

# Youth Partnership

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Partnership between the European Commission  
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



## CONTRIBUTION OF PARTNER COUNTRIES TO THE EU YOUTH WIKI

### CHAPTER IV: MOLDOVA SOCIAL INCLUSION

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## 4.1 General context

In Moldova, a nation where young people aged 14-35 make up a significant portion of the population, young people encounter a range of interconnected challenges requiring a comprehensive policy approach. The young population faces education, employment, health and civic participation issues. Despite high educational access, with a notable 39.3% of 25 to 29-year-olds holding post-secondary or higher degrees, the quality of education remains a concern, especially when compared to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) standards, as evidenced in the PISA assessments. Employment is another critical area, as many young Moldovans are not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET), and many struggle to find well-paid jobs that align with their skills and aspirations.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of youth is understood as a socially constructed phase, marking the transition from childhood to adulthood. It encompasses various stages, each characterised by distinct opportunities and challenges. These stages include engaging in formal education, initiating sexual relationships, entering the workforce, making autonomous choices and bearing their repercussions, developing intimate relationships beyond the familial scope and participating actively in civic life. The duration and nature of these transitions can vary significantly, influenced by the prevailing social and legal standards and the broader cultural and economic milieu.

Youth inclusion and well-being should be an important pillar of national development, as they 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.

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 as between the ages of 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 to 35 unless specified otherwise. The review uses "youth" and "young people" interchangeably. As of 1 January 2023, the permanent population in the Republic of Moldova was 2 512 800. Out of these, 615 272 or 24.49% are young people aged 14 to 34, with 49.91% men and 50.09% women.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova](#), EU-OECD Youth Inclusion Project, Paris. OECD Development Centre. 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Data from the [National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova](#) (last accessed 26 November 2023).

Poverty and social exclusion are important problems for young people. The environment of residence where they live and carry out their activities most often influences their living level and conditions. There is evidence of deepening social inequalities between youth in rural areas compared to those in urban areas. Rural localities and small cities have very low economic potential, high poverty levels, limited access to many goods and services and minimum opportunities for developing young human capital.

Multidimensional harmful behaviour affects over a third of the young population and presents strong gender, environment of residence and age discrepancies. Young women (38.9%), young people in rural areas (40.9%) and young people between the ages of 18 and 29 are confronted with deprivation to a greater extent than young men (32.8%), young people in urban areas (29.4%) and 15 to 17-year olds (20.8%).<sup>3</sup> The most marginalised categories of young people are young people with disabilities (77.2%), young people infected with HIV (47.6%), young people with a criminal record (43.4%), young pregnant women (23.1%), young people belonging to ethnic minorities, especially Roma (22.8%) and young women (16.9%).<sup>4</sup>

In the Republic of Moldova, there is an extremely high share (about 29%) of young people who do not follow any form of training or professional training and who are not even employed in the field of work (NEET rate). On this indicator, Moldova surpasses all the countries in the region, being far above the average of EU countries (17.9%), which confirms the high degree of vulnerability and social exclusion of young people. In recent years, the imbalance between labour supply and demand has doubled (from 20.8% in 2001 to 42.1%), largely due to the low employability of educated individuals and a higher incidence for the younger age group. The national statistics regarding the relationship of young people with the internal labour market attest that in relation to the status of the current activity, three out of 10 young people are placed in the labour field, and about two thirds are economically inactive (447 000), of which more than half are classified as in the process of studies and professional training, and over 20% are busy with housework, including family responsibilities. Among young people employed in the labour market, over 31% have informal jobs, and among young employees, 10.4% work without individual employment contracts.

At the same time, although there are programmes to support young entrepreneurs, their share remains relatively small; 2.4% are under the age of 24 and 20.3% are between the ages of 25 and 34. Four out of 10 officially registered unemployed are young (15 to 29 years old). Among them, three out of five are men, seven out of 10 come from rural areas and nine out of 10 are between 20 and 29 years old. Of the total number of young unemployed people, about 13% were long-term unemployed. Compared to neighbouring countries and some countries in the region, Moldova lags behind with the lowest employment rate among young people (18.1% for those aged 15 to 24 and 42.4% for those aged 25 to 29). At the same time, young people from Moldova register the highest rate of inactivity, over 66%.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [Youth Well-being Policy Review of Moldova](#), EU-OECD Youth Inclusion Project, Paris. OECD Development Centre. 2018.

<sup>4</sup> [Analysis of the Implementation of the National Strategy for the Development of the Youth Sector 2020](#). National Youth Council of Moldova. 2020.

<sup>5</sup> [The Situation of Young People in the Republic of Moldova: From Desire to Opportunities](#). Centre for Demographic Research. 2022.

The NEET (not in education, employment or training) rate among young people in the Republic of Moldova has been increasing over recent years, estimated at 29.7% in 2022. A territorial perspective analysis of the NEET youth profile shows that the highest proportion is recorded in the central region of the Republic, 28.9%, compared to the northern area, with 24.5%, and the Chisinau municipality, with 24.8%. Additionally, according to available statistical data, NEET youths are predominantly girls and young women with a low level of education.

The NEET rate is expected to rise in the coming years due to the economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This economic crisis will have a long-lasting impact on NEET youths due to severe implications for the labour force. According to the United Nations, the NEET rate worsened from the fourth quarter of 2019 to the second quarter of 2020 in 42 out of 49 countries with available data.<sup>6</sup> This is explained by the expulsion of many employees from the labour market, especially young workers.

Household and caregiving responsibilities are the main cause of the NEET status. Causal analysis reveals three major reasons why young people become NEET: (i) they take on caregiving responsibilities and thus become homemakers, a characteristic predominantly found in girls; (ii) they have a job abroad or plan to work abroad; and (iii) they have a disability or other situation.<sup>7</sup>

Disability is a significant barrier for young people to integrate into the labour market or education. 48.6% of young people with disabilities aged 15 to 34 fall into the NEET category. Although, in general, young women are predominantly NEET, among young people with disabilities, more men are in the NEET category. Another trend characteristic of this group is that the majority of NEET youths with disabilities are over 30 years old. The main barriers faced by NEET youths with disabilities in accessing educational institutions and the labour market relate to inaccessibility, including from an infrastructure perspective, existing stereotypes about the lack of skills or low efficiency of persons with special needs, and direct discrimination.<sup>8</sup>

Among the most vulnerable groups of children, students and youth in the socio-educational system continue to be those from poor families, families with very low parental income, children abandoned by parents, individuals with disabilities and children from rural areas, including those from Roma families. In the 2018 PISA report, the performance of students with a high level of social, economic and cultural status increased, while that of needy students regressed in mathematics and science compared to previous editions. The educational system in the Republic of Moldova is marked by a higher level of inequity than the educational systems in OECD member countries, except Bulgaria and Romania.<sup>9</sup> Compared to OECD member countries and other countries in the region, there are more students from disadvantaged backgrounds and far fewer from advantaged backgrounds in the Republic of Moldova, with the difference in well-being between disadvantaged and advantaged students being one of the most significant.

