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First national results of the project

"Youth Inclusion"

*A SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS IN THE
REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA*

Chisinau, Moldova, 02 December 2016

Summary of the discussions

PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT IN MOLDOVA

Youth is a stage in life often characterised by numerous changes and transitions in education, health, employment, family, rights and responsibilities. Many of these transitions happen in parallel, depending on the individual and environmental conditions, making youth a very heterogeneous group. The Moldovan National Youth Law from July 2016 defines a young person as being between age 14 and 35 ; international organizations commonly define young people as being between age 15 and 29. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2014 25% of the Moldovan population were youth. Inclusion, training and empowering young people is not just a matter of rights, it is also a matter of economic development. Investing in young people will enable them to be engines of economic and social progress. A well-prepared youth cohort can counterbalance the population aging observed in some parts of the world and benefit from this demographic window of opportunity.

The Government of the Republic of Moldova recognises the importance of developing its young population as stated in its *National Strategy for Youth Sector Development 2020*. The development of the youth sector and youth policies requires evidences. The Development Centre of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) supports, with co-funding from the European Union (EU), the Moldovan Ministry of Youth with a [report on the inclusion and well-being of young in the Republic of Moldova](#). In this context, the OECD focused together with national experts studies on the following topics:

- A Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Survey of the Moldovan youth
- Indicators and determinants of youth well-being
- The policy and institutional framework of Moldova
- Social norms and health disparities between young girls and boys in Moldova
- The current situation and prospects for the status recognition of youth workers in Moldova

This meeting's objective was to bring together youth policy stakeholders to foster an exchange on topics relevant to youth well-being as well as to obtain feedback on the project's findings. The discussion was centred around the documents prepared for the final report of the OECD, and on how to use the research results in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs.

INDICATORS AND DETERMINANTS OF YOUTH WELL-BEING

Presentation of the study: Olga Gagauz & Mariana Buciuceanu-Vrabie (Center for Demographic Research, CCD)

The objective of this study is to understand how youth in Moldova fare in terms of education, health, employment, civic participation as well as youth's perceptions on life evaluation, feelings and meaning. Youth are a very heterogeneous group, facing different challenges at different stages of their transition. Common threads across all well-being dimensions are the vulnerabilities of youth in rural areas, the well-being disparities in women, as well as and the differing challenges depending on the age youth.

The study documents important progress in the access to education and educational attainment. Despite the progress observed, international assessments, students, employers and education experts lament the low quality of education. In particular rural youth face risks of leaving the education system without the necessary skills for a successful integration in the labor market.

Employment vulnerability – in terms of access, formality and pay – increased in rural areas, resulting in an urban exodus to cities and abroad. Estimations suggest that approximately 15% of Moldovan youth are missing in the local labour market due to emigration. This impacts national statistics: official labour market statistics report a NEET rate of 40%, but excluding youth who have been living abroad for more than a year reduces the rate to 29%. An important share of the young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) is women or rural youth. Furthermore, the NEET are made up by unemployed and inactive non-students; in recent years the share of inactive non-students have been increasing. Consequently the discussions held voiced the demand to better understand who the NEET exactly are, what barriers they experience and what they value.

Compared to the European average, Moldova faces high adolescent pregnancy rates, high mortality rates due to avoidable causes, and gender violence. Socioeconomic differences seem to represent the most important factors of unequal health outcomes: young people from poorer backgrounds tend to have worse health outcomes, as they have less access to quality health services. Other important factors are youth's living and working conditions as well as nutrition, smoking, and harmful alcohol use.

An important part of the discussions revolved around the access to quality data. As indicated, many official statistics include young Moldovans living abroad, resulting in misleading results. Scholars and the National Bureau of Statistics were invited to address issues such as obtaining correct data on migration. Further, there is a lack of data to create a unified inclusion measure. Scholars and youth experts were invited to use the data of the recent OECD-EU-MTS survey "Youth in Moldova 2016" to propose such a measure. At the same time, the need for more qualitative research was highlighted. The current quantitative data does not capture the most excluded youth. For example, challenges in the lives of Roma and disabled youth too often go unnoticed.

