COVID-19 Epi and Health situation update (data as of 3 October unless stated otherwise)

The growth in COVID-19 cases has accelerated significantly. The total number of registered cases reached 294,392 at the end of September. The figure continued to grow further and now stands at 297,232.

The number of active cases has steadily increased over the past month and on 30 September it stood at 9,956, marking a two-fold increase compared to 1 September. On 3 October, the figure stood at 9,624.

The 7-day average number of deaths increased from 3.71 at the beginning of the month to 18.3 at the end. The figure has increased further and now stands at 22.71. The total number of deaths currently is 6,854.
The average daily number of very serious cases doubled in September (123) compared to the previous month (62). The average daily number of very serious cases reached 158 in the week of 27 September–3 October. The total number of hospitalized patients with COVID-19 currently stands at 1,930, of whom 172 are in a very serious condition.

The effective reproductive number remained above 1 throughout most of September. After decreasing to 0.98 for the week of 20-26 September, the number increased again to 1.09 last week. The effective reproductive is uneven across regions, with values ranging from 0.81 (Basarabeasca) to 1.49 (Taraclia). The effective reproductive number in Chisinau stands at 1.06.

The percentage of positive tests continued to increase over the course of September and, as of 30 September, the 7-day average stood at 13.8%, compared to 7.2% on 1 September. The figure continued to grow further and currently stands at 14.5%. Nearly 8,000 tests were conducted on average per day during the week of 27 September–3 October.

The crude cumulative incidence rate per 100,000 in the last 14 days is 447. The incidence has been highest in Balti (1,021), Chisinau (693) and Singerei (550). The lowest incidence has been recorded in Ocnita (158).
Overall, 59% of all cases have been recorded among women and 41% among men. Moreover, women (52%) account for a slightly higher proportion of all deaths than men (48%).

Even though infections among people aged 60 and over accounted for 32% of the total number of cases, 81% of all deaths were registered in this age group. The average age of patients who have died from the disease is 67.9.

Overall, the number of new cases in September increased by 234% compared to the previous month and reached 26,866. The crude cumulative incidence of cases per 100,000 population for the last 30 days was 773 on 30 September. The number of deaths increased by 158% during the same month. The monthly number of recoveries also reflected the increase in cases and rose by 276%.

The number of weekly cases has increased substantially over the course of the past month and reached 8,207 for the week of 27 September–3 October. This represents a 12% increase compared to the previous week. The crude cumulative incidence of cases per 100,000 population for the last 7 days was 236. Moreover, the number of deaths has increased by 59%, while the number of recoveries rose by 27%.
The number of vaccinations administered in August was 125,846 marking a 46% decrease compared to the previous month. As of 3 October, an estimated 24% of the country’s population or 30% of the population aged 18+ has received at least one vaccine dose.

Vaccine uptake is unevenly distributed between the different age groups. The highest vaccination rate is among people aged 70-79 (55%) and the lowest is among people aged 19-29 (24%). For the other two clinically vulnerable groups 60-69 and 80+, the vaccination rates are 50% and 27%, respectively.

Vaccine uptake is also unevenly distributed between men and women. Overall, 56% of all vaccines have been administered to women and 44% to men.

As of 3 October, a total of 1,409,239 COVID-19 vaccines have been administered. Overall, 23% of the country’s population has received a full vaccination course. The total vaccine utilization rate is 77%.
1.1 Official decision and restrictions

The Extraordinary National Commission for Public Health issued its Decision No. 62 from 22 September, 2021. The Decision sets the rules for general measures (Annex 1) for prevention of the infections and the measures for the public health system (Annex 2), that start from October 1st.