Today, the Republic of Moldova can benefit from the so-called demographic dividend. The demographic, or window of demographic opportunity, is a situation in which the working-age population is greater

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<sup>6</sup> [The Sustainable Development Goals Report](#). United Nations. 2021.

<sup>7</sup> [An inclusive approach to support policies for NEET youth in Moldova](#). Partnership Centre for Development. 2023.

<sup>8</sup> [An inclusive approach to support policies for NEET youth in Moldova](#). Partnership Centre for Development. 2023.

<sup>9</sup> [Development Strategy "Education 2020"](#).

than the dependent population. In 2017, 72.9% of the population was working age (15 to 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 to 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.<sup>10</sup>

## 4.2 Administration and governance

### Youth policies and institutional framework

Youth policy development necessitates collaboration among a wide array of stakeholders. It is beyond the scope of any single ministry to tackle the diverse issues impacting youth. Instead, various ministries and government bodies oversee and manage policies from their respective sectoral viewpoints, with their efforts augmented by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and global participants. These NGOs are crucial as service providers in domains where governmental activity is limited. However, their intervention in addressing these gaps can inadvertently hinder or displace government accountability. Therefore, it is essential for all involved parties to co-ordinate effectively to prevent such issues and to ensure the successful execution of 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 policymakers' 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 functional. 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.<sup>11</sup>

In 2023, the Government of the Republic of Moldova approved the [Youth Sector Development Strategy "Youth 2030"](#)<sup>12</sup>, a strategic document that has three general objectives:

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<sup>10</sup> [Analysis of the Demographic Dividends of the Republic Of Moldova](#), Alexandru Fala, UNFPA Moldova, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> [Comprehensive Youth Sector Analysis](#), National Institute for Economic Research, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

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

### **Governance**

In accordance with [Government Decision No. 149/2021](#) regarding the organisation and functioning of the [Ministry of Labour and Social Protection](#), social protection is identified as a primary area of competence for this ministry. This delineation underscores the ministry's pivotal role in crafting and implementing policies that safeguard the social welfare of the population, including youth.

However, the responsibility for inclusive policies extends beyond the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection remit, encompassing various other ministries within their respective areas of expertise. For instance, the [Ministry of Education and Research](#) shoulders the responsibility for policies related to inclusive education and ensuring access to quality education for all segments of society. Similarly, the [Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalisation](#) plays a crucial role in devising and executing programmes aimed at economic inclusion. These collaborative efforts across different governmental sectors are essential in fostering a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to inclusion, addressing various aspects of societal needs and ensuring that all citizens have equitable access to opportunities for personal and economic development.

Regarding the inclusion of youth, two central-level institutions in Moldova have significant responsibilities in this arena. The Ministry of Education and Research ensures the inclusion of young people in education, including those from vulnerable groups. This encompasses a range of initiatives to provide equitable access to educational opportunities tailored to address the diverse needs of all youth, particularly those at risk of marginalisation.

In the national context, inclusive education was first defined in the [Development Programme for Inclusive Education in the Republic of Moldova for the years 2011-2020](#), which states that inclusive education is an approach and an ongoing process of developing educational policies and practices aimed at ensuring equal opportunities and chances for excluded/marginalised individuals to benefit from the fundamental human rights to development and education, in the context of human diversity.<sup>13</sup> According to the programme, inclusive education involves the continuous change and adaptation of the educational system to meet the diversity of children and their needs and to provide quality education to all in integrated contexts and common learning environments.

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<sup>13</sup> [Development programme for inclusive education in the Republic of Moldova for the years 2011-2020](#). Government Decision No. 523 of 11 July 2011.

Approximately the same definition is given in the [Education Code](#), where inclusive education is defined as an educational process that responds to the diversity of youth and individual developmental requirements, providing equal opportunities and chances to benefit from the fundamental human rights to quality development and education in common learning environments.<sup>14</sup> The basic principles of inclusive education are those enshrined in educational policy documents, declarations of global forums in the field and other important documents. These principles focus on equality and equalising opportunities; respecting the best interests of the child and young person; non-discrimination, tolerance and valuing differences; individualisation of the education process and maximising the potential of each child; universal design, participative management, co-operation and social partnership.

On the other hand, as per its founding regulations and operational framework, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection is responsible for a broad spectrum of social protection policies. These include:

- gender equality policies: developing and implementing strategies to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all genders;
- policies for the protection of rights of persons with disabilities: focused on safeguarding the rights and improving the welfare of persons with disabilities, ensuring their full participation in society;
- child rights and family protection policies: these policies aim to protect children's rights and support families with children, ensuring their well-being and development;
- social service policies: designing and managing social services that cater to various needs of society, including support services for vulnerable groups;
- social assistance policies for low-income families and the elderly: providing financial and other forms of support to families with low incomes and elderly individuals to improve their quality of life and reduce poverty;
- social insurance policies: managing and implementing social insurance programmes, including pensions and other benefits, to provide financial security;
- policies for reducing poverty and energy vulnerability: these policies aim to address and mitigate the impacts of poverty and energy insecurity, ensuring sustainable and equitable access to resources.

Together, these ministries play a pivotal role in fostering an inclusive society where the youth, irrespective of their background or circumstances, have access to quality education and social protection, paving the way for a more equitable and inclusive Moldova.

The comprehensive governance of youth inclusion 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 Labour and Social Protection and the Ministry of Education and Research, other key institutions include the following.

- [National Agency for Employment](#) (ANOFM): ANOFM has streamlined the training process for jobseekers by introducing vocational training vouchers. These vouchers allow registered

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<sup>14</sup> [Education Code](#) No. 152 of 17 July 2014.



unemployed individuals to participate in qualification and requalification courses, thereby facilitating their integration into the labour market. Additionally, ANOFM is developing self-service modules, providing spaces equipped for independent job searches and specialist consultancy.

