UNITED NATIONS COMMON COUNTRY ANALYSIS:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2020
The development path of the Republic of Moldova (hereafter Moldova) has been profoundly affected by political instability in recent years. Rivalry between several political parties has led to frequent changes in the institutional structure and in the top management of many governmental institutions. These factors have had negative effects on institutional memory, internal capacities and the implementation of reforms in the country.

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.1 Moldova has received a body of recommendations from the international human rights mechanisms that monitor the implementation of the treaties that the country has ratified. Based on these, the Government has developed the National Human Rights Action Plan 2018–2022.2

The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 agenda has seen substantial progress on poverty reduction, decent work and economic growth, climate action and partnerships for development (SDGs 1, 8, 13 and 17). The progress towards improving nutrition, health and well-being, gender equality, sustainable energy, industry, innovation, infrastructure and sustainable cities (SDGs 2, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11) has been more modest. In spite of multiple efforts and financing across all social areas,3 there has been less noticeable progress towards enhancement of the quality of education, and of water and sanitation. Better progress could also be made in the reduction of inequalities (particularly non-monetary inequalities), and much more can be done regarding ensuring more responsible production and consumption, as well as life on the land. Peace, justice and strong institutions (SDGs 4, 6, 10, 12, 15 and 16) are particularly important areas for improvement, in order to maximize and accelerate efforts towards achievement of the SDGs. The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a rapid transition to the digital world, and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) as an alternative path towards achieving the 2030 agenda is now undeniable.

1 Additional information on the status of ratification can be accessed at the UN Treaty Body Database. Ratification Status for Republic of Moldova.  
3 According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data, in 2017–2018 social infrastructure received the highest amount of bilateral official development assistance (41%), followed by education (22%). The progress in these areas remains suboptimal.
Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Eastern Europe. Although inequality has decreased in the last few years, social transfers still make up a significant share of household incomes. The large outflow of Moldovan migrants has led to substantial dependency on remittances for Moldova’s economy, being in the top 10 most remittance-dependent countries in the world. The middle class is still very small as a proportion of the total population, and many households remain vulnerable to economic and climate shocks, which could quickly push them back into poverty. The still high share of low-intensive agriculture in the country’s economy, low labour productivity, and underinvestment in innovation and technology pose additional challenges to the country’s socioeconomic development.

The progress in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)-led negotiation process for the Transnistria settlement in the “5+2” format has been affected by changes in the Moldovan political landscape, as well as by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The idle and protracting Transnisterian conflict resolution continues to prevent the region and its people from creating a critical mass for development, but also for catching up with the progress made by their Moldovan peers as regards the attempt to upgrade the country’s socioeconomic situation and outlook to parity with European Union (EU) standards.

Disadvantaged and vulnerable people, who are often left behind, are not sufficiently captured by official data, and they are invisible in regard to the development of policies and programmes. There is a lack of disaggregated data at the country and subnational levels in different areas and for different groups. The scarcity of data and the limited sample size in the existing data sets pose significant challenges for the identification of, and for monitoring the well-being of, those who are furthest behind. The identified data gaps require additional support to Moldova’s Government regarding investing in the quality of data for better and evidence-based policymaking and monitoring of progress on the SDGs.
Key challenges and opportunities to accelerate the SDGs Agenda 2030

AN AGEING POPULATION AND HIGH OUTFMIGRATION

Moldova loses approximately 1.8% of its population annually. The demographic impact of outmigration on the resident population structure is multidimensional: a shrinking of the number of children, high emigration of the economically active population, rapid ageing, and depopulation of rural areas. Furthermore, Moldova faces a substantial brain drain, being in the top 10 countries within the European region in terms of skilled labour-force outmigration. By 2035, the population is likely to decrease on average by 0.6% annually in the low scenario and by 1.6% in the high scenario.

The outmigration and ageing of the labour-force are likely to decrease the country’s potential for economic development, as well as the resilience of the health and social protection system. By 2035 the country’s population could fall to 2 million people, and every third person will be over 60 years of age.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, around 30% of labour migrants employed in the services sector abroad have considered returning to Moldova, leading to additional pressure on its labour market. An International Organization for Migration (IOM) survey reveals the reasons for migrants’ return, which inter alia are related to job loss (26%), temporary suspension of professional activity (20%), risk of being evicted from a rented dwelling (14%), as well as health-related problems and the fear of being infected with COVID-19 (12%).