Annex 1
- Wearing of protective masks in all public spaces, physical distance and all the hygiene measures
- Encouragement of all staff from medical, educational, commerce and social institutions to get the vaccine
- All units of public and private organizations much ensure all sanitary measures for safe workplaces and service for the clients
- All units of commerce must ensure conditions for not allowing the crowding, including all units of public catering must ensure physical distance of clients (4 people at the table max.) Entrance only on availability of COVID certificate (vaccine, proof of illness in last 6 months or 72 hours-old PCR test).
- Border crossing into Moldova: availability of vaccination certificate, PCR negative test, proof of COVID infection in the last 6 months.

Annex 2
A colour coded system has been established based on the number of cases per 100,000 population cumulatively over the course of the last seven days:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases/100K</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–99</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100–249</td>
<td>Orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250+</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cases over 350+ could be grounds for the declaration of a National State of Emergency. As of 3 October the current national cases cumulatively over the last 7-days per 100,000 is 220.

Currently 5 territories are in Code Red, including Chisinau municipality and Transnistria, 28 in Orange and 5 in Yellow Codes. Restrictions become more severe going from Green to Red, but important to note the anticipation is that schools (except universities) will remain open with physical presence even in areas under code Red.

Chart: MoH as of 3 October 2021
2 General situation update

2.1 Political update & Transnistria region

- On 21-22 of October, the Moldovan delegation has participated at the General Assembly in New York, with the President having a speech about the challenges faced by the country democracy, but also about the major development priorities, among them fighting the consequences of the pandemic, climate change and its direct impact on the livelihoods, the peaceful settlement of the Transnistria region conflict, with emphasize on confidence building measures. Maia Sandu also noted that withdrawal of the Russian military contingent and destruction of the ammunition in Cobasna are still the key issues to be solved. In a bilateral meeting with the Secretary General she praised the role of UN as a steady partner of Moldova. She mentioned that the top priority of the new government is to rebuild the state through stronger institutions with less corruption and better justice and for that the involvement of the international actors is needed.

- In the after election-math the new government has dismissed key staff in most public institutions naming directly close to the party people. With the support of the parliamentary majority the legislation was adjusted making it possible for the heads of major institutions to be replaced, in the case of the Prosecutor General it will be possible for the parliament dismiss him for poor performance. Also, the MPs proposed a draft law amending the Tax Code and the Law on civil service and the status of civil servant, which will allow for the directors of the State Tax Service and Customs Service to be nominated at the proposal of the Minister of Finance.

- A mission of the International Monetary Fund to Moldova has started discussions with the authorities in regard to the request to initiate a new program focused on a set of policies to lay the foundation for the post-pandemic recovery and advance governance and institutional reforms.

- Moldova borrows €24.8 million from the World Bank to immunize the population against COVID-19. The money will be used to purchase vaccine doses, to invest in cold storage facilities, to develop information systems in healthcare and to provide technical assistance intended for strengthening the capacities for conducting the vaccination process.

- 50 million Euros from the European macro-financial assistance will reach Moldova in early October. The funds are allocated to strengthen sustainable support mechanisms for small and medium-sized enterprises in Moldova, including through the introduction of support mechanisms within the framework of technical or partial unemployment.

- The European Union has disbursed a grant of €36.4 million for Moldova to continue supporting country’s fight against COVID-19 and police reform.

- Exemplary courts will be developed within a programme to be implemented in the next 4 years, with a total budget of 5.6 M EUR. At the foreground of the initiative will be the reduction of the corruption phenomena and protection of the rights of civil society activists and journalists.

ATU Gagauzia

- In the first round of the elections to the People’s Assembly of Gagauzia held on 19 of September 17 deputies have been elected out of 35. In 6 districts the results were not validated because of the low presence. The second round was organized on 3rd of October. Out of the 122 participating candidates 14% were women, and in result only 2 women were elected as members of the Assembly.

Transnistria region

- On 12 of December elections of the Transnistria region de facto leader will be organized. So far 3 candidates have submitted documents for the registration at the elections, including Vadim Krasnoselskiy. The opposition leader, Oleg Horjan is still imprisoned. Previously the participation threshold for the elections has been excluded.
• Producers owning farmlands beyond the Ribnița-Tiraspol road will benefit from a green corridor through internal checkpoints with eased movement for harvested goods across the left bank. Farmers will be exempt from paying the tax to certify the origin of goods. Five mayor’s offices in Dubasari district have lots beyond the Ribnița-Tiraspol road that are 9,544 ha in area, with 6,499 ha of these being farmland.