- [National Youth Agency](#): the agency conducts various programmes for youth, including those from vulnerable groups, aiming to empower them and support their active societal participation. These programmes provide personal and professional development opportunities, contributing significantly to youth empowerment and engagement.
- The [National Council for the Determination of Disability and Work Capacity](#) plays a vital role in the Republic of Moldova's framework for youth inclusion, especially concerning individuals with disabilities. This council, operating under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, assesses disability and work capacity in children up to 18 years and adults. Its core functions include determining disability status, developing individual rehabilitation and social inclusion programmes, identifying the causes and duration of disability, establishing the nature and conditions of work for people with disabilities, maintaining electronic and paper records of assessed individuals and issuing disability grade certificates.

[Law No. 436 of 28 December 2006 on local public administration](#) establishes several attributions in the field of inclusion, including young people in charge of local public authorities. These attributes could be grouped into several important categories.

- Local public authorities are implementation structures and are responsible in the territory for implementing national youth policies at the local level. This can include organising educational and training programmes, providing youth services and ensuring that national standards for youth inclusion are met in their respective areas.
- Local public authorities are instrumental in engaging with the community, including young people, to understand their specific needs and challenges. This engagement is crucial for designing and executing programmes tailored to each locality's unique context.
- Local authorities frequently collaborate with NGOs and youth organisations. These collaborations can enhance youth programmes' effectiveness by leveraging these organisations' expertise and networks.
- They play a key role in facilitating access to various resources for young people, including educational facilities, recreational areas and employment opportunities. This also includes providing support for vulnerable groups within the youth population.
- Local public authorities can advocate the needs and interests of young people in larger governmental platforms. They represent the voice of the youth in policy discussions and help shape broader youth policies.

In addition to public institutions, private bodies also play an important role in the field of youth inclusion: social partners ([trade unions](#) and [employers' associations](#)), youth NGOs, representatives of the teaching and training professions, etc. Trade unions play a crucial role in advocating the rights and needs of young workers. They focus on issues like fair wages, safe working conditions and access to training and professional development opportunities. By representing the interests of young employees, trade unions help ensure that youth inclusion policies consider the realities of the labour

market. Employers' associations contribute by identifying skills gaps and labour market trends. They can provide valuable input on designing training programmes that align with industry needs, thus facilitating the economic integration of young people. These associations also play a role in creating apprenticeship and internship opportunities, which are vital for gaining work experience.

Educators and trainers are key in identifying the educational barriers that young people face, especially those from marginalised backgrounds. They offer insights into curriculum development, teaching methodologies and support services that can help in the social and educational inclusion of youth. These professionals also advocate inclusive education policies that cater to diverse learning needs, ensuring that all young people have access to quality education regardless of their background or abilities. Their input is crucial in shaping policies bridging the education and employment gap.

Youth representatives ensure that the policies developed reflect the needs and aspirations of young people. They bring first-hand experiences and perspectives to the policy-making process, making it more inclusive and grounded in reality. These representatives often facilitate communication between young people and policy makers, which is pivotal in raising awareness about youth challenges. Their involvement is crucial for developing policies that are effective and have the buy-in of the youth they are intended to serve.

### **Cross-sectoral co-operation**

In the realm of youth policy in the Republic of Moldova, cross-sectoral co-operation is recognised as a pivotal element, yet it remains a significant challenge that often impedes the effectiveness of public policies targeting young people. The core issue lies in the insufficient integration and collaboration among different sectors, resulting in policies that frequently fail to reach those who need them the most. This gap in effective cross-sectoral co-ordination is particularly evident in the field of youth inclusion, where the absence of a central co-ordinating body further exacerbates the problem. Without a dedicated committee or institution to oversee and harmonise efforts, initiatives in youth inclusion tend to be fragmented, leading to inefficient use of resources and overlapping efforts.

Delving into the “[Youth 2030](#)” development strategy, it becomes evident that while inclusion is a recurring theme across its strategic planning stages, it is not positioned as an independent goal. Rather, the strategy emphasises an inclusive approach, focusing more on catering to the diverse beneficiaries of its activities. This methodology acknowledges the importance of addressing the varied needs and backgrounds of young people, but it might fall short in confronting specific inclusion challenges faced by the most marginalised youth groups. The strategy outlines numerous objectives and actions intended to ensure inclusion and equality among young people, yet these efforts can be hampered by the lack of a unified directive force, leading to scattered and sometimes less effective interventions.

The landscape of youth inclusion in the Republic of Moldova reflects a pressing need for more focused efforts and a centralised mechanism. Such a mechanism would ensure that the diverse and specific needs of all young people, particularly those from vulnerable groups, are addressed in a cohesive and comprehensive manner. Establishing a central co-ordinating body could significantly enhance the efficacy of inclusion policies, ensuring that they reach and positively impact the lives of the young individuals they are designed to support.

Although the Strategy “[Youth 2030](#)” is addressed to a specific target group – young people – this group is not homogeneous. Age, ethnicity, abilities (physical and mental), place of residence (urban or rural)

and the norms and values of the environment in which they live influence the activities and responsibilities of young people, their social status, the opportunities and constraints they have in life every day. We observe from the established objectives that the social inclusion of young people is generated by involvement in youth programmes, social projects and initiatives in the decision-making process. These actions lead young people to become active social participants who become involved in community development and participate in the processes of strengthening participative democracy.<sup>15</sup>

The government programme “Moldova vremurilor bune” (Moldova of the good times) recognises the importance of the development of young people and youth structures and proposes both the quantitative increase of the financial resources allocated to support the initiatives of young people and the youth sector, as well as for the institutional support and consolidation of key actors with attributions in the development and implementation of youth policies and programmes. The government programme’s strategic vision is built around young people’s civic and decision-making participation by empowering and strengthening their skills. Also, the government programme emphasises the creation of an entrepreneurial mindset among young people, which will contribute to financial integration and innovation. We conclude that the alignment of the country’s youth policies with the guidelines of youth policies at the European level will increase the involvement of young people in decision-making processes at all levels, facilitate collaboration and the exchange of experience between youth organisations on a national and international level, and empower young people to better social and professional integration.

