

unicef 
for every child

Making a difference in the lives of children in Moldova

2023–2027







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Improvements for children in Moldova

Since 1997, UNICEF and the Government of Moldova have been working together to help fulfil the rights of children in this small landlocked country in Eastern Europe. Over the last decade, there has been substantial progress in reducing poverty, and previous country programmes of cooperation between the Government of Moldova and UNICEF have resulted in significant gains for children, helping Moldova move closer to its goal of giving all girls and boys the best start in life and a fair chance of reaching their full potential.

Number of children under 18 years of age:

About 600,000

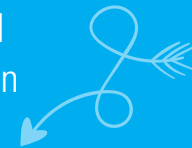


ACHIEVEMENTS FOR CHILDREN

Nearly **2 decades of steady progress** in **child survival**

40 youth-friendly health service clinics established

Decrease in sexually transmitted infections in adolescents



Pregnancy per 1,000 girls aged 15–19 years:

26 vs **22**

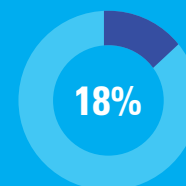
girls in 2010

girls in 2020

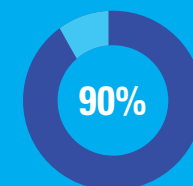
Free **early childhood, primary and secondary education**, and a **commitment to inclusive education**



Children benefiting from **early learning opportunities**:



of children aged 0–2 years



of children aged 3–6 years

90% fewer children in **residential institutions** in 2020

Sustainable Development Goals

Moldova's national development strategy, *Moldova 2030*, outlines the country's commitment to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The government and National Bureau of Statistics regularly produce data on children and monitor the country's progress towards the SDGs. The *2020 Voluntary National Review* reflects achievements and challenges in Moldova's SDG journey.



Challenges in Moldova

Children are among the world's most vulnerable citizens; their formative lives are directly impacted by both global and country-specific events and factors. Although Moldova moved from being a lower-middle-income to an upper-middle-income country in 2021, the lives of children – and particularly those from poor and vulnerable families – are likely to remain affected by several challenges facing the country. These include:

- difficulty in generating jobs;
- climate risks to agriculture, on which the economy relies heavily;
- a large informal economy;
- a rapidly ageing population; and
- ongoing high levels of emigration.

In addition to these ongoing challenges, Moldova has also had to battle the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and has been impacted by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which has resulted in an influx of more than 500,000 refugees, mainly women and children. The conflict in Ukraine is also driving the high levels of inflation in Moldova, which, in turn, puts pressure on funds available to address poverty in the country and develop a more socially inclusive society.



Growing up in Moldova

Despite noteworthy improvements in child well-being, many children in Moldova still lack the nurturing care and support they need to develop to their fullest potential and to become productive, thriving adults contributing to decision-making processes in Moldovan society.

Poverty

One in four children in Moldova grows up poor, with children born in rural areas more likely to experience absolute poverty. Social assistance for poor families is limited with Moldova's main social assistance programme, Ajutor Social, reaching only 7 per cent of the population and supporting only one in five of the country's poorest families. So, for many families, old-age pensions and money sent home by adult family members working abroad are critical sources of household income.

25% of children grow up **poor**

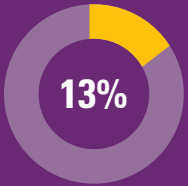


42% of families with three or more children live in **poverty**

Children living in **absolute poverty**:



of rural children



of urban children

7% of the population has access to a **social assistance programme**

Protection

Growing up without parents is a reality for approximately 34,000 children in Moldova, 85 per cent of whom are left in the care of their extended families when their parents seek work abroad. The absence of parents is emotionally challenging for children and may lead to a lack of care and an increase in the likelihood of risky behaviour.

Since the country began its de-institutionalization reforms 15 years ago, far fewer children live in residential institutions, but the number of children living with extended family members or in foster care has nearly tripled.

While there have been improvements in social protection, children remain worryingly vulnerable in Moldova. About 40 per cent of children experience some form of violence, with 14 per cent of girls and 5 per cent of boys experiencing sexual violence before the age of 18 years. Undocumented and Roma girls are particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking, while unaccompanied refugee children are at risk of exploitation.

The rights of children in contact with the law have improved, with free legal aid now granted to children and solitary confinement of children stopped. While the number of child offences decreased by about 35 per cent between 2016 and 2020, the number of children sentenced to detention increased by two thirds. Preventative and rehabilitative care options for these children remain limited, reducing their chances of successfully reintegrating into society.