THE POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK IN MOLDOVA

Presentation of the study: Veaceslav Berbeca (IDIS Viitorul)

The session on the institutional framework centred around policy coordination in a multi-stakeholder context. The needs and challenges of youth are multidimensional; attending these requires an intersectional approach and the cooperation of state institutions and civil society. The Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova heads a state commission on youth policies. This commission should facilitate policy coordination and discuss the big lines of youth policies. However, due to a limited functioning of the State Commission, current coordination of youth policy is insufficient and faces serious constraints. Increasing effectiveness in cooperation between ministries can be achieved by avoiding overlapping mandates and through a clearer division of labour.

Youth policies need a more coherent implementation strategy at the subnational level. The Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Moldova (MTS) does not have territorial subdivisions. The local implementation of the National Youth Strategy, thus, depends on local public authorities, who are also responsible for the local youth centres. The coordination between the MTS and local public authorities are constrained by insufficient financial resources as well as some authorities having a lack of awareness and recognition of youth's needs.

In sum, the MTS faces a number of constraints in implementing the National Youth Strategy. An important section of the session was dedicated to the functioning and structure of the MTS. The MTS experiences some challenges in its work, such as the above mentioned insufficient policy coordination and subnational representation. Other challenges are the insufficient financial resources for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy and the functioning of the ministry itself. The financial constraints limit the possibility of attracting and maintaining staff. Participants mostly agreed that increasing financial resources would aid the work, but recognised the limited financial capacity of the Government of the Republic of Moldova in general. Therefore it was argued that the effectiveness and efficiency of spending and investments need to be reviewed. Moreover, the already low number of staff is additionally overburdened by being involved in the direct implementation of programmes and activities, due to missing a subordinate agency responsible for the implementation of activities. The time spent on implementing activities takes away the time for designing and developing cost-effective policies and strategies.

Although Moldova has numerous platforms for youth participation in the policy making process, few are active. Youth CSO and representation bodies face barriers in securing financing and in lacking a receptive counterpart in the government (specifically at the local level).

Finally, compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals has to be assured by taking into account the related performance indicators and strategies.

SOCIAL NORMS AND HEALTH DISPARITIES BETWEEN YOUNG GIRLS AND BOYS IN MOLDOVA

Presentation of the study: Galina Lesco (Health for Youth Association)

This study analyses the drivers of gender differences in adolescents' health behaviour in Moldova, focusing on gender socialization and social norms. The goal is to provide policy advice how to improve adolescents' health outcome, taking into consideration gender differences.

Many of the differences in adolescents' health behaviours can be traced back to social norms and gender stereotypes. For example, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) behaviours and attitudes are particularly responsive to social norms. The different reporting of sexual activity at age 15 (the rate reported by boys is 30 percentage points higher) illustrates the pressure of social norms and the expectations of peers: girls likely underreport, while boys over-report. The role of peers is an important explanatory factor in adolescents' health behaviours. Peers reinforce negative behaviours, e.g. young men showcase more chauvinist behaviour when relating with peers. Furthermore, carrying responsibility for pregnancy and parenthood is distributed unequally. Qualitative research showed that the burden falls mostly on adolescent mothers – who are oftentimes considered a shame for the family –, while the young father is often not held accountable.

The role of fathers in the education of adolescents is an important aspect in adolescents' health behaviours. Adolescent girls mostly rely on the mothers to solve (health) problems, father do not have an active role in raising young women. Boys who are raised only by a single male figure tend to take more risks than those raised by a couple. In interviews with parents, fathers exhibited their rather conservative views on gender roles. The current normative environment puts more responsibility on the mother, but also makes the active involvement of fathers difficult. The discussions held invited further analysis and discussion on the the role of fathers in the upbringing of children and youth.

Adolescent boys tend to be more overweight (and obese) than young women. Focus group discussions showed that this trend is in line with the perception that young women should look slender and follow feminine stereotypes, while young men should look strong and act masculine. Currently the high-school curriculum is not including sufficient physical education and hours of daily activity decrease with age. The Ministry of Youth and Sports should collaborate with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education to promote a healthy and sporty lifestyle.

