

Youth Partnership

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CHAPTER VII: MOLDOVA HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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7.1 General context

For the Republic of Moldova, human capital is the primary resource for long-term development. The ability to transform young people into vital members in the state's socio-economic development largely depends on the quality of the national educational system and the infrastructure that ensures significant youth participation, thus turning them into active players in community development. Ensuring physical and mental health is essential for developing effective economic and social activity, especially for young people.

Youth is a social construct based on the notion of the transitions between childhood and adulthood. This period involves several stages, with specific opportunities and challenges: attending school, becoming sexually active, accessing paid work, making independent decisions and becoming accountable for the consequences, forming close relationships outside the family circle and exercising citizenship. These transitions might be longer or shorter, depending on the prevailing social and legal norms and the cultural and economic context. Specifying an age group is often needed to monitor youth development and well-being outcomes. The United Nations (UN) defines a young person as aged 15-24, and Eurostat commonly defines a young person between age 15 and 29; according to the Republic of Moldova's [Law on Youth](#) No. 215/2016, a young person is aged between 14 and 35; before 2016 the Republic of Moldova considered the population between 16 and 30 as youth. This review defines youth, based on data availability, as a young person aged 14-35, unless specified otherwise. The review uses "youth" and "young people" interchangeably. As of 1 January 2023, the population residing in the Republic of Moldova permanently was 2 512 800 people. Out of these, 615 272 or 24.49% are young people aged 14 to 34, with 49.91% men and 50.09% women.¹

Development of the health system is one of [the key objectives of the current government](#),² in addition to economic development, strengthening state security and developing discipline in public institutions and order in the country. The health system development objective includes the following.

- Increasing the population's access to a range of quality medical services and building regional hospitals, as well as creating the System of Regionalisation of Mechanisms for reference, diagnosis and treatment of acute cerebrovascular accidents.
- Strengthening specialised medical services for diagnosis and treatment by equipping sub-regional centres with high-performance equipment (CT, digital radiography, USG, endoscopy, equipment for reanimation and surgery departments).
- Improving the infrastructure conditions and equipment of the public medical institutions in the country through the creation and opening of emergency reception units, the renovation of the Centres of Public Health in the country and the gradual renovation of district hospitals.
- Implementation of projects for energy efficiency and use of renewable resources in at least five medical institutions.
- Organisation of the new national model for the provision of rehabilitation services at three levels (acute, post-acute, long-term).

¹ Data from the [National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova](#) (last accessed 26/11/2023).

² Government [Activity Programme "Prosperous, safe, European Moldova"](#), approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, decision no. 28 on 16 February 2023.

- Increasing access to medicines by expanding the list of subsidised medicines and improving policies in the field of medicine and pharmaceutical assistance.
- Continuous development of policies for human resources in health.
- The application of a modern system for evaluating the quality of medical services, the creation of the National Health Evaluation and Accreditation Council.
- Development of programmes for the prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases, health promotion and health education.
- Development and implementation of the electronic medical prescription.
- The development, interconnection and use by all medical institutions of the existing information systems, components of the digital transformation of the health system.
- Increasing the capacity for quick intervention to threats and health emergencies by developing contingency plans, responding to them and modernising the responsible institutions.

Today, the Republic of Moldova can benefit from what is known as the demographic dividend. The demographic, or window of demographic opportunity, is a situation in which the working-age population is greater than the dependent population. In 2017, 72.9% of the population was working age (15-64), 15.9% was 14 or younger and 11.2% was over 65. If used wisely, this demographic dividend can address outstanding challenges and increase productivity and sustainable growth. With one third of the population aged 14-35 (33% in 2017, according to the National Bureau of Statistics), youth should be a transversal theme in Moldova's public policies, preparing the country to take advantage of the demographic dividend.³

Youth inclusion and well-being should be an important pillar of national development, as young people are Moldova's present and future. The successful inclusion of young people must consider the heterogeneity of their backgrounds, needs, experiences and life aspirations, as well as the different socio-economic contexts that may affect their inclusion and well-being. Efforts to improve youth well-being should not be limited to work and cognitive skills but extend to social skills, health, engagement and political participation so that young people can fulfil their life goals and become productive members of society. While poverty has declined, volatile economic growth and high levels of emigration impact young people's well-being. It is therefore necessary to focus on youth for three reasons: the importance of this stage for personal development; the large share of youth in the population; and the diversity of young people who can belong to different groups with different needs at different times.

With 16% of the population below the age of 15 and youth (aged 14-35) accounting for one third of the population, Moldova is a youthful country. Young Moldovans face interconnected challenges requiring a comprehensive approach to youth challenges.⁴

³ [Analysis of the Demographic Dividends of the Republic Of Moldova](#), Alexandru Fala, UNFPA Moldova, 2022.

⁴ Data from the [National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova](#) (last accessed 26/11/2023).

Overall, the health status of young people has improved in recent years, but important gender disparities in health prevail. This entails differences in the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases, use of tobacco and alcohol, and risk-taking behaviours. Social norms and gender roles have an important role in explaining these differences. Yet, despite important discrepancies in youth health behaviours, few health and youth policies include a gender dimension. More importantly, [youth-friendly health centres \(YFHCs\)](#) have limited capacities for targeting vulnerable youth. Often, vulnerable youth do not receive necessary services because health centres do not have programmes to identify and actively assist young people in rural areas, from vulnerable families, without parental supervision or with drug addictions. And lastly, the absence of an integrated approach to providing detailed and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information in schools reduces young people's quality information sources.

Despite continuous progress, the Republic of Moldova lacks an effective and operative co-ordination mechanism for youth legislation, policies and interventions across different sectors and organisations. Although the responsibility of youth affairs falls under the [Ministry of Education and Research \(MER\)](#) mandate, different ministries and government entities develop and supervise policies affecting young people from a sectoral perspective. The work of NGOs and international bodies complements these. The principle of co-management of the Council of Europe practised in the Republic of Moldova gives young people tools to engage in the policy-making processes officially, yet the different line ministries could do more to involve them in policy-making processes. Moreover, the implementation of youth policies is limited by frequent institutional and staff changes and limited financial resources.

Moldova has a high rate of adolescent alcohol consumption. In 2013/14, rates of weekly alcohol use by 15-year-olds were 24% for men and 13% for women, higher than the European averages (17% and 10%, respectively). The share of 15-year-olds who reported first being drunk at or before age 13 was 12% for men and 4% for women, also higher than the European averages (10% and 7%, respectively). Moreover, 28% of 15-year-old men and 10% of women had been drunk twice or more, higher than the European average for men (26%) but almost half the European average for women (21%).

A high share of youth consume tobacco. According to Health Behaviour in School-aged Children data (2016), the prevalence of 15-year-olds who reported smoking at or before age 13 was 27% for men and 21% for women, higher than the European averages (22% and 17%, respectively). However, fewer 15-year-olds smoked at least once per week than the European averages: 9% and 6% vs 13% and 12%, respectively.