About **1,000** children live in residential institutions

About **18,000** children live with extended family members or in foster care



More than **1/3** of adolescents have one parent working abroad



About **10%** of adolescents have both parents working abroad

4 in 10 children experience childhood violence

Health

Children in Moldova face several health challenges from birth through adolescence. While child survival rates have improved steadily over two decades, infant and under-five mortality rates have remained the same since 2020 and are three times higher than the European average. Both child survival and health are impacted by a reduction in the roll-out of perinatal and primary health-care services due to staff shortages and by insufficient public investment in health infrastructure improvement. COVID-19 lockdowns and growing anti-vaccination sentiment among parents have meant that an increasing number of children are unvaccinated.

The network of youth-friendly health service clinics providing health care and counselling support to adolescents has driven steady improvements in adolescent sexual and reproductive health, although often those most at risk and vulnerable do not benefit from these services. Concern for the psychosocial well-being and mental health of youth in Moldova is also growing.

Not all Moldovans have health insurance cover and almost half of the country's health expenditure comes from out-of-pocket payments – an additional financial burden that is particularly hard on poor households.

“ Child survival rates have improved steadily over two decades; infant and under-five mortality rates have remained the same since 2020. ”

Deaths per 1,000 live births:

12 Infant | **14** Under-five



Reduced DTP3 vaccine coverage: **86%**

Adolescent fertility rate:

3 times higher than the European Union average



12% of the population has **no health insurance**

45% of health expenditure is **out-of-pocket payments**

4.4% of **GDP** is the **public investment in health**

About **12,000** children with disabilities are registered in the health system



Of children with disabilities:

Only **27%** receive a first diagnosis before 2 years of age



40% have severe disabilities

Only **10%** benefit from early intervention services



Only **11%** attend preschool



Disability

Although Moldova has committed to inclusive education, it has yet to fully adopt a social approach to disability assessment. Most children born with disabilities are unlikely to have these diagnosed before the age of 2, making it much harder to successfully address mild or reversible disabilities and developmental delays, and contributing to Moldova's high proportion of children with severe disabilities for whom the risk of institutionalization is higher. Very few children diagnosed with a disability benefit from the recently introduced early intervention services, and preschool attendance for children with disabilities is low.



Education and civic participation

Early childhood education and primary and secondary schooling may be free in Moldova, but poor children are less likely to be in school and few Roma children, children with disabilities and refugee children are enrolled in early learning programmes, further disadvantaging them developmentally before they start school. Additionally, about 10,000 children with disabilities and an estimated 1,000 Ukrainian refugee children in mainstream education need extra support at school.

School infrastructure also needs attention, particularly in rural areas where 40 per cent of preschools and 70 per cent of primary schools are without indoor bathroom facilities. The quality of teaching and learning outcomes remains a serious concern, especially in rural schools where more than half the students do not reach minimum levels of proficiency in science, reading and mathematics, according to the 2018 Programme for International Students Assessment. Students from lower-income families are particularly affected.

Just under one third of young people in Moldova are not in education, training or employment, with more girls and young women affected than males. Community networks for adolescents are scarce and poorly linked with broader societal initiatives, thereby further reducing the chances of young people's participation in society.

“The quality of teaching and learning outcomes remains a serious concern, especially in rural schools.”

Only **12%** of Roma children attend preschool



Less than **50%** of rural primary school students achieve **minimum proficiency levels** in science, reading and mathematics



1 in 3 young people aged 15–29 years is **not in education, employment or training** – more than **twice** the European Union average

40% of young people experience **deprivations in employment and civic participation**



2023–2027 UNICEF–Government of Moldova Country Programme

The vision

The Government of Moldova and UNICEF share a vision of change that, by 2027, all girls and boys in the country, including the most vulnerable, will grow up in a society that is firmly committed, more able, and better resourced to ensure that children develop to their full potential.

To achieve this, the government, UNICEF and other stakeholders will build on successes from previous country programmes as they partner and participate in the new UNICEF-led country programme, which focuses on four key areas of action.