However, as the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to be curbed as vaccination advances and the implementation of public health measures is enforced, former migration patterns are likely to be restored and maintained. On the other hand, recent elections have shown the strong commitment and willingness of the diaspora to maintain their ties with Moldova. There is a growing need to strengthen these ties between long-term Moldovan labour migrants and the diaspora, and their homeland.

EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

The education system has systemic and structural inefficiencies and imbalances that put Moldovan children behind their peers, not only in terms of access to educational facilities (notably for those with disabilities and special educational needs), but also in terms of the quality of education, which results in poor learning outcomes and suboptimal student achievement.

Children’s school-readiness has substantially improved in recent years due to improved access to preschool education and enhanced learning outcomes, despite persisting inequalities.

The decline in the number of students in the last few decades led to the need to rethink the education network and financing. Despite some improvements, the school network infrastructure is obsolete and not adequately adapted to the needs of those with disabilities. Many rural schools are still not connected to sewerage and do not have well-equipped sanitary blocks (i.e. they are not accessible for children with disabilities, are located outside the building and are not safe for young girls in particular).

Moldova’s performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) illustrates the quality challenges within the system. Most 15-year-old Moldovans lack basic skills required to participate effectively and productively in study, four out of every 10 15-year-olds cannot effectively summarize and systematize information, and 43% do not have minimum knowledge in science. Discrepancies in learning outcomes are often related to the ability of parents to pay for additional extra-school hours of tuition or other occupations/activities for children. Vulnerable children in rural areas, particularly Roma girls and girls with disabilities, are at high risk of dropping out of school. Suboptimal PISA performance is due to poor curricula and poor teaching quality.
Only two-thirds of teachers hold a pedagogical qualification. Teachers also have limited capacities to work with children with special educational needs, and teaching materials and specialized support for such children are unavailable.

**Lower quality of education in rural areas.** According to the results of the 2018 PISA, approximately 56% of students in rural schools do not reach the minimum level of competence in science. This could be due to the unequal distribution of educational services within Moldova. In addition, the rate of early school dropout is 2.5 times higher for rural youth than for young people in cities.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously affected the accessibility of early childhood education,** disproportionately affecting children living in rural areas, households with low incomes, and women-headed households. The pandemic has further **exacerbated the existing problems related to poor school infrastructure and teaching quality,** and has exposed the fact that the education system does not have the tools and skills needed to provide quality education remotely, due to the obsolete technical and material base of educational institutions (lack of ICT infrastructure and equipment, such as computers, interactive technologies, IT systems, and IT-related content), teachers' low level of general teaching skills, limited financial resources allocated to improving the infrastructure of primary and secondary education institutions, lack of elementary IT skills for online teaching, limited access of teachers to training programmes, and hence the low rate of using ICT in the teaching and learning process, as well as the lack of a coordination mechanism.

**The lack of digital skills also has negative repercussions for the safety of children and youth online.** While many actions have been undertaken to address this issue, the lack of a national strategy and coordination mechanism ensuring the sustainability of these actions, engaging all stakeholders in the implementation, still remains a challenge.

**Enrolment in the higher education sector has declined during the last decade.** The biggest challenge relates to the internal financial inefficiency and quality of teaching in sector. Moldova's higher and vocational education and training (VET) education system does not meet labour market demands in terms of skills mix. In the past 10 years, overall enrolment in VET has declined by 20%. Enrolment in secondary VET has decreased from 24,270 students in 2008/09 to 14,700 students in 2019/2020. In light of the importance of academic preparation prior to higher education, to ensure enrolment and the retention of STEM college students it is critical to place an emphasis on STEM in primary and secondary schools.

The **persistence of high school dropout rates** among Roma children, particularly among Roma girls, was one of the main concerns expressed by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee in 2020.

**The education system, which has been heavily hit by COVID-19, is struggling to overcome the challenges regarding closing immediate gaps versus undertaking a more strategic approach.** Outdated teaching methods lead to a mismatch between academic skills and real-world industry needs. This has particular implications for women, who are less likely to apply for hi-tech positions without practical experience and knowledge.