### **4.3 Strategy for the social inclusion of young people**

#### **National strategy(ies)**

In the Republic of Moldova, while no dedicated public policy document exclusively focuses on the social inclusion of young people, essential elements related to this subject are integrated within the “Youth 2030” strategy. This document is a comprehensive framework for addressing various youth development and inclusion aspects. “Youth 2030,” as the fourth public policy document concerning the youth sector, is built upon the insights gained from evaluating its predecessor, the National Strategy for the Development of the Youth Sector 2020. It transcends conventional approaches by constructing an ecosystem encompassing various institutions and actors responsible for youth development. This ecosystem is not just a network of entities but a co-ordinated effort to address the multifaceted needs of young individuals in a comprehensive manner.

The strategy emphasises creating environments where young people can thrive, encompassing both formal and informal settings. It recognises that true well-being for young people extends beyond mere economic opportunities and educational attainment. Instead, it encompasses a holistic view that includes social integration, mental and emotional health and active social participation.

“Youth 2030” particularly addresses the real needs of the youth, tailoring its interventions to be as relevant and impactful as possible. This includes attention to youth associative structures and initiative groups, which are crucial for fostering a sense of community and belonging among young people. The

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<sup>15</sup> [Social Inclusion of Young People from the Republic of Moldova](#). Alexandru Colta. Jean Monnet International Conference, “The Eastern Partnership: towards a European community of democracy and prosperity”, 2023.

strategy also highlights the role of youth workers, who act as mentors and guides, helping young people navigate the complexities of modern life.

Furthermore, the strategy involves both public and private institutions in its framework, recognising that effective youth development requires collaboration across different sectors. Public authorities, in particular, are seen as key players in implementing the strategy, ensuring that policies and programmes are formulated and executed effectively.

The “Youth 2030” strategy in the Republic of Moldova is a forward-thinking document that establishes clear goals, objectives and indicators specifically aimed at enhancing the inclusion of young people in various societal aspects. It stands as a testament to the country’s commitment to fostering a supportive environment where all youth, irrespective of their background, have the opportunities to succeed and contribute meaningfully to society.

One of the primary objectives of “Youth 2030” is to create a robust framework that not only addresses the immediate needs of the youth but also anticipates and prepares them for future challenges. This includes a focus on developing a non-formal educational system that is both flexible and comprehensive, capable of equipping young people with the necessary skills and competences required in the digital era. The strategy emphasises the importance of analytical thinking, innovation, emotional intelligence and leadership, acknowledging that these skills are essential for young people to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

In terms of inclusion, the strategy outlines specific indicators to measure progress. These include the youth participation rates in civic and decisional processes, the extent of youth involvement in community development and the effectiveness of non-formal education in enhancing life skills. Additionally, the strategy looks at the impact of interventions on marginalised groups, including NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) and those from rural areas, to ensure that policies effectively reach and benefit these vulnerable segments of the youth population.

By setting these goals and objectives, along with clear indicators, “Youth 2030” provides a comprehensive road map for the social inclusion of young people in Moldova. It underscores the country’s dedication to creating a society where every young person has the opportunity to develop, participate and succeed, thereby contributing to the nation’s overall growth and prosperity.

Another important document that includes indicators and objectives in the field of youth inclusion is the “Education 2030” development strategy. This document establishes several targets in the field of inclusion in education. The [“Education 2030” Strategy](#) in the Republic of Moldova represents a significant commitment to addressing the educational needs of the country’s youth, with a specific focus on social inclusion. This strategy, outlined as a priority national policy, aims to optimise citizens’ intellectual, cultural and professional formation, emphasising the importance of quality education and lifelong learning competences.

“Education 2030” is built upon a comprehensive analysis of the current state of education in Moldova, including the disparities in access to quality education across different social, economic and geographic groups. The strategy aims to align educational policies with broader state policies reflected in key strategic documents such as the [“Moldova 2030 European Development Strategy”](#), the [National Action Plan in the field of Human Rights](#) and the [Strategy for Digital Transformation 2023-2030](#). It seeks to remedy the mismatch between the quality of the education system and societal expectations and standards.

A notable aspect of the strategy is its promotion of the inclusion concept at all levels of the education system, ensuring that it is realised in normative, methodological and human terms. This approach is crucial for integrating vulnerable populations into the educational framework, ensuring that no group is left behind.

The strategy particularly addresses the needs of vulnerable groups of children, pupils and young people. This includes those from poor families, families with very low parental income, abandoned children, individuals with disabilities and children from rural areas, including Roma families. The educational system in Moldova is marked by higher levels of inequity compared to OECD member countries, with significant disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged students. This highlights the need for dedicated policies targeting these disadvantaged student groups.

### **Scope and content**

The “Youth 2030” strategy outlines a vision for an inclusive society where all young people have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. The strategy’s main elements include creating inclusive educational pathways, ensuring equal access to employment opportunities, fostering active civic participation and promoting the well-being of all young people. It emphasises the development of an educational system responsive to the evolving demands of the labour market and the digital era, aiming to bridge the gap between education and employment.

The political objectives set by the strategy concerning social inclusion are multifaceted. They include reducing the NEET rates by providing targeted support and creating pathways to education and employment, integrating young people from migrant or ethnic minority backgrounds, addressing the challenges faced by newly arrived young refugees and supporting young people at risk of marginalisation or violent radicalisation. The strategy also targets homeless youth and young families, recognising the importance of stability in achieving social inclusion.

“Youth 2030” identifies specific target groups within the youth population that are at risk of social exclusion. It acknowledges the unique challenges NEETs face, who are often disadvantaged due to a lack of employment and educational opportunities. The strategy also seeks to support young people from migrant or ethnic minority backgrounds, including newly arrived young refugees who may face integration challenges. Additionally, it addresses the needs of young people who are at risk of marginalisation or violent radicalisation, homeless youth who lack secure and stable environments and young families who require additional support to ensure their social inclusion. These focus areas are aligned with the [EU Work Plan for Youth](#), ensuring that the strategy is consistent with broader European objectives for youth inclusion.

The “Youth 2030” strategy includes specific measures for each of the three strategic objectives to ensure the inclusion of young people.

Strategic objective 1 – Increasing the number of young people who benefit from quality youth programmes by strengthening capacities within the sector and professionalising human resources.

- Establishment of all methodological materials related to the creation and management of youth programmes through the lens of inclusion and gender equality (ways to identify and analyse the needs of young people from disadvantaged groups, ensuring fair participation for girls and boys, reasonable adjustment of youth programmes for young people with disabilities and age categories).