7.2 Administration and governance

Youth policies and institutional framework

Youth policies require engagement by numerous stakeholders. No single ministry can address the range of topics affecting youth; rather, different ministries and government entities develop and supervise policies affecting young people from a sectoral perspective, complemented by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international bodies. These non-governmental agents are important service providers in sectors and areas where the government is less active. At the same time, stepping in and filling the gaps can slow down or prevent the government assuming responsibility. The parties must work closely together to avoid this and implement successful youth policies.

The institutional framework for youth policies is fragmented. As various institutions implement youth policies, the Republic of Moldova needs an implementation framework and harmonised national and local strategic planning. However, stakeholders are fragmented and disconnected, reducing potential synergies and multiplier effects. While the ministry mandated with implementing the national youth policy collaborates with NGOs, the relationship is not institutionalised, resulting in ad hoc stakeholder consultations and dependent on responsible policy makers' convictions. Still, NGOs are regularly consulted during the set-up of new activities and documents; for this, the ministry relies on its database of youth organisations and the [National Youth Council of Moldova](#).

The youth policy co-ordination mechanism is not operative. The [Governmental Commission for Youth Policies](#), headed by the [prime minister](#) and following the Council of Europe's principle of co-management, is the official youth policy co-ordination body. However, the commission does not have adequate representation by all stakeholders and is *de facto* not operative (it never meets). Some ministries important to youth well-being do not officially form part of the commission, such as the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family. Members of the commission, including civil society representatives, are not very active and do not make use of their right to request meetings.

Other obstacles to co-ordinating, designing and implementing efficient youth policies across sectors include limited communication channels and platforms, competition in budget allocation and insufficient data. These limit the fine-tuning of policies and ensure they address youth needs.⁵

Implementing recent shifts in Moldova's vision for youth faces challenges at the local level. Since adopting the [National Youth Strategy for 2009-2013](#), young people's role as important economic and social development agents has grown in political discourse. This growing importance brought a paradigm shift, emphasising youth development, health and empowerment over sports and leisure. In 2014, the government adopted the [National Strategy of Youth Sector Development 2020](#) to develop civic engagement and employment policies and strengthen the legal framework for establishing and functioning regulatory mechanisms for youth-sector activities. While these strategies set a clear vision for youth inclusion and empowerment, implementation is weak. In 2023, the Government of the Republic of Moldova approved the [Youth Sector Development Strategy "Youth 2030"](#),⁶ a strategic document that has three general objectives.

- Increasing the number of young people who benefit from quality youth programmes by strengthening capacities within the sector and professionalising human resources.
- Increasing the level of participation and civic involvement through training, capacity-building and youth empowerment programmes.
- Harnessing the potential of young people to carry out social innovation and community development initiatives through financial and material support tools.

The institutional frameworks of regional and local governments for implementing youth policy are especially underdeveloped. Experts in the youth field, particularly local-level civil servants, do not always fully comprehend youth needs and youth policies, causing discrepancies between central and local administrations' understanding and prioritisation of policy goals. Youth workers also play a

⁵ [Comprehensive Youth Sector Analysis](#), National Institute for Economic Research, 2020.

⁶ Government Decision 168/2023 for the approval of the [Youth Sector Development Strategy "Youth 2030"](#) and the Programme regarding its implementation for the years 2023-2026.

crucial role in supporting youth locally; however, they are not adequately trained or paid, which may affect the quality of services.

The Ministry of Education and Research (MER) should learn from the obstacles faced by the former Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS). The short-lived MoYS (2009-17) was constantly developing and strengthening. Yet, until its absorption into the MER, it did not fully develop the convening power to lead the implementation of a comprehensive national youth strategy and struggled to function as a co-ordinating force. The frequent changes of the minister and deputies partially explain this situation.

Significant obstacles to delivering quality programmes included insufficient financial resources to carry out all responsibilities, understaffing of the Youth Division (especially experts in the field of youth policies), high staff turnover and consequent training costs, a high administrative load and insufficient strategic planning of resources. The MoYS was overextended, given its financial and human capacities.

Governance

The structural foundation of youth health and well-being in the Republic of Moldova is underpinned by the [Ministry of Health](#), as per [Government Decision No. 148 of 25.08.2021, regarding the organisation and functioning of the Ministry of Health](#). This ministry is tasked with formulating, implementing, and overseeing health policies. It operates within the legal framework set forth by [Law No. 411 of 03.28.1995 regarding health protection](#). The ministry's responsibilities extend from setting health standards and protocols to supervising subordinate institutions directly engaging with youth health services. Additionally, it is mandated to collaborate with other sectors and international bodies to align national health objectives with broader global health standards and practices.

The Ministry of Health's role is crucial in ensuring access to quality healthcare services for all, especially focusing on preventive measures and promoting a healthy lifestyle among the youth. It serves as the primary institutional body that addresses not only the immediate health needs of young people but also endeavours to instil long-term well-being practices. Beyond the Ministry of Health's scope, a range of subordinate and specialised agencies work in concert to address the multifaceted dimensions of youth health. These include mental health services, addiction treatment centres and reproductive health facilities. The ministry also oversees the implementation of health education in schools, ensuring that health promotion and disease prevention are integral parts of the educational curriculum for young people.

In the broader context set by [Law No. 411 of 03.28.1995 regarding health protection](#), the ministry is committed to safeguarding public health, with a special emphasis on reducing health inequalities. This legislation enshrines the right to healthcare and ensures the state's role in providing a system that is accessible, equitable and sustainable. The law also emphasises preventive care and the importance of a healthy environment as determinants of health, which are particularly relevant to the younger demographic. Through these legal frameworks, the Ministry of Health is positioned as the guardian of youth well-being, steering Moldova's young citizens towards healthier futures.

The Ministry of Health's mandate also extends to co-ordinating with regional and local health authorities to ensure that health services are delivered effectively across different levels of governance. This hierarchical structure allows for tailored approaches to health challenges faced by youth in diverse communities. By integrating efforts from national to local levels, the ministry aims to construct a coherent national health system that is responsive to the specific needs of young people

in various regions of the country. Such a decentralised approach is vital in reaching out to marginalised or at-risk youth populations and providing them with the necessary health support and services.

The comprehensive governance of youth health and well-being in the Republic of Moldova involves various public institutions at the national level, each playing a pivotal role. Apart from the central role of the Ministry of Health, other key institutions include the following.

[The National Health Insurance Company](#), the financier of the health system, plays a critical role in ensuring that Moldovan youth have access to health services.⁷ It administers the health insurance funds that guarantee coverage for various medical services, from preventive care to complex treatments, thus directly influencing the accessibility and affordability of healthcare for young people.

[The National Agency for Public Health](#) is at the forefront of health promotion and disease prevention, pivotal for young people. It conducts epidemiological surveillance, develops public health campaigns and implements programmes aimed at reducing risk behaviours among young people, such as substance abuse or sexually transmitted infections.

The [National Council for Determination of Disability and Work Capacity](#) is vital for young individuals with disabilities or health conditions that affect their ability to work. It evaluates and certifies disability, helping to ensure that young people with health challenges receive the support and accommodation they need to lead fulfilling lives and, where possible, integrate into the workforce.