• The Special Representative of the Swedish OSCE, Thomas Mayr-Harting, has concluded a two-day official visit to the Republic of Moldova. The official has met the Moldovan President, Speaker of the Parliament, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration and Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. In Tiraspol, he met with the de-facto leader Vadim Krasnoselsky and the main negotiator. He stressed the need to advance the negotiation process by developing further joint proposals, and by improving lives of people on both banks, including freedom of movement, protection of human rights, transportation and healthcare. Also, current and upcoming challenges were discussed together with the prospects for organizing a result oriented “5+2” meeting this fall.

• Starting with 1 of September transport units with registration plates of the Transnistria region are prohibited to travel across the Moldovan-Ukrainian border. As a result of the negotiations between Chisinau and Kiev it was agreed for vehicles to be allowed to return to the Transnistria region through Ukraine till 1st of October 1.

2.2 Economic and social update

• In the aftermath of Covid-19 outbreak which caused economic decline of -7% in 2020, the economy is showing signs of recovery having grown by roughly 21.5 per cents y.o.y in the second quarter of 2021. Compared to 14 per cents GDP decline in the same period of 2020 (versus 2019), this rate of growth is quite high. The economic expansion was caused by the 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%) followed by manufacturing (including extractives) and public sector (including defense, social protection and healthcare, education) and constructions. However, the most dynamically developing is ICT sector followed by trade and constructions. The agriculture being still an important sector of the economy despite dragging down in the second trimester witnessed good weather conditions and is therefore expected to stick 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 trade balance deficit widened in the first semester as imports outperformed exports. While the export substantially lagged behind in volumes, its value was offset by higher price. The EBRD in its Regional Economic Prospects Report 2021 projected that Moldova’s economy will grow by 4.5% in 2021.

• Consumer prices in Moldova climbed up to 4.64 per cent y.o.y in August from 3.5 per cent in July 2021. The inflation rate of growth was the fastest since April of 2020 and driven by non-food products (6.9 percent vs 5.5 percent in July), on account of a surge in prices of fuel (18.0 per cent vs 17.2 per cent) and construction materials (18.3 per cent vs 14.9 per cent); and food articles (4.8 per cent vs 4.2 per cent), primarily meat and products thereof (7.3 per cent vs 6.7 per cent) and dairy products (5.6 per cent vs 5.1 per cent). To a lesser extent, charges of services also went up in August (1.0 percent vs -0.4 per cent), underpinned by catering services (3.6 per cent vs 2.2 per cent) and public transportation (1.6 per cent vs 2.0 per cent).

• According to National Employment Agency, the labour force in second quarter 2021 grew by 1.9% (vs same period of 2020). The economic recovery stimulated Moldova’s labour force participation rate that reached 41.2% (vs 39.9% in 2020) while men being more active (47.3%) compared to women (35.9%). Positive trends versus 2020 were observed throughout many key labour force indicators: share of total occupied population
grew by 2.6%, while share of 15+ employed also grew by 1.5%, the unemployment rate declined from 4.2% in 2020 to 3.6% in 2021 and population outside the labour force decreased by 3.6% compared to 2020. Noteworthy, the share of NEET in first half of 2021 was high throughout all age categories: 18.1% amongst 15-24 y.o., 27.4% - amongst 15-29 y.o., while among 15-34 being the highest – 31.4%. Gender disaggregation suggests that there are more women amongst NEET than men, while as this is inter alia explained by childbirth (for younger categories) the lack of life-long learning opportunities could also facilitate labour force drop out. The Covid-19 pandemic affected informality in Moldova: in the first half of 2021 there were 17% of those engaged in informal sector (vs 17.6% in 2020) yet the share of informal employment in the second trimester 2021 decreased from 23.3% in 2020 to 22.8%. almost every one of 4 persons in Moldova receive informal wages, while the highest share of informal employment is in constructions – over 62% (e.g. in agriculture this number if roughly 10.8%).