- Programme funding schemes will require clear requirements and indicators to ensure inclusion and equality.
- The capacity-building effort for youth centres and youth workers will also involve the development of knowledge/capacity related to ensuring inclusion and equality.

Strategic objective 2 – Increasing the level of participation and civic engagement through training, capacity building and youth empowerment programmes.

- In the effort to establish and strengthen platforms for the participation and representation of young people, the objective related to the fair representation and participation of girls, boys and young people from disadvantaged groups will be taken into account.
- The desire for fair representation and participation will be consolidated in all framework documents that regulate/guide the activity of participation and representation platforms.

Strategic objective 3 – Harnessing the potential of young people to carry out social innovation and community development initiatives through financial and material support tools.

- The support offered to youth organisations, youth structures and educational institutions will include requirements for ensuring inclusion and equality.

By encompassing these elements, the “Youth 2030” strategy demonstrates a comprehensive approach to fostering a society where young people are included and empowered to contribute actively to their communities and the nation’s future.

### **Responsible authorities**

The Ministry of Education and Research is entrusted with the pivotal role of co-ordinating and implementing the strategic visions encapsulated in the “Youth 2030” and “Education 2030” development strategies. As the responsible authority, the ministry spearheads the nation’s efforts to foster an inclusive environment for the youth, aligning with Moldova’s commitment to European integration and sustainable development.

In its capacity, the ministry orchestrates the activities of various stakeholders in the youth sector, ensuring a coherent approach to the common goals outlined in the strategies. It is not alone in this endeavour; the [National Youth Agency](#) plays a significant role in implementation, particularly by executing programmes and initiatives that directly impact young people. The agency serves as a bridge between the government’s strategic objectives and the young people’s needs on the ground, operationalising the concepts of inclusion into tangible outcomes.

Beyond these key institutions, the strategies acknowledge the importance of local public authorities (LPAs), NGOs and other bodies in the youth sector. Local authorities are crucial for adapting and applying strategic measures to the specific context of their communities. They ensure that the strategy’s goals are met with localised precision and relevance, particularly in rural or underprivileged areas where the need for inclusion may be more pronounced.

NGOs contribute their expertise and on-the-ground presence, often acting as implementers and advocates for youth interests. They bring innovation, agility and a close connection to the youth demographic, complementing the work of formal institutions. Additionally, these organisations often serve as watchdogs, ensuring that the strategy remains true to its intended purpose and advocating adjustments when necessary.

The collaborative efforts of this wide range of bodies are essential for the success of the “Youth 2030” and “Education 2030” strategies. Their roles and responsibilities are interdependent, forming a comprehensive network to support the social, educational and economic inclusion of all young people in Moldova. Through shared responsibility and concerted action, these strategies seek to empower young people as active, engaged and valued members of society.

#### **4.4 Inclusive programmes for young people**

##### **Programmes for vulnerable young people**

In the Republic of Moldova, most programmes targeting the inclusion of young people are concentrated in key areas vital for fostering comprehensive social integration. These domains encompass formal and non-formal education, economic empowerment through employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, poverty reduction, addressing other economic vulnerabilities and promoting equality and non-discrimination.

The “[Programme for the Support of the Roma Population 2022-2025](#)” in the Republic of Moldova, while broadly aimed at the Roma community, includes specific elements that focus on youth within this demographic. This programme recognises the unique challenges young Roma face and aims to provide targeted support to enhance their social inclusion and empowerment.

The programme’s general purpose, with a specific emphasis on youth, is to encourage and facilitate the active participation of young Roma in public life and decision-making processes. It aims to combat discrimination that young Roma often face and improve their access to essential services such as education and healthcare. Additionally, the programme promotes cultural awareness and media representation, which is crucial for shaping a positive and inclusive societal narrative around Roma youth.

The main objectives of the programme, when considering young people, involve several key areas.

- Enhancing participation: facilitating the engagement of young Roma in civic and decision-making processes, thereby empowering them to have a say in matters that affect their lives and communities.
- Combating discrimination: addressing and mitigating the discrimination and social challenges that young Roma face, especially in educational institutions and healthcare facilities.
- Education and healthcare access: ensuring that young Roma have equitable access to quality education and healthcare services, which are fundamental to their development and well-being.
- Cultural and media inclusion: promoting the representation of Roma youth in culture and media, thereby fostering greater understanding and reducing stereotypes.
- Employment and social protection: providing support in employment and reinforcing social protection measures to assist young Roma in overcoming economic barriers and achieving financial independence.
- Rights of young Roma migrants: safeguarding the rights of young Roma migrants and combating human trafficking, which disproportionately affects vulnerable youth.

By targeting these areas, the programme seeks to address young Roma's specific needs and challenges, aiming to create a supportive environment where they can thrive, contribute to society and enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

The "[Programme for the Development of Youth Centres 2017-2022](#)" ("Programul de dezvoltare a centrelor de tineret pentru anii 2017-2022") is a significant initiative in the Republic of Moldova, focusing on enhancing the institutional capacities and services provided to young people.

The primary goal of this programme is to strengthen the institutional capacities that enable the development and territorial expansion of youth services, thereby increasing the number of young beneficiaries. It aims to enhance the level of civic activism among youth, especially those with limited opportunities, and strengthen local youth councils. The programme also focuses on diversifying methods for youth to access information, developing outreach services, promoting healthy lifestyles and extending non-formal education services.

The programme comprises several components aimed at achieving its objectives.

- Professional development of human resources in youth centres: this component focuses on enhancing the skills and competences of individuals working within youth centres.
- Support for technical and material base development: the programme supports the development of the infrastructure and equipment necessary for the efficient functioning of youth centres.
- Support for development of regional/municipal grant programme for youth initiatives: this includes funding for initiatives and projects from youth organisations and youth initiative groups through a competitive grant programme.

The programme's beneficiaries are youth centres, which are public institutions established by local public authorities at levels I and II, including non-commercial private institutions, associations and foundations. In co-operation with local public authorities at level II, these centres deliver youth services at the regional/municipal level or within community groups.

The Republic of Moldova has implemented the "[Programme for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Consolidation of Interethnic Relations 2021-2027](#)" a public policy document focusing on four priority directions: public participation, language as a means of integration, intercultural dialogue and civic belonging, and media representation.

This programme aims to strengthen the capacities of young people, particularly those from national minorities, to encourage their active participation in public life. It focuses on enhancing effective communication between authorities and civil society, improving institutional capacities of consultative bodies and promoting human rights education, including the rights of national minorities. The programme also emphasises the promotion of minority languages, cultural diversity and civic spirit, along with actions to prevent crimes motivated by prejudice, ethnic hatred and discrimination.