At the same time, the health and safety of the environment in which children are receiving their education is a critical component. This currently requires additional investment, in order to ensure infection prevention and control (IPC) measures (hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, clear administrative measures for distancing, isolation, pupil flow separation, mask wearing, etc.).

The above-mentioned shortcomings are a result of many factors: **insufficient efforts to continuously upgrade educational policies, the low return from the educational system in the real economy, the lack of finances for the social inclusion of all disadvantaged layers of the population, and the big brain drain that occurs after school graduation (due to the uncompetitive higher education system and lack of future opportunities).**

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Despite substantial progress in life expectancy, Moldovans live on average 10 years less than their European peers. Furthermore, extra years of life gained due to increased life expectancy are not always lived in good health. Moldovan women spend a larger proportion of their lives in poor health compared to men, while people in rural areas live four years less than their urban peers, most likely due to poorer health outcomes. There is a higher prevalence of chronic diseases in rural areas (50.8%, compared to 44.2% in urban areas). A higher proportion (19.3%) of the rural population perceives their health status as bad or very bad, compared to those from urban areas (12.8%). Despite the steady progress on improving the infant mortality rate, as of 2019 it was almost three times higher than the EU average.

Moldova faces a double health burden: from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and from communicable diseases. High rates of NCD are primarily caused by unhealthy behaviours (smoking, alcohol consumption, unhealthy diet). On the other side, communicable diseases are dominated by MDR-resistant tuberculosis (TB), while HIV infection prevalence is among the highest in Europe. TB and HIV remain a particular burden for overcrowded prison institutions (4.5% of prisoners are HIV-positive, while 40% have mental health problems), which have limited sanitation and health-care services.

Despite good progress in reducing the childbirth rate among adolescents in recent years, it is still three times higher than the EU average. Girls and women with disabilities also face particular obstacles to realizing their sexual and reproductive rights.

In recent years, Moldova has made significant progress in the prevention of cervical cancer; however, the accessibility of cervical screening and other prevention services is still lower than in the EU, due to lack of awareness about prevention among the population.

Access to health care for Moldovans is unequal due to several factors, including the geographical concentration of health-care service providers (primarily in Chisinau) and high formal and informal out-of-pocket payments. The poorest 20% of the population reported having worse access to both primary and hospital care in 2016 than they did in 2012.

Utilization rates for both outpatient and inpatient services continue to be strongly correlated with households’ consumption levels and coverage with health insurance. The current health financing system relies to a large extent on out-of-pocket payments, placing a disproportional financial burden on the poorest groups of the population. Despite substantial progress, accessibility of health care largely depends on whether a person has health insurance coverage. The majority of uninsured reside in rural areas – 31%, versus only 16% in urban area – while a large share of young people and men involved in informal employment, alongside Roma people, do not have health insurance.

The quality of health care remains one of the main challenges, which, among other factors, is affected by a lack of investment in hospital network upgrades and poor integration of health care with social services. Health-care staffing resources are insufficient. Health-care services are also limited in prisons.

The stewardship function of health authorities remains weak, due to the lack of an integrated health information system (HIS), which is needed for timely and accurate data analysis, evidence generation and informed decision-making.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the structural challenges faced by health sector in Moldova, as well as the need to strengthen health emergency management to ensure adequate response to the ongoing public health emergency and potential future public health emergencies. Curbing the expansion of the pandemic requires coordinated and consistent enforcement and observance of public health measures, including immunization.

The implementation of essential public health operations (surveillance, disease prevention, health promotion and protection) during the pandemic and beyond, requires strengthened institutional mechanisms, supported by a transparent and resilient governance, overarching coordination, and sustainable human resource development and funding.

Centre for Policies and Analysis in healthcare (PAS Centre) (2019) Barometru de sanatate a populației Republicii Moldova.
In Moldova, 24.3% of households composed of a single person aged over 60 face absolute poverty. The minimum pension covers just 63% of basic needs for those who are dependent on it. Older women are among the most affected and most vulnerable populations, having the highest risk of poverty. 44.7% of older persons declared on a survey conducted by UNFPA that their available income was not sufficient for their minimum existence needs, and this has been further exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The country’s large informal economy affects the government’s fiscal revenue for social services, while the social assistance system continues to face challenges in preventing and eliminating vulnerabilities. This environment is putting more pressure on an already high monetary child poverty rate (of 24%). Fur-
thermore, children in rural areas are at a much higher risk of poverty than children living in urban areas: the poverty rate for children in rural areas was 34.7% in 2018, compared to 9.7% among children in urban areas. In Moldova, 10.1% of children suffer from extreme poverty.