- The UNEP released its Food Waste Index 2021 Report that provides comprehensive food waste data collection, analysis, and modelling to date, generating a new estimate of global food waste. In addition, it publishes a methodology for countries to measure food waste at household, food service and retail level, aimed at tracking national progress towards SDG Agenda 2030. The report estimates that around 931 million tons of food waste (representing 17 per cent of global food production) was generated in 2019, and 61 per cent of which came from households, 26 per cent from food service and 13 per cent from retail. Despite low confidence in the estimates due to lack of quality data in Moldova, the household food waste estimate suggests that annually there are 76 kg of food wasted per person, while this indicator for Romania refers to only 70 kg per capita.

2.3 Human Rights update

- In the context of various events, including during the Human Rights Media Academy conducted by OHCHR in the Transnistria region for journalists, media professionals and communication specialists end of September, various human rights aspects related to COVID-19 were discussed. A particular focus was placed on how to ensure human rights compliant messaging including in the context of crises. As a follow-up two participants will cover issues around access to information in the context of the COVID-19 crises.

3 UN Social and Economic Response and Recovery Portfolio update

Please access https://covid19response.un.md/ to see the Plan and the Project Portfolio in more detail, including on-going projects and initiatives still requiring financing.

3.1 Pillar 1: HEALTH FIRST: protecting health services and systems during the crisis

- The assessment of hospitals capacities (infrastructure, human resources for health, devices, including oxygen sources and human resources) in response to COVID-19 pandemic to ensure efficient response of hospital system to COVID-19 pandemic, rational use of capacities, identification and designation of referral facilities for care of patients with COVID-19, as well as revision of intensive care unit (ICU) capabilities and infrastructure was conducted by the WHO in the EU project framework. The COVID-19 hospitals and beds activation mechanism were presented to MoH. The hospitals activation principles were designed based on assessment results, developed classification of hospitals, experience of other countries, etc. The forecast of needed hospitals capacities was developed for each of all 4-alert levels and EPI forecast.

- The assessment of current oxygen capacity and respiratory care system (or ‘ecosystem’) was conducted by the WHO in the framework of the EU project. Besides the identification of the equipment and additional components and installation constraints, the assessment encompassed dimensions like consumables, procurement, and financing, as well as human resources availability. The results will support the Ministry of
Health in comprehensive sustainable planning to upscale the capacity, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of oxygen and respiratory care systems.

- The WHO supported the development of a Guidelines for planning and management of health workforce in the emergency situations for decision makers, managers and human resources staff in the health system. The guide proposes recommendations at individual, managerial, institutional and system level and covers the staff protection and employee support, training and staff re-qualification, ensuring the provide with staff and adequate salaries; governance of human resources in crisis situations, as well as mechanisms of intersectoral collaboration.

- The draft Roadmap for strengthening of the Emergency Care System and institutional capacities as part of the health system and integrating the emergency preparedness and response was developed based on the participatory approach during a face-to-face meeting on 15-16 September 2021. The findings will be used for legal framework development.

- On 14 September the first from the three seminars on NCD-surveillance during the pandemic within the framework of the Evidence for Public Health Policy Project, supported by the Kingdom of Norway and the WHO, has been conducted. 50 representatives from the National Agency for Public Health and 10 Regional Public Health Centres have been trained on the NCD prevention measures.

- The reengineering of the national (electronic) surveillance system for communicable diseases and public health events is ongoing and the component of the Laboratory Information System (LIS) for the 12 national public health laboratories is in the process of installation.

