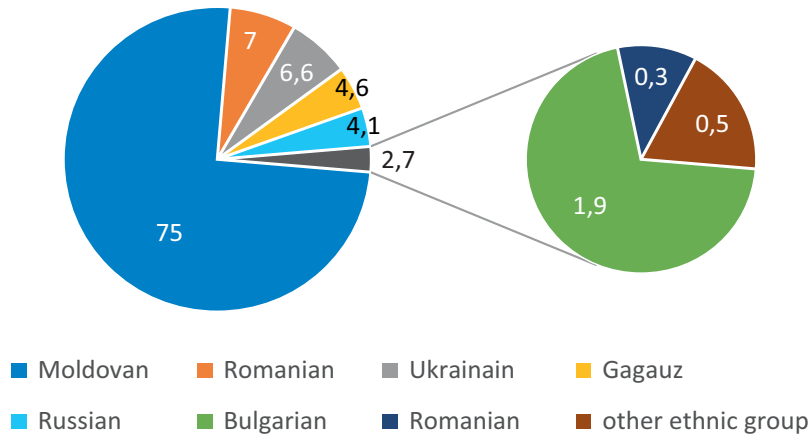


Figure 1: The performance of Moldova by SDG indicators

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

COUNTRY RANKING

Moldova
48 / 165

COUNTRY SCORE



REGIONAL AVERAGE: 71.4

STATISTICAL PERFORMANCE INDEX

0 (WORST) TO 100 (BEST)



AVERAGE PERFORMANCE BY SDG

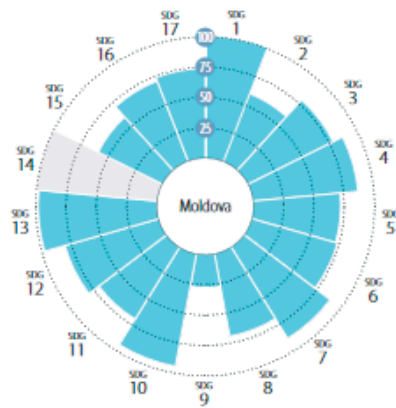
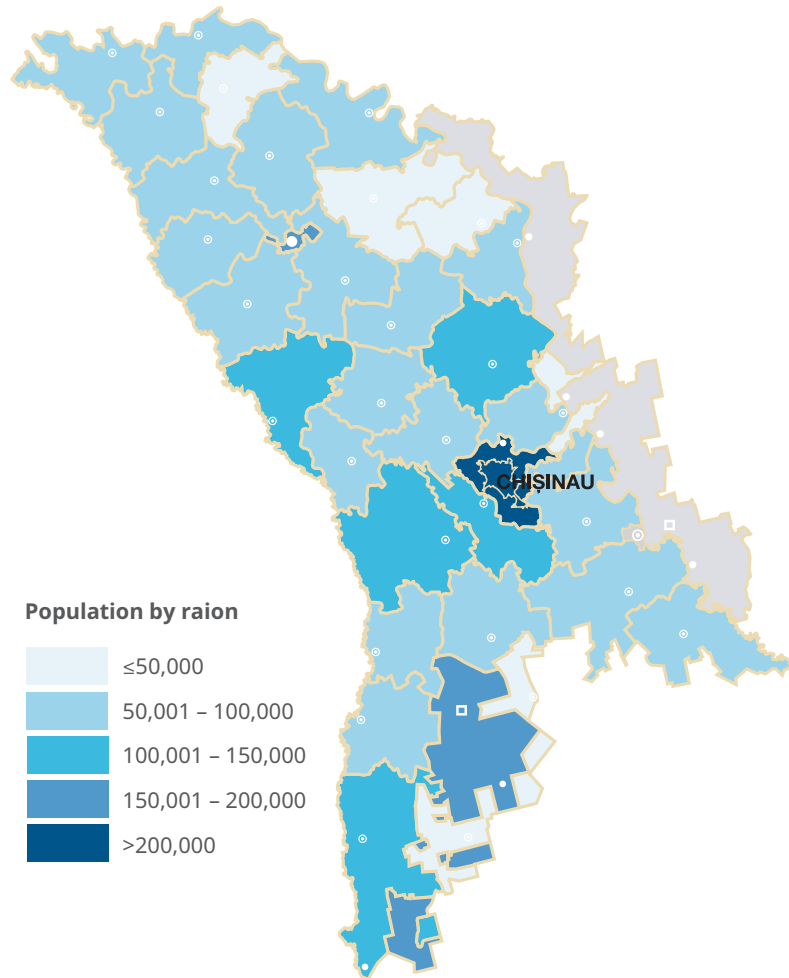


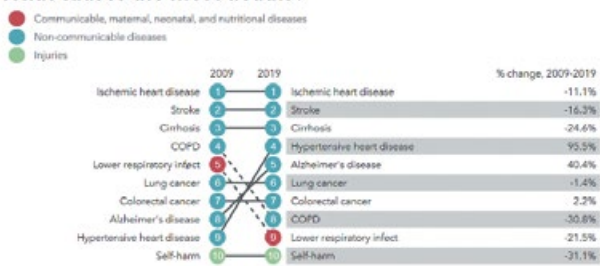
Figure 2: Distribution of the population by raion



Source: NBS

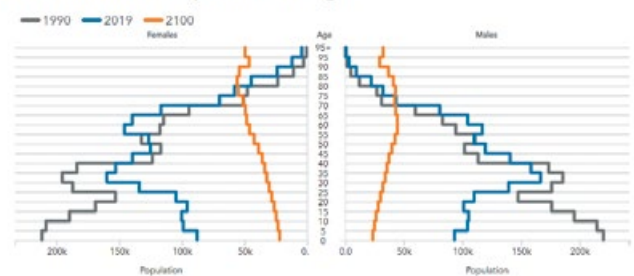
Figure 3: Causes of death by disease (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2019)

What causes the most deaths?



Top 10 causes of total number of deaths in 2019 and percent change 2009-2019, all ages combined

How many older versus younger people are in the population, and how will these patterns change?



Population age structure for males and females in 1990, 2019 (reference scenario), and 2100 (reference scenario). Forecasted data based on Global Burden of Disease 2017 results.
See related publication: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30677-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30677-2)



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