The connection of the [Agency for Intervention and Payments for Agriculture \(AIPA\)](#) to youth health may not be direct, but its responsibilities for ensuring food safety and supporting sustainable agricultural practices have a significant impact on public health. By promoting safe and healthy food production, AIPA contributes to the prevention of foodborne illnesses and supports the broader goal of a healthy living environment, which is crucial for the well-being of young people.

Each of these institutions, while having distinct operational focuses, collectively contributes to a health system that is attuned to the needs of young people, ensuring that their physical and mental health concerns are addressed within a supportive and integrated framework.

In alignment with [Government Decision No. 886 of 06.08.2007 regarding the approval of the National Health Policy](#), Moldova has set a 15-year agenda to improve the population's health and reduce social and regional health disparities. The governance of this policy is multifaceted, involving various state structures, legal frameworks and intersectoral actions, all aiming to address health determinants comprehensively.

Furthermore, a functional network of medical, social and psychological support for young people, including crisis centres and friendly healthcare services, is being developed ([youth clinics](#)). Intersectoral co-operation ensures adequate treatment, rehabilitation and social integration for young people with chronic illnesses or disabilities. In collaboration with communities, local authorities identify and support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring adequate nutrition and care. The network of youth clinics in the Republic of Moldova comprises 41 centres distributed across the country. These clinics were established between 2002 and 2017 as part of a national initiative to offer comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services to young people. The services provided by these clinics are especially notable for their accessibility and inclusivity, catering to young people

⁷ [Government Decision No. 156 of 11.02.2002](#) regarding the approval of the Statute of the National Medical Insurance Company.

aged between 10 and 24. These centres are staffed by multidisciplinary teams including gynaecologists, urologists/andrologists, internists, dermatologists, midwives, nurses, psychologists and social workers. They offer free counselling services, contraceptives and HIV testing, ensuring that adolescents have access to essential health services without financial barriers.

The impact of these clinics on youth health in Moldova is significant. For instance, the fertility rate among those aged 15 to 19 decreased by 25% in the last five years, and abortions in this age group have decreased by 20%. The number of abortions among minors almost halved from 243 in 2016 to 141 in 2018. Additionally, the percentage of 15-year-olds who have started having sex decreased from 18% in 2014 to 13.3% in 2018, and the use of contraceptive pills among sexually active 15-year-olds increased from 6% in 2014 to 10% in 2018.⁸ These trends indicate a positive impact of the clinics' work on young people's sexual and reproductive health. However, challenges such as the consistent incidence of HIV among young people and the inconsistent use of condoms among sexually active 15 to 17-year-olds highlight areas that require continued attention and support.

To enhance accessibility and reach remote areas, the network is expanding its services through mobile teams that provide clinical outreach services to adolescents in villages. This initiative aims to address the reluctance of young people in small, remote villages to seek help from regular local health services, ensuring privacy and confidentiality in smaller communities. These mobile teams consist of nurses and volunteers who visit communities based on an established programme, offering confidential and free services to young people.

Legislative framework

The Republic of Moldova has established a robust legislative framework to govern and protect its youth's health and well-being, guided by national laws and international agreements. The legislative underpinning of youth health policies is marked by a commitment to align with European standards and to incorporate global health principles.

[Government Decision No. 886 of 06.08.2007 regarding the approval of the National Health Policy](#) is pivotal in shaping the country's approach to health and sets forth a comprehensive policy for health and well-being. It emphasises the importance of addressing health determinants through multidisciplinary and intersectoral interventions, underscoring the state's responsibility in health promotion, disease prevention and ensuring equitable access to healthcare services.

[Law No. 411 of 03.28.1995 regarding health protection](#) forms the bedrock of health legislation in Moldova, stipulating the rights to healthcare and the state's duties in providing accessible and quality health services. It highlights preventive care, a healthy living environment and the need for economic and social security as essential health components.

Moldovan health legislation considers the principles of the [World Health Organization's \(WHO\) "Health for All" strategy](#) in the European Region and the [Moldova-European Union Action Plans](#). This alignment ensures that the country's health policies align with international standards and practices.

The national legal framework does not include some youth health-specific provisions for young people. However, most of the health provisions include youth-specific provisions focusing on areas such as sexual and reproductive health, mental health and lifestyle diseases. Laws and regulations are

⁸ [Health Behaviours of Adolescents in a Crisis Context](#). HBSC Moldova 2022 data. Dr Galina Lesco, HBSC Moldova PI.

designed to cater to the unique health needs of adolescents and young adults, providing a legal basis for targeted health programmes and services. The legal structure supports establishing and operating youth-friendly health clinics, ensuring that these facilities operate within a defined legal and ethical framework to offer specialised health services to young people.

Despite the comprehensive nature of the legislative framework, challenges such as inconsistent application of laws at different levels of healthcare and the need for continuous updates and reforms to keep pace with evolving health needs remain. Future legislative efforts are geared towards further aligning national health laws with European standards and addressing gaps in youth health services.

Responsibilities of regional/local authorities

The effective implementation of youth health and well-being policies in the Republic of Moldova relies significantly on the roles and responsibilities of regional and local authorities. These entities are essential in translating national health strategies into actionable plans tailored to the specific needs of their local populations. Although [Law No. 436 of 28.12.2006 regarding local public administration](#) does not establish any express obligations for local public authorities in the health field, regional and local authorities are tasked with adapting and executing the national health policies and programmes locally. This includes supporting the development of relevant local infrastructure, deploying health initiatives, preventive campaigns and educational programmes specifically designed to address the health needs of young people in their respective regions. Local public authorities are responsible for developing and maintaining the medical infrastructure in their territories, which they also own, but they do not finance health services.⁹

These authorities work closely with local healthcare facilities, including hospitals, clinics and youth-friendly centres, to ensure that young people have access to necessary health services. They play a pivotal role in facilitating the smooth operation of these facilities and ensuring they are adequately staffed and equipped. A key responsibility is to engage with the community, including schools, families and youth organisations, to promote health awareness and education. Local authorities often co-ordinate events, workshops and campaigns focused on critical youth health issues such as mental health, sexual and reproductive health, substance abuse prevention and healthy lifestyles.¹⁰

Non-governmental stakeholders and their role

In the Republic of Moldova, non-governmental stakeholders play a vital role in complementing and enhancing the government's efforts in promoting youth health and well-being. These stakeholders include diverse entities, each contributing uniquely to the health landscape. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are pivotal in reaching out to communities, especially in areas where government services are limited. They often focus on specific health issues such as mental health, sexual and reproductive health, or substance abuse. NGOs also play a crucial role in advocacy, raising awareness about youth health issues and pushing for policy changes. One of the most relevant examples of collaboration between the state and NGOs is launching a network of youth-friendly health centres. The "[Health for Young People](#)" public association originally created the network. Gradually, the youth-friendly health centres (after rebranding the youth clinics) were taken over for financing and administrative management by the Ministry of Health through its territorial structures.