Schools can play an important role in fostering healthy lifestyles and reducing risk-taking behaviours. Currently there is no satisfactory SRH education in most schools. Adolescents compensate the missing satisfactory SRH education in school by consulting peers, parents and the internet. These sources may, however, provide inadequate or erroneous information and often reinforce stereotypes. Participants agreed

on the need of SRH education at school; this SRH education should also address gender stereotypes and values, not just prevention of pregnancies and STD. During the discussions it was indicated, that a broader education for health, not just SRH, could be socially more acceptable and easier to promote. Next to the formal curriculum, it is also important to consider the informal curriculum at schools, such as ethics as well as teachers' and pupils' attitudes and behaviours. This informal curriculum also plays a role in shaping health behaviours; it can contradict and override the formal curriculum and reinforce existing negative behaviours.

Generally, the discussions confirmed the importance of gender stereotypes in explaining the different health behaviours and outcomes. The observed differences also suggest that strategies for health promotion and disease prevention may need to be tailored differently for boys and girls. Special attention may need to be paid to boys' well-being at school, as they score systematically lower than girls in relation to school experiences. Many risk behaviours are still more common among boys, so health-promotion activities that specifically target boys may be needed. A potential increase in girls' risk behaviours, resulting in gender equalization of health-compromising behaviours, should be monitored carefully. Persistent gendered patterns in self-rated health and well-being, with girls reporting lower subjective health, require attention. Girls' relatively low self-perceptions call for mental health promotion to give stronger emphasis to strengthening their self-esteem and preventing them from developing negative ideas about their bodies. Boys and girls may react differently to mental health interventions, so they may need to be tailored.

The role of media and role models, which reinforce conservative gender stereotypes, were also discussed to a great extent.

THE CURRENT SITUATION AND PROSPECTS FOR THE STATUS RECOGNITION OF YOUTH WORKERS IN MOLDOVA

Presentation of the study: Constantin Turcanu (Ministry of Youth and Sports) on behalf of Daniela Dirzu (Youth Centre "Facila")

Youth workers are important stakeholders in the youth sector and are often the link between young people and governmental services and programmes. The National Youth Strategy foresees a further development and regulation of the youth worker profession to improve this link and as such strengthen the guidance young people receive during their transition from these youth workers. This present study explores the current situation regarding the recognition of the youth worker in Moldova as well as the international experience that could be extrapolated to the Republic of Moldova.

The Law on Youth defines a youth worker as a youth leader, a volunteer, a person from a youth organisation or any other organisation, who offer support to young people in personal, social and educational development. Still, a clear definition of the youth worker profession (a specialist in youth work) needs to be developed. A specialist in youth work should have benefited of training in the area of youth work and should offer professional services to young people in youth centres/youth service institutions. This definition should encompass the occupational status and educational needs of specialist in youth work.

Should youth workers become a specific and protected profession? The advantages and disadvantages of creating an own category of youth workers were part of this session's discussions. The participants coincided that it is important to have a mid-/long-term perspective in defining the occupational category as it should be applicable for many years to come. An argument in favour of grouping youth workers with professionals of the education system was the higher salary of the latter, which would provide incentives for people to enter the profession. Currently, the average salary of a youth worker is slightly above the minimum wage. A possible grouping of youth workers with social workers was not welcomed by all participants, as both have different approaches and methodologies in their work. Social workers tend to work with problematic cases and often try to correct behaviours. Grouping youth workers with this approach could stigmatise youth, who need guidance, advocacy and positive incentives, not correction. Another argument for having a separate occupational category for youth workers was that it would give them the importance they deserve and allow having sub-categories to reflect different realities of youth workers.

An important discussion point was the need for an own educational degree for youth workers. While all participants agreed on the importance of tools and methodologies when working with and for youth, many pointed to challenges of an own degree. The demand for youth workers is too small to create an independent degree. It is hard to say whether this can result in graduates with a youth worker degree not finding employment in their field, or too few students enrolling for such a degree given the limited job opportunities. Some participants advocated for re-training programmes and including non-formal educational approaches.

Youth Inclusion Project

Co-funded by the European Union, the Youth Inclusion Project is implemented by the Development Centre of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development until 2017 to analyse policies for youth in ten developing and emerging economies. The project takes a multisectoral approach to support countries in better responding to the aspirations of young people and strengthening youth involvement in national development processes. The project will shed light on what determines youth vulnerabilities and successful transitions. It will also strengthen national capacities to design evidence-based policies that promote youth inclusion and youth well-being.

For more information [please visit our website](#).

For questions on the Youth Inclusion project in Moldova please contact Mr Ian.BRAND-WEINER@oecd.org