- The WHO provided support in adjusting COVID-19 vaccination automated information system RVC-19 and in developing new variables, reports as well as in strengthening the Adverse Events Following Immunization surveillance system. The results and improvements were presented by main experts from the National Agency for Public Health and National Regulatory Authority. In addition to terms of reference, was provided Ministry of Health requested support in development of COVID certificate (vaccination, recovery and test certificate).

- COVID-19 immunization supportive supervision visits were conducted from 25th of August to 3rd of September for district level in order to assess the local action plan and to improve the access of the HCWs to the communication and guidance materials.

- On 15th of September was initiated the performance assessment of the immunization services delivery by Primary Health Care services. The activity will be conducted by Family Doctors Association under MoH with WHO support. A special capacity building with ToT simulation exercises on preparedness and management of Anaphylaxis cases is provided. The agenda was approved and are in process 42 administrative territories visits (20 Health Care Facility from district level and 22 from local level) and 5 national trainings of 42 coordinators from district level. Trainings are delivered at the highest performance simulation training of State Medical University https://www.cusim.md/.

- The vaccine logistics management information system developed and is piloted for the national, regional and local vaccine warehouses of the National Agency for Public Health. The vaccine logistics management updated information system will be installed at NAPH and public health professionals and managers will be able to use data for vaccine and vaccine supply forecasting, inventory management, distribution, planning, reporting and performance monitoring, with main function to incorporate routine data management processes.

- WHO Moldova CO developed the COVID-19 vaccine forecast and absorption scenarios which were submitted to Ministry of Health in order to improve vaccine and supplies planning for short and medium term. Additionally, was developed the forecast tool for COVID-19 which is based on effective reproduction number (Rt), forecasted according to retrospective existing evidences. Forecast tool has 3 scenarios and provided 96% accuracy in forecasting the number of cases for September.
• Two walk-in refrigerators rooms with capacity of 30 m³ and one walk-in freeze room with capacity of 10 m³ were procured and are installed at National Vaccine Warehouse, National Agency for Public Health. Another 5 walk-in refrigerators rooms with capacity of 10 m³ are in process to be installed in regional vaccine warehouses, including in Tiraspol. The procurement process was done by WHO at the MoH request.

• Over one thousand sets of equipment (PPEs) for COVID-19 vaccination mobile teams were procured. The equipment for the Health Care Workers included all necessary items was delivered to 37 Public Health Centers.

• One million surgical masks for the total amount of $290,000 were delivered to the country with the mediation of the WHO. The handover event took place on 16 September 2021 in the premises of Institute of Emergency Medicine.

• The IT-equipment - 41 sets of computers, MFD printers, barcode scanners and barcode printers have been procured in a framework of the COVID-19 immunization Project which is a part of the country COVID-19 pandemic response. Monitoring and accounting equipment have been recognized as extremely important to be procured for Central and Regional vaccine warehouses. Total cost of the shipment is $45,500.

• UNICEF initiated procurement of Cold Chain Equipment, with USAID funds and based on consultation with the Ministry of Health, and the National Agency of Public Health. The 120 units of Vestfrost VLS204 ice-lined refrigerators have been ordered via UNICEF Supply Division and will benefit the 120 Health Care Facilities.

• UNICEF contracted a national company for conducting the qualitative study among vaccination target groups on attitudes related to anti-COVID-19 vaccination. The results of the study will be used to inform relevant stakeholders, including government, development partners, and others, on improving effectiveness and targeting of communication materials, tools, and strategies. The qualitative assessment will focus on specific target groups and subgroups, such as families with children, youth, vulnerable households, Roma communities, and others.

3.2 Pillar 2: PROTECTING PEOPLE: Social protection and basic services

• Based on a needs assessment conducted by MECR, UNICEF partnered with the Foundation for Advancement of Moldova to strengthen digital literacy, knowledge and skills of teaching staff in the pre-primary subsector in support of on-line learning, in order to overcome the challenges imposed by the epidemiological context. The aim was to create a critical mass of preschool teachers (over 10 thousand professionals, representing approximately 80% teaching personnel in 1485 pre-primary institutions) who can confidently use digital skills to search, collect, receive, store and process information, thus improving their on-line educational services during the lockdowns imposed by the epidemic. The indirect beneficiaries are the 134,158 pre-school age children nationwide. The USAID-funded training was launched on June 30 and concluded end-August 2021.