⁹ [Health Systems in Action Republic of Moldova](#), World Health Organization, European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2022.

¹⁰ [Regions for Health Network](#), World Health Organization, 2018.

[International organisations and donors](#) provide critical support regarding funding, expertise and global best practices. They often collaborate on large-scale health projects, capacity-building initiatives and research studies to improve youth health outcomes in Moldova.

Medical associations and health professionals, including doctors, nurses, psychologists and other healthcare workers, contribute by providing direct care, engaging in preventive health education and participating in policy advocacy. They also play a role in training and capacity building within the healthcare sector. The Ministry of Health updates and approves annually a [list of NGOs recognised as partners in the development of the health sector](#) in the Republic of Moldova.

Cross-sectoral co-operation

In the realm of youth health and well-being, cross-sectoral co-operation stands as a cornerstone for effective and sustainable interventions. This approach acknowledges that young people in the Republic of Moldova face health issues that are not isolated challenges but are deeply interconnected with various social, educational and economic factors. Therefore, a multifaceted approach involving collaboration across different sectors is essential to comprehensively address these complex health needs.

Intersectoral co-operation and co-ordination are mentioned as weak points in the [National Health Strategy “Health 2030”](#). The capacities of the responsible public institutions are assessed as modest in terms of evidence-informed policy making, limited credible local records, lack of co-operation between decision makers and the research community, and slow co-ordination between ministries.¹¹ The concept of cross-sectoral co-operation extends beyond the traditional healthcare sector, encompassing education, social services, community engagement and private-sector participation. This collaborative model brings together diverse expertise and resources, fostering synergies that enhance the efficiency and impact of health initiatives.

For instance, schools and universities are pivotal in early health education and awareness. Social services provide critical support networks and resources for vulnerable youths, addressing social determinants of health. The private sector contributes valuable resources and innovation to health projects through corporate social responsibility initiatives and partnerships. Moreover, community engagement ensures that health programmes are culturally appropriate and responsive to the unique needs of the youth population. Several issues still exist in co-operation between various stakeholders. For example, the nurses find it difficult to get accepted by the educational body for decision making at the school level. Educational stakeholders reported that nurses lack knowledge about educational processes.¹²

This integrated approach addresses immediate health concerns and works towards building a supportive environment that nurtures the long-term well-being and development of young people. Cross-sectoral co-operation in Moldova represents a commitment to a holistic, inclusive and sustainable youth health and well-being model.

¹¹ [Evidence-informed Policy Network \(EVIPNet\) Europe: success stories in knowledge translation. Public health panorama](#), WHO, Regional Office for Europe, Scarlett J., Köhler K., Reinap M., Ciobanu A. and Şirdea M. (2018).

¹² [Assessing and Improving School Health Services in the WHO European Region](#), WHO Regional Office for Europe and Russia, 2022.

Schools and higher education institutions collaborate closely with health authorities to integrate health education into their curricula. This includes programmes on physical health, mental well-being and social issues, ensuring that students receive comprehensive health education as part of their overall development. The “[Health Education](#)” course was introduced in Moldovan schools in 2015 for grades I-XII and is actually the only one that complexly addresses issues related to adolescents’ health and safe development. It is an optional course, annually being selected by about 10% of teenage students. Currently, “Health Education” addresses topics specific to adolescent development by applying interactive and digital learning methods such as role-playing games, quizzes (What? Where? When?), visits to youth institutions, community projects and many other interesting education activities.¹³

The Republic of Moldova also benefits from international partnerships, receiving support from global health organisations and foreign governments. These collaborations bring in additional resources, global best practices and specialised knowledge, significantly enhancing the quality and scope of health services provided to young people. To combat communicable diseases, WHO has supported implementing the [National Immunisation Programme](#) developed by the Ministry of Health and the National Agency for Public Health and assisted in drafting the prevention and control programmes for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, hepatitis and tuberculosis (TB). WHO has also supported the Ministry of Health and the [National Agency for Public Health](#) in implementing the national immunisation programme and the associated communication strategy. This included the immunisation catch-up campaign “Vaccine yourself! Protect your future!” in 10 areas with low vaccination coverage.¹⁴

These collaborative efforts showcase Moldova’s commitment to a holistic and inclusive approach to youth health and well-being. By leveraging the strengths and resources of various sectors, Moldova is able to offer a more comprehensive and effective response to the health needs of its young population.

Moldova’s approach to youth health and well-being is marked by a number of innovative and unique cross-sectoral projects that showcase the country’s commitment to dynamic and effective health initiatives. These approaches are improving the direct provision of health services and expanding outreach and engagement with young people. Moldova has implemented mobile health units to recognise the challenge of reaching rural and remote communities. These units travel to underserved areas, providing essential health services, screenings and education directly to young people where they live. This approach significantly improves access to healthcare for those in remote locations.

Several digital health platforms and apps have been developed to give young people easy access to health information and services. These digital solutions offer resources on [mental health](#), [sexual and reproductive health](#), nutrition and more, often with interactive features that engage users meaningfully.

These innovative collaborative approaches reflect Moldova’s commitment to evolving its health services and outreach methods to better serve its young population. By embracing new ideas and

¹³ [Curriculum for the Optional Discipline Health Education](#) (grades V-XII), Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic Of Moldova, 2019

¹⁴ [Health Systems in Action Republic of Moldova](#), World Health Organization, European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2022.

technologies and fostering co-operation across sectors, Moldova is creating a dynamic health landscape that is more responsive to the needs of its youth.

7.3 Sport, youth fitness and physical activity

National strategy(ies)

In the Republic of Moldova, the landscape for national strategies promoting sports and physical activity, particularly among young people, is characterised by both legislative foundations and the absence of specific, overarching strategic guidance.

The main legislative document in the field of sport, youth fitness and physical activity is the [Law No. 330 of 25.03.1999 on Physical Culture and Sport](#). This law lays the groundwork for sports and physical activities in Moldova. It outlines the legal basis for promoting physical education and sports, setting a general direction for activities in this domain. However, it does not constitute a comprehensive strategy with specific objectives and actions tailored to the needs of young people.

Currently, Moldova does not have a dedicated national strategy that specifically guides priorities in the field of sports, either in general or for the youth demographic. This absence indicates a need for a more focused and strategic approach to develop and promote sports and physical activities among young people. The responsibility for sports, including youth sports, currently falls under the purview of the [Ministry of Education and Research](#). The ministry's involvement underscores the recognised link between physical education and the broader educational and developmental needs of young people. There is no specialised institution in Moldova solely dedicated to administering sports programmes. This implies that sports initiatives, particularly for youth, are likely integrated within broader educational and community programmes, rather than being driven by a dedicated sports-focused entity.

While providing a legal basis for sports and physical activities, the current legislative framework lacks the targeted approach for addressing young people's needs and interests. The absence of a specialised strategy or institution for sports means that initiatives may not be as effective or as focused as they could be in promoting youth sports participation and physical activity.