The programme specifically aims to develop the competences of young people belonging to national minorities, especially young women, for public service employment. It includes organising and conducting national and regional information and awareness campaigns on the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and campaigns on equal participation in public service. Furthermore, it proposes developing and piloting "on-the-job" training programmes and internships for representatives of national minorities, particularly young graduates employed in ministries, the



parliament, government agencies and local public authorities. These initiatives are designed to encourage young people's participation in public life through empowerment and mentorship.

The Republic of Moldova has initiated the “[START pentru TINERI: o afacere durabilă la tine acasă](#)” programme, translated as “START for YOUTH: a sustainable business at home”. This initiative is tailored to foster economic empowerment among young people, particularly in the realm of entrepreneurship and business development.

The programme's primary aim is to integrate young Moldovans into the economic circuit by facilitating the launch and development of sustainable businesses. It is designed to stimulate entrepreneurial spirit among young people and to provide them with the necessary support to transform innovative ideas into viable business ventures. This programme addresses the critical need to create job opportunities, particularly in rural areas, and to harness the potential of young entrepreneurs to contribute to the country's economic growth.

The main objectives of the programme include:

- stimulating entrepreneurial spirit: encouraging young people to develop and pursue business ideas, emphasising innovative and sustainable ventures;
- developing entrepreneurial competences: providing informational, consultative and educational support to young entrepreneurs to enhance their business skills and knowledge;
- financial support for business launch and development: offering financial assistance to young people for initiating and growing their businesses, focusing particularly on innovative ventures that align with sustainable development goals;
- facilitating innovation and technology transfer: encouraging the implementation of innovative ideas and the transfer of technology and know-how among young entrepreneurs;
- promoting business growth in rural areas: aiming to increase the number of active enterprises and job creation in rural regions, thereby addressing the urban-rural economic divide.

This programme exemplifies the Republic of Moldova's commitment to empowering its youth through entrepreneurship, providing them with the tools and support needed to succeed in the modern economy and contributing to the country's overall sustainable development. It also demonstrates Moldova's commitment to fostering an environment where young people are supported, engaged and prepared to participate actively in society.

The “[Anti-Bullying Programme for Adolescents](#)” in the Republic of Moldova, developed by the Ministry of Education and Research in partnership with the [Terre des hommes Foundation Moldova](#) as part of the “Joint Efforts to Combat Bullying in Moldova” project funded by [UNICEF Moldova](#), is an initiative specifically designed to address the issue of bullying among adolescents.

This programme aims to address and mitigate the widespread issue of bullying among adolescents. By focusing on this age group, the programme seeks to raise awareness about the nature of bullying, its effects and the importance of creating a supportive environment for young people. The initiative emphasises the development of empathy and understanding among peers, fostering a community where adolescents can feel safe and supported.

The primary objectives of the anti-bullying programme are multifaceted and include:

- identifying human characteristics beyond culture, skin colour, social status or academic performance;
- recognising the need for belonging and establishing relationships with others;
- raising awareness about the phenomenon of bullying;
- understanding the role that witnesses play in perpetuating bullying;
- increasing empathy towards peers who are targets of bullying;
- learning appropriate ways to handle bullying situations, especially in the role of a bystander, including supporting targeted peers and seeking help.

These objectives are integral to equipping adolescents with the skills and understanding necessary to combat bullying and foster a more inclusive and empathetic school environment.

### **Funding**

The primary funding sources for youth inclusion activities and programmes are the approved budgets of the institutions implementing these activities. Additional funding is provided through projects financed by foreign loans and donations and funds from the budgets of both entity governments and the Government of the Republic of Moldova.

### **Quality assurance**

Various mechanisms and indicators are utilised to measure the quality of the inclusion programmes, including the number of beneficiaries characterised by specific attributes such as age, gender, profession, educational status, work experience, income, etc. Based on these factors, the implementing institution produces and tracks monthly and annual statistics. The implemented programmes and services can be adjusted to fulfil specific results in a given year based on the collected data.

At both national and territorial levels, a system of statistical indicators is used to monitor various areas of youth life, including education or employment indicators.<sup>16</sup> The National Bureau of Statistics, in conjunction with the relevant ministries, establishes these statistical indicators and their calculation methodology.

In economic activity and employment, the National Employment Agency (NEA) is responsible for creating and managing the labour market's information system, which includes primary documents and its databases and information on labour market participants. The Ministry of Education and Research created and manages the Integrated System for Management in Education in the educational system.

## **4.5 Initiatives promoting social inclusion and raising awareness**

### **Intercultural awareness**

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<sup>16</sup> Law 105/2018 regarding the promotion of employment and unemployment insurance.

In the field of intercultural dialogue, the [Agency for Interethnic Relations \(ARI\)](#) has a key role. The institution is a specialised administrative authority under the Government of the Republic of Moldova, responsible for implementing state policies in the field of interethnic relations and the functioning of languages spoken within the country. As a public legal entity, the agency is funded by the state budget and other sources as provided by law, with headquarters in Chisinau.

The agency's mission is to ensure the implementation of state policies in the realm of interethnic relations and the functioning of languages spoken in Moldova. Its activities encompass several key areas: strengthening interethnic relations, promoting intercultural dialogue and civic identity and overseeing the functioning of languages on Moldovan territory. This includes monitoring the integration of national minorities, ensuring transparency in decision-making processes, formulating legislative proposals and collaborating with both local and international organisations in these domains.

The agency collaborates with central and local public authorities, autonomous public authorities and non-governmental and international organisations regarding its operational structure. It is empowered to request necessary information from central administrative bodies, public institutions and local public administration authorities to fulfil its functions. Additionally, the agency participates in intergovernmental negotiations on topics within its competence and manages its assets in line with its activity objectives and normative framework.

The agency has a key role in the implementation of at least three important programmes and strategies, which aim at a wide set of measures, including the popularisation of the topics of dialogue and cultural diversity.

- [The programme for the years 2023-2025](#) for the implementation of the Strategy for the Consolidation of Interethnic Relations in the Republic of Moldova for the years 2021-2027;
- [Programme for supporting the Roma population](#) in the Republic of Moldova for the years 2022-2025;
- [The strategy for strengthening interethnic relations](#) in the Republic of Moldova for the years 2017-2027.