Even in the pre-COVID-19 period, economic growth (at an average of 4.15% during 2017–2019) was slowing down and was below its potential, being affected inter alia by the slowdown in the two regional economies of Russia and Turkey.

Although remittances have been declining as a share of GDP in recent years, their level is still significant (16% of GDP in 2019) and even grew statistically during the COVID-19 crisis, reflecting the formalization of money transfer flows in the context of movement restrictions. However, the vulnerability of those who rely on remit-
tances has substantially increased in the COVID-19 period.

Moldova’s general government debt declined during 2016–2019, reaching 27% in 2019. However, it will likely reach 36% of GDP by the end of 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis.

The services sector, which accounts for over 57% of Moldova’s economy and 59% of women’s employment, is the sector that has been most affected by COVID-19: for example, the tourism sector has faced a two-thirds decline.

Almost two-thirds of Moldova’s total exports and 54% of its total trade relates to the EU. Moldova underuti-
lizes its export potential. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, exports declined by 10.6% while imports went down by 7.3% in 2020.

Although increasing in recent years, foreign direct investment (FDI) in Moldova is still lower than in its comparator countries and is below its potential. The country’s dependence on energy imports is still high, reaching 87%, while diversification of energy sources towards renewables is progressing at a slow pace.

In recent years, manufacturing grew by 3.4% year-on-year, but the rate of growth slowed in 2019. MSMEs represented approximately 98.6% of all enterprises in 2019. However, only 8.4% of these were involved in manufacturing (with the majority being involved in trade and the repair of vehicles). 65% of all MSMEs are located in Chisinau Municipality.

Agricultural and food products account for about 80% of Moldovan traded goods, and one-fifth of employ-
ees are engaged in agriculture, but agricultural wages are the lowest – one-third lower than Moldova’s na-
tional average. Agri-food sector production and its size in the processing industry has declined by 3.5 percentage points during the last five years (from 37% to 33.5 %). Farmers continue to use traditional agricultural technol-
ogies, instead of developing more sustainable production by implementing environmentally friendly practices.

In total, 98.8% of agricultural producers are smallholders; they cultivate 36.4% of the total agricultural land and generate over 62% of the total volume of agricultural production. Smallholders face multiple challenges in terms of economic profitability and various threats posed by the effects of climate change and extreme weather events; at the same time, they are the least equipped to adapt to the effects of these phenomena. This situation has been aggravated by the negative consequences of a severe drought in the country, which has decreased the cereal, fruit and vegetable harvests by 20% to 50%. Moreover, smallholders experience major deficiencies in terms of accessing the financial resources needed for investment in production technologies, equipment and inputs.

A small number of large-scale farmers are increasingly able to exploit the expanded opportunities afforded by the free trade agreement with the EU, the country’s main agricultural export destination. However, smallholders struggle to comply with the strict EU market requirements and therefore target the more accessible Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) markets. Subsistence farming is on the increase and productivity has fallen, leading a quarter of the young rural population to migrate to the cities.

ICT is one of the most promising economic sectors in Moldova, accounting for more than 10% of GDP. However, the level of internet connectivity is one of the lowest in Europe. In 2019, there were 16.58 fixed broadband subscriptions and 58.9 mobile broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. In addition, connectivity prices are high. Regarding the affordability of fixed services, Moldova has the highest fixed broadband basket price as a percentage of gross national income (GNI) per capita of any country, reaching nearly 5% of GNI. The mobile data price basket relative to income costs more than 2% of GNI, being above the 2% United Nations Broadband Commission affordability target. Together with the digital skills gap, this may adversely affect the dynamics of the country’s digital transformation.