Promoting and supporting sport and physical activity among young people

Promoting and supporting sport and physical activity among young people in Moldova are integral to the broader effort to develop a comprehensive sports culture in line with the envisioned [National Sports Development Strategy until 2030](#). A key focus of the ongoing discussions and strategic planning is on mass sports development. This initiative aims to foster an active lifestyle among the youth, recognising physical activity as crucial for maintaining health and well-being. Programmes and activities are being designed to encourage widespread participation in sports among young people, irrespective of their skill level or athletic ability.

Efforts to promote sports and physical activity are integrated into schools and community settings. These initiatives include after-school sports programmes, interschool competitions and community sports events. The aim is to make sports accessible and enjoyable for all young people, creating an environment where regular physical activity is a valued part of daily life. School education includes a mandatory discipline, [National Physical Education](#), which comprises theoretical and practical activities.

Alongside mass sports development, there is a focus on nurturing talents and providing pathways for young athletes to excel in high-performance sports. This involves identifying and supporting talented young athletes and providing them with access to quality training, coaching and competition opportunities both nationally and internationally. The [National Olympic and Sports Committee](#) and [sports federations](#) are responsible for recruiting young people and developing performance sports.

Campaigns are being conducted to raise awareness about the benefits of physical activity and sports. These campaigns target young people, parents, educators and the wider community, emphasising the role of physical activity in overall health and personal development.

The ongoing focus on promoting and supporting sports and physical activity among young people in Moldova aligns with the goals of the National Sports Development Strategy until 2030. These efforts are crucial to creating a culture of health and active living among the youth, setting the foundation for a healthier, more active and engaged population.

Physical education in schools

Physical education (PE) in schools is pivotal in promoting sports and physical activity among young people in Moldova. This component is vital for instilling a culture of health and fitness from an early age, aligning with the broader objectives of the National Sports Development Strategy until 2030.

Physical education is an integral part of the school curriculum in Moldova. The curriculum is designed to give students a comprehensive understanding of physical fitness, health and wellness. It includes a variety of sports and physical activities, ensuring that students are exposed to different forms of exercise and movement.

PE classes in schools focus on skills development in various sports and educating students about the benefits of regular physical activity for health. Lessons often include components on maintaining an active lifestyle, the importance of regular exercise and basic knowledge about body functions and health. Schools are encouraged to improve their sports facilities and equipment to provide students with better opportunities to engage in physical activities. This includes the development of playgrounds, sports fields, gymnasiums and providing necessary sports equipment.

While considerable progress has been made in integrating physical education into school curricula, challenges such as uneven access to quality facilities and resources across different regions remain. Future opportunities lie in further enhancing the quality and reach of physical education, ensuring that all young people in Moldova have equal access to quality sports education.

In summary, physical education in schools is a fundamental pillar in promoting sports and physical activity among the youth in Moldova. By providing quality education and opportunities in sports, schools play a crucial role in fostering a healthy and active lifestyle among students.

Collaboration and partnerships

Collaboration and partnerships in the realm of sports and physical education in Moldova are essential components for enhancing and diversifying opportunities for youth engagement in physical activities. These collaborations span various sectors and bring together different stakeholders, significantly contributing to developing a comprehensive sports culture for young people.

Schools and educational institutions in Moldova often partner with local sports federations and clubs. These partnerships provide students with access to specialised coaching, advanced sports facilities and opportunities to participate in competitive sports. They also facilitate talent identification and

nurture young athletes' potential. Starting in 2020, the Ministry of Education and Research, in partnership with the [National Football Federation](#), has been implementing the “[Football in Schools](#)” programme. This project aims to promote the passion for football among students and discover new talents, to form specialised football classes and to support the development of future generations of footballers for the national teams. The [curriculum for the football discipline](#), approved by the Ministry of Education and Research, constitutes the basis of the students' training in the project.

Local governments collaborate with schools and community organisations to promote sports and physical activities among young people. This includes organising community sports events, developing public sports facilities and supporting local sports initiatives that are accessible to all young people in the community.

Collaboration with the private sector, including sponsorships and business partnerships, significantly enhances school sports programmes. Private companies often contribute resources, funding and expertise, enabling schools to improve their sports facilities and equipment and to organise larger-scale sports events.

7.4 Healthy lifestyles and healthy nutrition

National strategy (ies)

Moldova's strategic approach to promoting healthy lifestyles and nutrition among its youth includes the comprehensive “Health 2030” strategy. This strategy integrates insights from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study and other pertinent research, focusing on enhancing young people's overall health and nutritional habits.

No strategic document is dedicated to promoting healthy lifestyles and nutrition among young people. The national priorities on youth health are found in the national strategy “Health 2030”. The strategy provides a detailed framework for enhancing public health, including the youth. It includes government policies and action plans spearheaded by key ministries such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the Ministry of Education and Research. The strategy is designed for long-term impact and spans until 2030, allowing for the development and integration of health-promoting behaviours among the youth.

The strategy encompasses several critical areas, including improving nutritional standards, promoting physical activity, providing comprehensive sexual health education and preventing substance abuse. It addresses health challenges identified in the HBSC reports, such as low physical activity levels and irregular dietary patterns among adolescents.

The “Health 2030” strategy aims to mitigate lifestyle-related health issues, improve mental and physical health and encourage adopting lifelong healthy habits. This includes initiatives to increase daily physical activity, enhance dietary choices and raise awareness about sexual health and substance abuse prevention. The strategy includes targeted interventions for several issues, such as low physical activity and irregular breakfast consumption. These focus on comprehensive health education, accessible physical activity programmes and initiatives to improve dietary habits.

The strategy focuses on diverse youth groups, including those in rural areas and from different socio-economic backgrounds, ensuring inclusiveness and addressing varied youth health needs.

Encouraging healthy lifestyles and healthy nutrition for young people

In Moldova, encouraging healthy lifestyles and nutrition among young people is critical to public health policy. This focus aligns with the broader goals of the Health 2030 strategy, emphasising the importance of fostering healthy habits from a young age. This involves providing adolescents with accurate information about sexual and reproductive health, promoting responsible behaviour and ensuring they have access to necessary health services. The emphasis is placed on educating young people about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. This includes regular physical activity, balanced nutrition and mental well-being. The services of the 41 youth-friendly health centres are the main tool for promoting healthy lifestyles and healthy nutrition. Thus, the results that impacted public health indicators in 2022 highlighted that 38.8% of the youth population aged 10-24 was in the activities of the youth-friendly health centres. These activities covered subjects such as physical activity, nutrition and healthy behaviours.

Efforts are made to educate young people about the importance of healthy eating. This includes understanding nutritional needs, choosing balanced diets and developing healthy eating habits. Programmes may also involve parents and caregivers, recognising their role in shaping dietary habits. Most of these campaigns are organised through the network of the youth clinics and in partnership with youth and health NGOs.

Comprehensive programmes are designed to prevent risky behaviours among young people, including substance abuse such as drug, tobacco and alcohol use. These programmes often involve awareness campaigns, educational workshops and counselling services.