Through its programmes, the agency supports public organisations that represent cultural minorities in the Republic of Moldova, as well as supports a series of public events aimed at popularising and promoting cultural diversity. A series of non-governmental organisations with the support of the government and development partners annually organise festivals and public events to popularise cultural diversity: the Ethnic Festival with the generic name "Unity through diversity" is one of the oldest events run by the Interethnic Relations Agency, in partnership with the Council Co-ordinator of Ethnocultural Organisations and Local Public Administration from the Republic of Moldova. For two decades, the Festival of Ethnicities has celebrated diversity and intercultural dialogue, promoting the traditions, culture and language of ethnic minorities, thus strengthening friendly relations between representatives of different ethnicities.

In its activity with civil society, the Interethnic Relations Agency emphasises the creation of Co-ordinating Councils of Ethnocultural Organisations at the local level and the education of young people in the spirit of European values related to the field of interethnic relations. In this context, during the reference period, working visits were carried out in the Balti municipality and Soroca district, where local co-ordinating councils were created with the involvement of young leaders in their composition.

ARI continued organising ethnocultural events to facilitate and expand intercultural dialogue, preserve national identity and promote the traditions and cultural heritage of ethnic minorities. In 2022, traditional actions were organised on the occasion of International Native Language Day, International Roma Day, Days of Slavic Writing and Culture in the Republic of Moldova, Children's Day, etc. To carry out the socio-cultural programmes of the ethnocultural organisations during the reference period, in the premises of the House of Nationalities, in partnership with the ethnocultural organisations of the ethnic minorities, around 93 activities were carried out: seminars, round tables, training programmes, fine art exhibitions and crafts, events promoting national customs and traditions. Thirty-three activities, which included around 4 350 participants, were organised with co-financing from ARI. The total volume of financial means allocated by ARI to support ethnocultural organisations reached 330 thousand Moldovan lei. In 2022, 22 ethnocultural organisations and an estimated 2 000 of their members have become beneficiaries of statutory support. A total of 172 books and/or teaching resources were also edited with financial support from ARI.

### **Young people's rights**

Communication with young people concerning rights and responsibilities is a significant strand of public policies, in particular for the ministry in charge of youth (Ministry of Education and Research), as well as the specialised institutions on human rights ([Children Rights Ombudsman](#) and the [Council for Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination and Ensuring Equality](#)). Also, an important role in youth rights promotion can be attributed to the National Youth Agency, the main institution responsible for implementing youth programmes and promoting youth priorities cross-sectorally.

Additionally, several youth organisations and structures, such as the [National Youth Council of Moldova](#) and the National Network of Local Youth Councils, among others, promote knowledge of rights to all young people. These structures represent youth in various governmental institutions, submit shadow reports within international monitoring reports on youth and children's rights, etc.

The main awareness-raising actions on the issue of young people's rights are carried out by youth organisations, often with financial support provided by the government through the [Grants Programme for Youth Organisations](#) or with financial support from development partners. The governmental grant programme is dedicated to supporting and developing the youth sector in the Republic of Moldova, through which logistical and financial support is offered, on a tender basis, for implementing youth initiatives, programmes and projects, thereby strengthening co-operation with civil society.

### **Key initiatives to safeguard democracy and prevent radicalisation leading to violent extremism**

One of the general objectives of the [Strategy for consolidating interethnic relations in the Republic of Moldova for the years 2017-2027](#) involves a series of measures aimed at safeguarding democracy and preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism. Specific objective 3 establishes as a priority the prevention and elimination of discrimination, xenophobia, ethnic stereotypes, interethnic tensions and segregation. This objective has the following priority actions.

- Improving the legal framework regarding the prohibition of incitement to hatred.

- Increasing the capacities of different relevant actors for promoting cultural diversity, human rights, civic education and preventing interethnic tensions.
- Implement measures aimed at increasing intercultural co-operation and preventing the isolation of national minorities in society.
- Promoting the active involvement of civil society in notifying the competent bodies about cases of incitement to interethnic hatred, discrimination and expression of intolerance.
- Increasing the capacities of the Council for preventing and combating discrimination and ensuring equality to analyse individual complaints regarding cases of discrimination and increasing the level of awareness of the council's role among central and local public authorities.
- Increasing the role of the People's Advocate institution.

## 4.6 Access to quality services

### Housing

The main document facilitating access to affordable housing for young persons is the programme "[Prima Casa](#)" ([First Home](#)), which the Government of Moldova established to facilitate access to housing for young people. This state programme is structured to support acquiring homes through government-guaranteed loans with favourable terms.

The Prima Casa programme is designed to assist young Moldovans to purchase their first home. It does so by offering state-guaranteed loans, ensuring more accessible and affordable financing options for individuals. The programme mandates that monthly mortgage payments, including interest and guarantee fees, should not exceed 50% of the beneficiary's and their family's official net income.

Eligibility for the programme requires the applicant to be a Moldovan citizen, employed in Moldova and have a verified income source. The applicant or their spouse must not own a property with a living area exceeding 9 square metres per family member. An exception is made for properties inherited or gifted in villages or communes, regardless of their size. Beneficiaries must contribute at least 10% of the property's purchase price.

The programme is implemented nationwide, with the Ministry of Finance publishing biannual reports detailing its progress on its website. Participating banks must meet specific criteria to provide these loans, and the government, through the Ministry of Finance, delegates the issuance of state guarantees to the [Organisation for Entrepreneurship Development](#) (ODA). The programme also includes mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on the state guarantees provided, ensuring its effectiveness and sustainability. More than 8 000 families have used the programme to obtain housing.

### Social services

[Law No. 123 on social services](#), adopted by the [Parliament of the Republic of Moldova](#) on 18 June 2010, focuses on social services and outlines a framework for providing and accessing these services, especially for young and disadvantaged individuals.

The law defines social services as a set of measures and activities designed to meet the social needs of individuals or families, particularly in difficult situations, to prevent marginalisation and social

exclusion. It establishes a general framework for creating and operating an integrated social services system. This includes the responsibilities of central and local public administration authorities and other legal and physical entities involved in providing social services and protecting the rights of service beneficiaries.

Social services are based on principles like targeted social assistance, prioritising disadvantaged persons/families, adaptability to changing needs, accessibility to all types of services, equal opportunities and prompt decision making on service provision. The law ensures individual rights to social services based on a personal/family needs assessment.