Moldova’s economy relies heavily on ICT to remain competitive: ICT has emerged as the sector with the most dynamic development, which makes it attractive to investors. The ICT industry has experienced dynamic trends and has witnessed exponential growth over the last six years and makes a significant contribution to the country’s total GDP. A key advantage of using ICT is that it increases the level of innovation in different sectors of the Moldovan economy. Yet the IT industry in Moldova remains behind those of neighbouring Ukraine and Belarus, primarily due to weak utilization of innovations and very narrow/technical specialization. Furthermore, ensuring a techno-savvy population and the upgrading of businesses is imperative in the context of rapid digitalization. However, policy restrictions limit the potential for improved industry-academia collaboration. For example, IT industry professionals are not formally allowed to teach at universities (even part-time) unless they have advanced degrees and pedagogical certification. The business side suffers from the lack of qualified specialists. Every year, Moldova misses hundreds of opportunities in the IT and engineering fields due to the low level of its academic training and outdated curricula, as well as due to placing a big emphasis on theoretical studies, rather than practical ones, which reflects the lack of an appropriate studying environment.

The number of women working in ICT industries, founding or investing in technology start-ups, or serving as high-level managers or directors in technology companies remains remarkably low. Challenges, ranging from cultural norms and biases, to lack of self-confidence, to online and offline harassment, hinder girls’ and women’s full participation. While a nascent ecosystem of start-up and innovation hubs in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries has emerged, the number of women start-up entrepreneurs remains low. Across the region, women account for no more than 10–12% of founders. Women may be reluctant to start their own businesses due to avoidance of risk-taking, lack of available support services, limited exposure to the business world, and lack of access to capital. The lack of women working in technology is also concerning because of the pervasiveness of digital violence in countries in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe.

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LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT

Despite positive growth trends before the COVID-19 pandemic, key labour market indicators show no major improvements. Moldova's labour-force participation and employment rates are the lowest in the region. In 2019, only 42.3% of the population over 15 years was in the labour-force and only 41% were employed (38% for women). In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, employment had dropped by 9% by the end of 2020.

The overall unemployment rate has been hovering close to 5% (4.4% for women and 5.8% for men). Youth unemployment is disproportionately high, at nearly 8% for youngsters aged 15–24 years in 2019.

The informal employment rate (23% in 2019) indicates both structural deficiencies and a deficit in decent work. High levels of informality are also detrimental to urgently needed productivity growth.

Moldova’s labour productivity is one of the lowest in Europe. The economy has been unable to shift resources from low- to high-productivity sectors. Shifts within sectors to higher-productivity uses have been equally slow. Innovative firms have often missed the chance to seize new market opportunities. A skills mismatch and the shortage of a skilled workforce have further hampered enterprise performance.

High economic inactivity is a salient feature of the Moldovan labour market. The share of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) aged 15–34 years was around 30% in 2019 (20% for young men and 40% young women), more than twice the EU average.11 This phenomenon can be explained by the high proportion of inactive youth that work abroad or that are involved in circular migration. A key obstacle to improving youth employment is the skills mismatch referred to above.

The poor quality of education has consequences that are felt directly on the economic front and that are reflected in the employment rate. According to employers, young workers do not have the necessary knowledge and skills mix for the labour market because educational plans and curricula do not ensure education remains relevant. In Moldova, 85% of companies mention a lack of qualified labour-force, with companies saying they require a higher level of professionalism and specific skills than they can get from many workers. Private sector actors have referred to a significant gap between the needs and professional skills mix of graduates of vocational/technical education institutions. The curricula also lead to a situation where young workers are not adaptable to company conditions. This most often leads to a high turnover of staff. Aligning the education system to the requirements of the labour market is imperative, to stop the brain drain from Moldova.12

Vulnerable groups are greatly affected by unemployment. In 2018, 36% of persons living with HIV were unemployed, while women are twice as likely to be unemployed as men.

Women’s labour-force participation is still lower than men’s, even though female students outnumber male students in tertiary education.

As the majority of Roma have a low level of education and skills they are the group that have been most heavily affected by the COVID-19 crisis, making up the highest share of those who have lost their jobs (69.2%), with Roma aged 35–49 particularly affected.13

The employment rate of persons with disabilities is half that of the general population.14 Persons with disabilities face difficulties finding employment as a result of stereotypes and prejudices in Moldovan society, but also because of the lack of access to necessary physical infrastructure and information.