Health education and healthy lifestyles education in schools

Incorporating health education and promoting healthy lifestyles in Moldova's school curriculum is a fundamental step towards ensuring the long-term well-being of young people. This approach is multidimensional, focusing on various aspects of health and wellness. Starting in 2019, the optional subject of [health education](#) has been available in general education. In this sense, the Ministry of Education and Research approved the health education curriculum and developed a set of didactic materials for the practical implementation of this optional course.

The curriculum includes a wide range of health-related topics. It encompasses education on healthy eating and nutrition, physical activity, preventing risky behaviour (like substance abuse) and general wellness practices. The pedagogical approach to health education encourages active participation, critical thinking and practical application of knowledge.

The school course health education provides information on sex education and personal relationships education within the curriculum. The education programme covers both biological and emotional aspects of sexuality, reproductive health, awareness of different sexual orientations and responsible sexual behaviour.

Educators responsible for teaching health and sexual education benefit from [tailored training programmes](#), online resources and additional educational materials. This provision is paramount to ensuring their adeptness in delivering these subjects effectively. Nonetheless, the prevalence of schools offering this elective course remains relatively limited. Schools often attribute this limitation to the shortage of adequately qualified teachers available to conduct the course. Notably, teachers can customise health education content to align with their students' unique requirements and backgrounds, enhancing its relevance and fostering active engagement.

The National Resource Centre for Youth-Friendly Health Services, Neovita, the public association Health for Youth and the Ministry of Education and Research (MER), with support from ERIKS Development Partner (Sweden), implement the programme [European Healthy Schools \(EHS\)](#). This initiative has expanded continuously, reaching in 2023 a total of 42 primary and secondary schools nationwide. The educational institutions within the EHS network are dedicated to implementing a structured and systematic health and well-being plan for all students and the teaching and non-teaching staff.

Regular assessments of health education programmes are essential to determine their effectiveness and impact on student health and behaviour. The health education curriculum evolves to reflect new health challenges, scientific understandings and societal changes. By prioritising health education and healthy lifestyle education in schools, Moldova is taking significant steps towards cultivating a health-conscious younger generation. The success of these programmes in schools will play a pivotal role in shaping the overall health and well-being of future generations in the country.

Peer-to-peer education approaches

Peer-to-peer education is critical to Moldova's strategy to enhance young people's knowledge and understanding of health and well-being. This method of education leverages the influence and relatability among peers to effectively communicate and reinforce healthy lifestyle choices.

Moldova implements various types of peer-to-peer education initiatives, including workshops, seminars and interactive programmes focused on health and well-being. The main implementers of peer-to-peer education initiatives are the youth clinics. All 41 local youth health centres recruit teams of young volunteers annually to be trained to provide peer-to-peer activities on various topics.

With the UNFPA support, a network of peer-to-peer educators has been established ([Y-PEER Moldova](#)). Notably, the Y-PEER curriculum received approval from the Ministry of Education of Moldova, recognising it as an innovative educational approach.

Y-PEER is a network of peer educators dedicated to organising information, communication and education sessions for young individuals. The primary objective of peer-to-peer education within this network is to foster knowledge, positive attitudes and essential life skills among young people, encouraging healthy and responsible behaviour.

Since April 2013, Y-PEER Moldova has operated as an officially registered non-governmental organisation (NGO) under the name Peer Educators Network Moldova. Its activities span 15 towns and villages throughout Moldova, with a dedicated team of over 300 peer-to-peer educators conducting educational sessions nationwide. Y-PEER offers young and enthusiastic individuals who aspire to volunteer the opportunity to join the Moldova team and contribute to their impactful initiatives.

The primary goal of these initiatives is to empower young people to make informed decisions about their health and to promote positive health behaviours within their peer groups. These initiatives often target specific groups within the youth population, such as adolescents in schools, young people in vulnerable communities or those with specific health risks. The methods used to reach these target groups may include school-based programmes, community outreach and online platforms.

Peer-to-peer education approaches in Moldova significantly enhance health education and promote healthy lifestyles among young people. By utilising the power of peer influence and communication,

these initiatives effectively engage youth in health discussions and activities, leading to more informed and health-conscious behaviours.

There are several funding sources we could highlight for the peer-to-peer initiatives. The main one is the public funding from the Ministry of Health that goes to the youth clinics. The Y-peer network is financed by UNFPA Moldova and from other grants.

The [National Agency for the Development of Youth Programmes and Activities](#) annually inaugurates the Youth Organisations Grants Programme. This programme is specifically designed to provide support for advancing and enhancing the youth sector within the Republic of Moldova. Its primary aim is to foster a range of youth initiatives, including those related to the domain of youth health.

Collaboration and partnerships

Collaboration and partnerships are crucial in promoting youth fitness, physical activity, healthy lifestyles and nutrition among young people in Moldova. The [National Agency for the Development of Youth Programmes and Activities](#) is the main stakeholder that ensures and actively encourages and promotes partnerships between formal education providers, youth workers, health professionals and sporting organisations. The National Network of Youth Centres has been created to facilitate this process to support the experience and good practices exchange among youth workers. The National Youth Agency also provides methodological and technical support to the youth service providers in designing and implementing quality youth services at regional and local level.

The Neovita Centre co-ordinates the network of youth-friendly health service providers. Neovita represents an innovative model of integrated healthcare assistance for adolescents and youth, following the principles of youth-friendly health services. This includes comprehensive services that integrate advisory and informational assistance. The Neovita Centre was established on 30 May 2002 by the Health for Youth association with the support of [UNICEF Moldova](#) in collaboration with the Territorial Medical Association of Râșcani and Chișinău City Hall. Neovita was one of the first youth-friendly centres to open in the Republic of Moldova. In 2007, the Neovita youth-friendly health centre was integrated into the country's public healthcare system and is now funded by the National Health Insurance Company. Over the years, Neovita has contributed to establishing a network of 41 youth-friendly health centres throughout the country and serves as a resource centre for this network and healthcare professionals providing services to youth.

Raising awareness of healthy lifestyles and the factors affecting the health and well-being of young people

The Ministry of Health, with the support of development partners (ex. WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF) and with the participation of numerous youth and health organisations, carries out various campaigns to raise awareness of healthy lifestyles and the factors affecting the health and well-being of young people.

In 2023, to increase immunisation rates among the population, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with [UNICEF Moldova](#), the [National Agency for Public Health](#) and the [Centre for Health Strategies and Policies](#), launched an awareness and community mobilisation campaign. This initiative focused on boosting immunisation demand in rural areas, with the slogan "[Help me fight infections](#)". The campaign involved community members, local authorities, teachers, educators and social workers and covered 10 districts across the country and 15 suburbs within the Chișinău municipality with low vaccination rates against preventable infectious diseases.

Annually, within the activity plan of the youth clinics network, a range of activities fosters a health-conscious lifestyle and provides educational resources to young individuals on a variety of health-related subjects. These comprehensive campaigns encompass the following themes.