• UNICEF, with USAID support, provided a nationwide training for focal points, users of the Ministry’s of Education “Electronic Management Information System”. The training reached 100% of focal points, from every pre-school institution.

• UNICEF purchased essential hygienic items for the national Youth Friendly Health Services (all 41 Youth Friendly Centers in the country, located within the Primary Health Centers). The supplies were delivered to a centralized medical storage facility under the Ministry of Health. Labour and Social Protection -- with subsequent distribution to the recipient institutions, serving approximately 150,000 beneficiaries over the course of a year.

• UNICEF purchased WASH/hygiene supplies for over 20 residential institutions for children, aiming at reaching approximately 2000 children.
• UNDP, in partnership with Gagauzia’s Bashkanat and the Department of Education has initiated a 5 weeks’ course on digital pedagogy for over 200 teachers of STEM disciplines teaching pupils from 7-12 grades, that helps the teachers face the challenges faced by the education system during the pandemic. At the same time, professionals from both riverbanks were trained in lessons’ planning in the hybrid learning format, with the support of the education thematic platform.

• UNDP, within the EU-funded Support to Confidence Building Measures, Programme, supported the Sports and Health thematic platform of professionals from both riverbanks in raising awareness on healthy lifestyle and on-line workout sessions, applicable to the pandemic context.

3.3 Pillar 3: ECONOMIC RESPONSE & RECOVERY: Protecting jobs, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the informal sector and workers

• UNICEF conducted a second round of the COVID-19 impact assessment on remittances and families with children. The first such survey was conducted with USAID funds in 2020. The current, repeated survey has been adjusted to include recommendations from the first survey results, including: additional questions will be added to assess the impact of distance learning on children. The preliminary results of the survey are available, as of end August. The official launch of the study is planned for QIV of 2020.

• UNDP, within the Sweden and UK-financed AidTrade initiative, launched two studies to reveal the challenges and impact of the pandemic, as well as solutions for women led businesses in the Transnistria and access to finance of SMEs.

3.4 Pillar 4: MACROECONOMIC RESPONSE AND MULTILATERAL COLLABORATION

• On September 21, 2021, UNDP and ITU delivered a joint presentation of the Digital Transformation Compact for the Republic of Moldova. It is based on the recently-developed UNDP Digital Readiness Assessment and ITU Digital Country Profile for Moldova, and might be seen as a comprehensive ‘radiography’ of the digital transformation readiness of the country.

3.5 Pillar 5: SOCIAL COHESION AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

• NTR

4 Communications and Advocacy

• WHO provides continuous support to MoH and national stakeholders in RCCE activities and COVID-19 vaccination roll-out. The national platform for COVID-19 information www.covidinfo.gov.md is maintained with WHO and EU support. E-newsletter (No. 42 and No. 43) on COVID-19 and other related MoH subjects is produced and widely disseminated.

• WHO developed and produced posters and flyers on COVID-19 vaccines debunking myths for nationwide distribution in public places, in both Romanian and Russian languages.

• WHO with EU support contributed to launching of the COVID-19 vaccination information campaign through pharmacists. The action is organized by the MoH in partnership with Association of Pharmacists. WHO and national experts trained more than 300 pharmacists in SARS-CoV-2 particularities, COVID-19 vaccination and principle of pro-vaccination communication.

• WHO with USAID support developed and produced a school stickers on COVID-19 prevention rules, targeting both pupils and teachers. A distribution process in ongoing.

• WHO with EU supports contributed to development and launching of the COVID-19 vaccination information and mobilization campaign among students and youth Put your shoulder, get vaccinated! A large