11 EU average: 12.9% of 15- to 29-year-olds and 10.5% 15- to 24-year-olds.
12 Source: ITU/Consultancy Questionnaire
**ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

Moldova is one of the most vulnerable countries in Europe in regard to climate change. On average, Moldova is exposed to four to five severe droughts and one to two disastrous floods every 10 years, while economic losses from disasters over the last 10 years have amounted to over $50 million. Along with COVID-19 outbreak, the 2020 drought multiplied the negative effects on the population living in rural areas. As a result, total agriculture production decreased by 27% in 2020 compared with the last year, and plant production decreased by 36%. The country’s vulnerability to climate change has a direct impact on the agricultural and food systems, including leading to a worsening of livelihoods in rural areas, which accelerates and facilitates outmigration from rural areas.

Moldova is one of the most energy-intensive economies in the region, with energy consumption that is twice as high as the EU average. Municipalities are responsible for more than 50% of the total air pollution in Moldova. The country’s transportation system is responsible for 16.3% of total national greenhouse gas emissions, while the waste sector is responsible for 10.7%. Between 2014 and 2018 the amount of hazardous waste generated increased by eight times, from 0.2 kg to 1.6 kg per person. Only one-fifth of the rural population are connected to sewerage facilities. Energy-intensive industries and climate change effects are also affecting the sustainable management of natural resources. There has been a continued degradation of the arable lands and a decline in the potential of soil minerals for sustainable agriculture production.

Moldova does not have processes and instruments in place to ensure the resilient, sustainable and environmentally friendly management of resources and production. There is still limited waste management and recycling, which adversely affects the environment and creates the preconditions for infectious disease outbreaks. Furthermore, disaster preparedness and public health emergency readiness is still below EU standards, and requires prioritization, through financial and non-financial stimuli to the private sector and the population, but also through adjustment of the regulatory framework.

**GOVERNANCE AND THE RULE OF LAW**

Numerous challenges affect governance in the country. Although access to data has improved significantly in recent years, there are still challenges related to data accuracy and timeliness, caused by suboptimal digitalization of data-collection and processing.

Weak transparency and participation in the decision-making process of rights-holders leads to low rates of trust of the population in the government. 54% of the population believes that the country is on the wrong path. Slow implementation of measures to ensure the digitalization of public services leads to low performance of the government in regard to the efficiency and effectiveness of public service. Despite some small progress in fighting corruption and fraud, both still persist at various levels of the government and judiciary. Corruption is considered one of the main factors undermining the rule of law and other sectors of the development sphere in Moldova. A lack of access to justice, as well the lack of effective remedies for human rights violations of vulnerable groups, remain key concerns.

The perceptions of the population on the efficiency of the judicial system are mostly negative. Only 1 in 10 citizens are satisfied with the efficiency of the courts, prosecutors and bailiffs. Unreasonably long legal proceedings and the lack of thoroughness of such proceedings are major concerns for citizens. Only half of citizens feel free to express their thoughts and criticize the authorities without facing any repercussions.
A lack of effective and fair justice service delivery, coupled with the low trust in governance institutions, reinforces a culture of civic passivity. At the same time, deep societal divides and inequities along urban/rural, income level, ethnic and linguistic lines have a negative impact on the already fragile social cohesion in the country.

Despite making up 51.8% of the population, women continue to be under-represented in the Parliament, on district and local councils, as well as in central and local government.

Civic involvement of the youth is suboptimal and insufficiently sustained by vocational training, professional development and non-formal education.

Citizens’ trust and confidence in governmental institutions can be built through inclusive, open and transparent decision-making at all levels of the government, and by efficient and responsive public service delivery. The justice system can also play an important role in building the trust of rights-holders in the government and state authorities generally. Justice should be just and impartial. It should deliver effective remedies for victims of human rights violations, with particular emphasis on transposing international human rights standards at the national level.

Moldova has not reached a sufficient level of proficiency in the state language among ethno-linguistic minorities, i.e. genuine bilingualism and is far from having a multilingual approach in its policy framework. Therefore, minorities face linguistic barriers to being fully integrated into the general society. Since 2008, United Nations treaties bodies have raised concerns over the persistent underrepresentation of minorities in central public administration, particularly Roma. Legislation does not provide mechanisms for relatively proportional representation of minorities in all levels of public administration.