- Sexual and reproductive health education: empowering young people with knowledge and guidance on matters of sexual and reproductive health.
- Non-communicable disease prevention: promoting awareness and strategies to prevent non-communicable diseases among youth.
- Promotion of healthy lifestyles and positive behaviours: encouraging the adoption of healthy lifestyles and positive behaviour patterns for overall well-being.
- Injury and accident risk reduction: implementing measures to mitigate the risks of injuries and accidents among youth.
- Immunisation promotion: advocating and facilitating immunisation as a preventive healthcare measure.

These initiatives are designed to enhance the health and well-being of young individuals and are integral to the mission of the youth clinics network.

The national campaign [“Maintain your health! Take the cytology test!”](#) has been launched in Moldova, conveying that women’s health remains essential. The Ministry of Health, in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and other partners, aims to raise awareness about the importance of cytology testing. The campaign encourages women to undergo a test every three years. The campaign emphasises the safety measures in place, including protective equipment for healthcare workers, to ensure women’s safety during testing. The campaign was launched for the first time in 2021 and continues to be organised annually.

7.5 Mental health

National strategy (ies)

The legal framework governing the mental health of adolescents and youth encompasses various documents. However, several primary legal instruments are particularly relevant to adolescent and youth mental health and well-being.

The mental health domain in the Republic of Moldova is primarily regulated by [Law No. 1402 on mental health](#). The law was initially introduced on 16.12.1997. It has undergone significant amendments, notably through [Law 156 dated 09.06.2022](#). The law provides comprehensive definitions of mental disorders, outlines the rights and protections for individuals with mental health issues and establishes guidelines for voluntary and involuntary hospitalisation. It emphasises the importance of a multidisciplinary therapeutic team in mental healthcare and details the roles of legal representatives and healthcare professionals. The law also addresses the protection of minors with mental health issues and specifies the conditions under which coercive medical measures may be applied.

The primary objectives are to ensure humane and dignified treatment of individuals with mental disorders, guarantee their rights and privacy, provide clear guidelines for psychiatric care and hospitalisation and safeguard the interests of minors and other vulnerable groups.

The law specifically targets individuals suffering from mental disorders, including those with severe psychiatric conditions, minors and other vulnerable groups requiring special attention in the context of mental healthcare. The implementation, co-ordination and monitoring of this law are primarily the responsibility of the healthcare sector under the oversight of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Moldova. However, other government agencies and departments related to social services and education also play a role in its execution.

[Law No. 140 of 14.06.2013](#) on Special Protection of Children at Risk and Children Separated from Their Parents, outlines the responsibilities of the central authority for child protection (MLSP) and territorial/local guardianship authorities (APL). These responsibilities include identifying, assessing, assisting, referring, monitoring and documenting children at risk, including those whose parents are working abroad.

[Government Decision No. 270 of 08.04.2014](#) “Instructions Regarding the Intersectoral Co-operation Mechanism for the Identification, Assessment, Referral, Assistance and Monitoring of Child Victims and Potential Victims of Violence, Neglect, Exploitation and Trafficking” operationalises Law No. 140. It provides a reference mechanism for addressing various high-risk situations, including attempted suicide. However, it does not explicitly address self-harm, which does not align with WHO guidelines (WHO 2003). As the central authority for child protection, MLSP serves as the case manager in all six prescribed institutional procedures: identification, emergency intervention, request for special examination, assessment, record-keeping and prevention.

Improving the mental health of young people

There is currently no strategy or action plan in the mental health field. Certain objectives and elements in this field are contained in the national strategy “Health 2030”. However, no exact priorities or targets are established for the general population or young people.

Despite all this, several actions in the mental health field and strengthening a support system in this field have been carried out. To understand Moldova’s adolescent and youth protection system, it is important to consider the resources available across three key administrative levels.¹⁵ At the community level, which includes around 900 communities, the system involves the Ministry of Education (providing teachers, psychologists in high schools and school assistants), the Ministry of Health (family doctors), the local public administration and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (community social assistants), the local guardianship authority and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (community police service).

At the district level, which includes 32 districts and two municipalities (Chişinău and Balţi), the system is expanded to include the youth-friendly health centres (youth clinics) and the community mental health centre from the Ministry of Health, the Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Service, youth centres and youth councils from the Ministry of Education and Research, territorial guardianship authorities,

¹⁵ [The expert report of the mission to analyse the situation regarding the mental health of young people in Moldova](#), Robert Thomson, Ana Gurau-Stäger. 2017.

directorates for social assistance and family protection, directorates for education, youth and sports, and police inspectorates from the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

At the regional level, [community mental health centres](#) have been created, a medico-social service offering medical assistance, psychosocial rehabilitation, support and mediation in family and community relations. Currently, 40 centres operate in all the districts and municipalities of the country. Psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and psychiatric nurses are part of a complete team, trained to identify and treat mental health problems according to the provisions of national clinical protocols. People of any age can use community mental health centres with symptoms of mental and behavioural disorders.

Finally, at the national level, four main ministries are involved: the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This multilayered approach indicates a comprehensive framework for youth protection in Moldova, with various ministries and local authorities each contributing at different levels.

7.6 Mechanisms of early detection and signposting of young people facing health risks

Policy framework

There is no policy framework dedicated only to early detection and signposting of young people facing health risks.

Stakeholders

There is no mechanism on the national level to involve different stakeholders in detecting young people at health risk at an early stage.

7.7 Making health facilities more youth friendly

The main document highlighting the government's commitment to more youth-friendly healthcare is the "[Youth Standards](#)", established through [Order No. 168 of the Ministry of Health](#) on 12 June 2009, regarding approving the quality standards for youth-friendly health services in the Republic of Moldova. The document reflects the commitment and priorities of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Moldova. It aligns with various national policies and strategies, including the National Health Policy, the National Reproductive Health Strategy, the Youth Strategy, the National Programme for the prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, the Concept of Youth-Friendly Health Services and other normative acts related to health and youth development.

The document addresses the health and development issues faced by young people aged 10-24, who constitute 28% of the country's population. These issues include sexually transmitted infections (STIs)/HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy, drug use, nutritional deficiencies and more. These are major causes of morbidity in this age group. Youth often seek medical assistance late or in limited cases due to the lack of youth-specific services, fear of confidentiality breaches and the accusatory attitude of medical staff.

In accordance with the [National Concept of Youth-Friendly Health Services \(YFHS\)](#) in Moldova, a working group was created in 2006 to develop Quality Standards for YFHS. With UNICEF's technical support, a preliminary version of the standards was developed and sent to the WHO's Department of

Child and Adolescent Health for review. A workshop was organised in November 2007 to adapt the developed standards to WHO criteria, leading to the final version of the Quality Standards for YFHS and their implementation measures.

The document sets out two main objectives: presenting principles for transforming existing health services into youth-friendly health services to effectively address young people's health and development issues and presenting practical ways and tools to ensure the organisation of youth-friendly health services. These standards ensure the implementation of existing normative acts in the field.