Social services are classified into primary, specialised and highly specialised services, each addressing different levels of need. Providers of these services include public entities like central and local government institutions, as well as private organisations and individuals. All providers must be accredited as per the law.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection implements social service policies and regulations. Local public administration bodies play a significant role in service delivery, especially at the community level. Social services are funded through various sources, including state and local budgets, private contributions and other legal means. The law emphasises the importance of periodic service evaluation, monitoring and efficient resource allocation to ensure the quality and effectiveness of social services provided to youth and other disadvantaged groups.

### **Financial services**

There is no information on financial services designed for vulnerable young people.

### **Quality assurance**

Every programme and public service developed or funded through public resources incorporates a mechanism for data collection. This system often includes the disaggregation of data based on categories of beneficiaries. It also integrates indicators that measure the satisfaction levels regarding the services provided. This data collection is crucial for evaluating the programme's effectiveness, ensuring that the needs of diverse beneficiary groups are met, and for continuous improvement of the services based on feedback and performance indicators.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that deliver social services using public funds are subject to a rigorous process of accreditation and ongoing monitoring. This process is designed to ensure a high standard of service quality. Accreditation evaluates various aspects of an NGO's operation, including its capacity to deliver services, compliance with legal and ethical standards and the effectiveness of its programmes. Monitoring involves regular assessments to ensure continued adherence to these standards and foster service delivery improvements. This structured oversight ensures that publicly funded social services NGOs provide are accountable, efficient and responsive to the community's needs.

#### **4.7 Youth work programmes fostering social inclusion**

The National Agency for Youth Development Programmes and Activities was established under [Government Decision No. 598](#) dated 12 August 2020. However, the agency only became operational in the year 2022. This agency was created to orchestrate and manage various youth-focused programmes and initiatives, aiming to enhance youth engagement and development at a national level. Despite its recent operationalisation, the agency is expected to be pivotal in shaping youth policies and programmes.

Since its inception, the agency has been actively implementing several programmes to strengthen the community of youth service providers at the local level. These programmes are designed to build capacity and support and enhance the network of organisations and individuals who work directly to deliver youth services. However, it is noted that as of now, no specific programmes are developed by the agency dedicated to promoting youth inclusion. Addressing this gap is crucial for ensuring that all young people, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from these programmes.

Most of the programmes developed by the Youth Agency, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Research, involve a detailed categorisation of young beneficiaries, including the inclusion of youth from vulnerable groups. This approach often mandates specific conditions and quotas for the involvement of young people from these groups in the implemented programmes. Examples of such initiatives include the Youth Councils Development Programme, Youth Centre Development Programme and grant programmes for youth organisations. This structured approach ensures equitable participation and addresses the diverse needs of young people, particularly those from marginalised or underserved communities. These efforts reflect a commitment to inclusive youth development, recognising the importance of reaching all segments of the youth population.

In addition to the existing programmes, the youth centres are actively developing outreach services and other initiatives to enhance the inclusion of young people in local youth programmes and services. These centres play a critical role in reaching out to and engaging young people from various backgrounds, especially those who are often underrepresented or marginalised. Through outreach efforts, these centres can identify and connect with youth who may not have easy access to or awareness of available youth programmes and services.

The services provided by these centres are tailored to address the diverse needs and interests of young people, fostering an environment where every individual feels valued and supported. This includes offering a range of activities and resources that cater to different skills, hobbies and educational needs, as well as providing mentorship, counselling and support services. The aim is to create inclusive platforms where all young people, regardless of their socio-economic background, ethnicity or other factors, can participate, learn and grow. This approach helps nurture a sense of community and belonging among young people and plays a pivotal role in their holistic development and empowerment.

#### 4.8 Current debates and reforms

**Development of quality standards for youth services:** Current discussions and developmental efforts are focused on establishing quality standards for youth services provided by Youth Centres established by local public authorities and youth NGOs. These standards are expected to mandatorily include elements that ensure social inclusion and the diversity of young beneficiaries. The aim is to create a uniform framework that sets high-quality benchmarks for all youth services, ensuring that they are effective, equitable and accessible to all segments of the youth population. These standards would encompass various aspects of service delivery, including programme design, implementation, evaluation and staff training, with a particular emphasis on fostering an inclusive environment that caters to young people's diverse needs and backgrounds.

**Continuous training programme for youth workers by the National Youth Agency:** The National Youth Agency is currently developing a continuous training programme for youth workers. This programme is designed to include components focused on youth inclusion and developing outreach-type services. The training aims to equip youth workers with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively engage and support young people from diverse backgrounds, including those who are marginalised or face barriers to accessing services. The programme will cover various aspects, such as understanding the needs of different youth groups, effective communication strategies, inclusive programme planning and implementation of outreach initiatives. The objective is to enhance the capacity of youth workers to create more inclusive and welcoming environments, thereby ensuring that all young people have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from youth programmes and services.

**Piloting and implementation of a Youth Guarantee Programme in the Republic of Moldova:** There are ongoing discussions about piloting and implementing a Youth Guarantee Programme. This initiative, inspired by similar programmes in the European Union, is designed to ensure that all young people under a certain age receive good-quality opportunities for employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within a set period of registering as unemployed. The Youth Guarantee programme aims to address youth unemployment and provide young people with the skills and experience required in the modern labour market. The pilot phase of this programme in Moldova would involve identifying the most effective strategies for reaching out to and engaging unemployed youth and collaborating with various stakeholders, including educational institutions, employers and NGOs, to create a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach. This programme could significantly contribute to reducing youth unemployment in the country, improving the quality of the workforce and promoting sustainable economic growth.

**Expansion of the Child Ombudsman's mandate to include youth:** There are active discussions, particularly advocated by several youth NGOs, regarding the need to expand the mandate of the Child Ombudsman to encompass youth issues. This proposal underscores the importance of having a dedicated public advocate who can address young people's unique challenges and rights violations. Extending the ombudsman's mandate would involve broadening the scope of oversight to include the age group typically classified as youth, thereby providing a more inclusive representation. This initiative aims to ensure that the concerns of young people are adequately heard and addressed at a governmental level, promoting their well-being, rights and interests. The idea is to create a more integrated approach to child and youth advocacy, recognising the continuum of needs and rights from childhood into young adulthood. By expanding the ombudsman's mandate, it is anticipated that there



will be a stronger and more effective platform for addressing issues such as youth unemployment, education, mental health and social inclusion.

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