The lack of accessibility of public institutions, of public transportation, and of public information, including in emergency situations, as well as limited access to assistive technologies, are among the root causes of the limited participation of persons with disabilities in civil, political and cultural life.

According to the United Nations Moldova Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index (SCORE) and a July 2020 survey on the impact of COVID-19 on social cohesion, social cohesion in Moldova is fragile. Both found that there are a number of factors that undermine social cohesion in the country, including low social tolerance of different political, social and ethnic groups, and negative attitudes towards women and migrants. These negative attitudes and this low social tolerance are compounded by minimal contact between many groups, and between people located on the two banks of the Nistru river.

15 For further details, see Public Opinion Barometer, dated October 2020
17 This refers to a lack of, or inaccessible, ramps; inaccessible elevators; and a lack of special signs for people with sensory impairments, among other things.
For example, according to SCORE, about 85% of respondents would prefer for people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex (LGBTI) community, drug users, and sex workers to leave their communities. Furthermore, over half of respondents had similar attitudes to people living with HIV and AIDS, and to Muslims, and over one in three stated that they would prefer not to have contact with Jews, Roma and immigrants, and they would prefer for these groups to leave their communities.

According to the European Women's Lobby, 9 million girls throughout Europe experience cyber violence by the age of one. Furthermore, girls report being the target of harassment or violence through digital media more than boys, and incidents of such violence are likely to have increased amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. While Moldova is a signatory to the Budapest Convention on Cyber Crime, the government has not developed adequate mechanisms for redress or legal frameworks to address online violence. Furthermore, Moldova has no ratified the Istanbul Convention, which contains provisions relevant to cyber violence and hate speech against women.

Women in Moldova often face multiple forms of domestic violence. Around 60% of women have experienced psychological violence at a certain point in their lifetime, 55% have been subjected to psychological violence oriented towards making them socially isolated, and 10% have suffered economic violence at least once. In addition, approximately 40% of victims have experienced physical violence at least once in their lives, and about 19% have experienced sexual violence. For rural women the lifetime prevalence rate of violence is 68.2%, 10.8 percentage points higher than that of women living in urban areas (57.4%).

Roma women in Moldova suffer double discrimination – as both women and Roma. More than 80% of Roma believe that women's key role is to care for and look after the household, children and the family. Also, the rate of domestic violence faced by Roma women is higher than that faced by non-Roma women.

Women with disabilities lack opportunities to escape domestic violence, as most institutions and services are not accessible to them. In addition, women with psychosocial disabilities face a high risk of violence, including sexual abuse, if they are institutionalized.

The phenomenon of violence against children is widespread. Research reveals an alarming incidence of family disputes. Every third child under the age of seven is subjected to occasional or systematic emotional abuse as a witness to family disputes. Children in Moldova suffer from high rates of physical, emotional and sexual violence, and rather limited progress has been achieved in this field. Approximately 6% of Moldovan households report that at least one family member has been trafficked and exploited abroad within the past three years. Poverty and violence remain the main push factors leading victims to accept high-risk jobs.

Given the widespread lack of acceptance of LGBTI people in the society, they face various types of vulnerabilities, in particular in relation to the right to personal security and integrity, the right to effective remedy and access to services, and the right to work. 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.

Children with disabilities remain one of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups of people, and they face difficulties in the realization of their rights. In its Concluding Observations, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2017) expressed concerns about stigmatizing attitudes towards children with disabilities, which are reinforced by a lack of community services.

Roma children face discrimination to the same extent as adults, being denied the right to a safe and healthy childhood and to education. As they are less likely to be registered at birth, many lack birth certificates that are needed for them to enjoy their right to a whole range of services, including early education programmes.

Persons in detention centres are subject to various levels of vulnerability, stigma and discrimination. Imprisonment limits access to education, health care, employment and a social life.

The lack of a digital inclusion and digital accessibility framework leads to limited access of persons with disabilities to ICT products and services.

The UNCT has identified vulnerable and disadvantaged population groups (presented graphically below) that should not be left behind when addressing the above-mentioned challenges.