The target group for these services is young people aged 10-24, with particular attention on certain categories of youth who are more likely to face health and development risks. These include all adolescents (10-19 years old), youth in vulnerable situations, sexually active youth and any young person facing health and development issues.

Key health and development issues for youth in Moldova identified in the document include STIs/HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy, mental health problems due to substance abuse, psycho-emotional and personality disorders, health issues resulting from violence, nutritional disorders and developmental disorders during puberty. The document provides two packages of YFHS to be adopted by member institutions and organisations of the YFHS network based on their capacities and profiles: the basic package of services, or "friendly approach", and the extended package of services at the secondary level.

To enhance accessibility according to WHO dimensions and reduce obstacles to adolescents and youth accessing health services, six quality standards of youth-friendly health services were developed. These include knowledge of where and when to seek health services, easy access to needed health services, respect for the confidentiality and privacy of youth by service providers, community mobilisation to promote youth-friendly health services, effective and comprehensive services by providers in line with the real needs of youth and equal access to health services for all young people.

The six developed standards in the document are as follows.

- **Young people's awareness:** this standard ensures that young people know when and where to seek health services. It ensures young people know about the availability and locations of health services.
- **Easy access for young people:** this standard provides young people with easy access to the health services they need whenever they need them. It emphasises the importance of accessible healthcare for youth.
- **Respect for confidentiality and privacy:** healthcare providers must respect the confidentiality and privacy of young people. This standard highlights the importance of creating a trustworthy and secure environment for youth seeking health services.
- **Community mobilisation:** health services engage the community to promote youth-friendly health services. This standard involves community involvement and awareness raising to support and promote health services that are geared towards young people.
- **Effective and comprehensive services:** providers offer effective and comprehensive services in line with the real needs of young people. This standard stresses the importance of

healthcare services being not only effective but also all-encompassing, catering to the broad spectrum of young people's health needs.

- **Equal access for all young people:** this standard ensures that all young people have equal access to health services, emphasising equity in healthcare provision regardless of various personal factors.

7.8 Current debates and reforms

Recommendations

In light of the ongoing debates and forthcoming policy developments related to youth health in Moldova, several recommendations have been proposed to enhance the youth policy environment, professionalise local youth services provision and increase the gender sensitivity of health policies.

- **Mainstream youth in all sectoral ministries:** encourage the integration of youth perspectives and concerns into the policies and programmes of all sectoral ministries to ensure a holistic approach to youth well-being.
- **Activate cross-sector co-ordination mechanisms:** promote cross-sectoral collaboration and co-ordination mechanisms to effectively implement youth policies and programmes, leveraging the expertise and resources of various ministries.
- **Ensure institutional stability:** maintain institutional stability for the ministry mandated for youth policy, providing a clear and consistent vision for youth-related initiatives.
- **Support and train staff:** invest in capacity building by providing training and support to the mandated ministry and local public administration staff to enhance their knowledge and skills in youth policy implementation.
- **Increase budgets for youth programmes:** allocate larger budgets for youth programmes, ensuring that financial resources are sufficient to support a wide range of initiatives, including those related to health.
- **Apply results-based management:** implement results-based management practices to assess the effectiveness of youth programmes and make data-driven decisions.
- **Create an information system on youth:** develop an information system dedicated to youth to collect relevant data, monitor the impact of policies and evaluate the well-being of young people.
- **Establish local implementation structures:** create structured mechanisms at the local level to effectively implement youth policies and programmes, ensuring that young people's needs are addressed locally.
- **Harmonise occupational responsibilities:** standardise the occupational responsibilities and requirements of youth workers to ensure consistent and high-quality service provision.
- **Include SRH and gender specificities in education curricula:** integrate comprehensive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education focusing on gender-specific issues into school curricula.

- **Promote gender role equilibrium:** within the education system, strive to balance gender role perceptions and promote gender equity.
- **Promote healthy models of femininity and masculinity:** encourage the promotion of healthy models of femininity and masculinity among adolescents and society as a whole, fostering positive gender norms.
- **Advertise youth-friendly health centres (YFHCs):** develop effective mechanisms to advertise the services provided by youth-friendly health centres (YFHCs) and identify vulnerable youth with limited access to healthcare.
- **Adapt health services to gender-specific needs:** enhance health services by increasing the number of experts in YFHCs who can address gender-specific health needs.

Train professionals: train health and education professionals in youth and gender-sensitive approaches, ensuring they are equipped to provide inclusive and responsive services.

These recommendations aim to strengthen Moldova’s youth policies and health-related initiatives, promoting its young population’s well-being and holistic development.

Ongoing debates

Approval of the National Strategy for Sport Development “Sport 2030”: the ongoing debate regarding the approval of the strategy Sport 2030 reflects Moldova’s commitment to enhancing its sports sector. The strategy, which aims to promote sports activities and shape the future of sports in the country, has generated considerable discussion among policy makers, sports organisations and the public. Supporters argue that it provides a comprehensive road map for sports development and can lead to increased international recognition and success for Moldovan athletes. However, there are opposing views as well. Critics point out the need for detailed implementation plans, clear funding mechanisms and accountability measures to meet the strategy’s objectives. The debate revolves around balancing ambitious goals and practical implementation, making it a critical point of contention in Moldova’s sports landscape.

Specialised agency for sports portfolio management: the discussion surrounding establishing a specialised agency dedicated to managing the sports portfolio in Moldova is gaining traction. Advocates argue that such an agency could streamline the administration of sports-related matters, including funding allocation, infrastructure development and athlete support programmes. Proponents believe that a dedicated agency would bring expertise and focus to the sports sector, ultimately leading to improved performance and competitiveness on the international stage. However, opponents raise concerns about the potential duplication of functions and bureaucracy, suggesting that existing governmental structures should suffice. The ongoing debate centres on finding the right balance between creating a new agency and optimising the current system for effective sports management.

Multistakeholder governmental entity for youth health priorities: the need for a multistakeholder governmental entity to co-ordinate youth health priorities has become a prominent topic of discussion in Moldova. Recognising that youth health is a multifaceted issue involving education, healthcare and social services, proponents argue that a co-ordinated approach is essential to address young people's unique challenges. This entity would bring together government agencies, healthcare providers, educators, youth organisations and other stakeholders to develop comprehensive strategies for promoting youth well-being. On the other hand, critics express concerns about potential inefficiencies and overlap with existing structures. The ongoing debate revolves around such an entity's optimal composition, scope and authority to ensure effective youth health co-ordination.

Harmonisation of health, sports and related domains with European standards: As part of Moldova's European Union integration process, there is a growing discussion about harmonising health, sports and related domains with European standards. Advocates argue that alignment with EU standards would enhance the quality of healthcare and sports infrastructure and facilitate cross-border cooperation and opportunities for Moldovan citizens. The harmonisation process ensures that Moldova's systems and regulations are in sync with European counterparts, promoting compatibility and compliance. However, challenges related to funding, resource allocation and adapting to new regulations have sparked debates. The ongoing discussion focuses on the practical steps needed to achieve harmonisation and the potential benefits for Moldova's overall development in the context of EU integration.

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