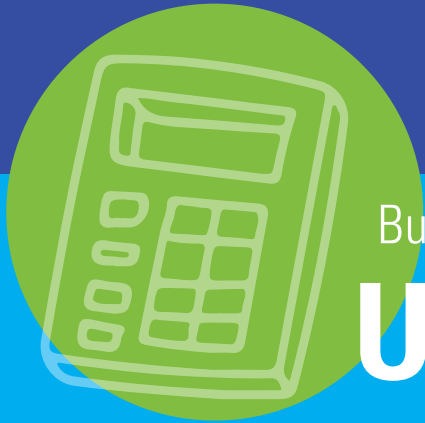
“The Government of Moldova and UNICEF share a vision of change that, by 2027, all girls and boys in the country, including the most vulnerable, will grow up in a society that is firmly committed, more able, and better resourced to ensure that children develop to their full potential.”

**1. FIRST DECADE:
Survival,
development,
family care and
protection**

**2. SECOND
DECADE:
Health,
empowerment
and participation**

**3. CROSS
SECTORAL:
Knowledge and
resources**

**4. PROGRAMME
EFFECTIVENESS**



Budget:
US\$17,450 million

- **promoting the integration** of social welfare, health, education, child protection and justice interventions **for vulnerable and at-risk children;**
- **strengthening** programming at **local level;**
- **addressing** structural inefficiencies and weaknesses that hamper the **implementation of human rights-based and gender-sensitive policies** and including **accountability mechanisms** for duty bearers in programme design; and
- **leveraging additional resources** – not only financial – from public and private sources.





Key interventions

The key interventions that make up Moldova's country programme re-emphasize the commitment to uphold the rights of all children and to leave no one behind.

Priorities in children's health and well-being

1. Support the development of health-care policies and standards that prioritize good-quality service delivery to vulnerable pregnant women, mothers and young children especially those who:

- are poor;
- are from Roma communities;
- are refugees and asylum-seekers;
- have no health insurance;
- live in remote rural areas; and/or
- have developmental risks and/or disabilities.

2. Expand universal home-visiting by primary health-care workers in order to:

- strengthen parenting skills;
- offer care to women during pregnancy and to their children up to 3 years of age; and
- communicate critical information about child growth and

development to caregivers such as the importance of immunization, breastfeeding, prevention of childhood illnesses or injuries and early detection of developmental delays.

3. Enhance early identification services to reach more families of children with developmental risks or disabilities so that they can benefit from professional counselling, gender-responsive health-care interventions and support.

4. Support and strengthen the youth-friendly health service network as an essential service, in order to reach and encourage the participation of adolescent girls, including those who are mothers.

5. Develop a customized, age-appropriate response to the challenge of young people's psychosocial well-being to strengthen the country's mental-health agenda.

6. Promote good practices in gender-responsive adolescent parenting through social and behaviour change initiatives.



Priorities in children's education

- 1. Promote early childhood stimulation and learning through intersectoral parenting education programmes.** Using primary health care and preschools to educate parents on early childhood development, UNICEF will spread information about gender-responsive caregiving practices and expand the use of child-centred methods by preschool teachers.
- 2. Model public finance management solutions for equitable early childhood education services** to reach the most disadvantaged children.
- 3. Strengthen support for all families in nurturing their children** to prevent young children being placed in institutions, especially those children with disabilities, those left behind by migrant parents and unaccompanied refugee children.
- 4. Continue to generate high-quality data and research** to inform the roll-out of inclusive basic education.
- 5. Support national planning that:**
 - **improves infrastructure and standards** for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), accessibility, safety and digital connectivity in schools; and
 - **creates school environments that are safe, effective and positive learning spaces** – including for children who are most likely to drop out or have poor attendance – by making schools more gender-, disability- and age-sensitive, and free from bullying.
- 6. Prioritise programmes that enable girls and boys to acquire transferable and job-related skills** through traditional and innovative learning pathways. Girls who are not in education, employment or training will be given particular attention.
- 7. Address the risk of the widening digital divide**, particularly from a gender perspective.

Priorities in children's protection

1. **Increase the number of social workers and equip them** to identify, prevent and respond effectively to child-protection concerns, including ensuring that children are well connected to local networks of specialized social services.
2. **Use parenting education and social and behaviour change initiatives to promote non-violent methods of child discipline**, in order to prevent and address all forms of violence against children.
3. **Apply multidisciplinary approaches to the design of child protection interventions**, focus on their **financial sustainability** and promote their **scale up**.
4. **Protect and look after the best interests of children in contact with the law**. This includes working with professionals across sectors to ensure that investigations, trials and sentencing procedures are child-friendly and threats to children's well-being are prevented and responded to.

Priorities in adolescent social participation

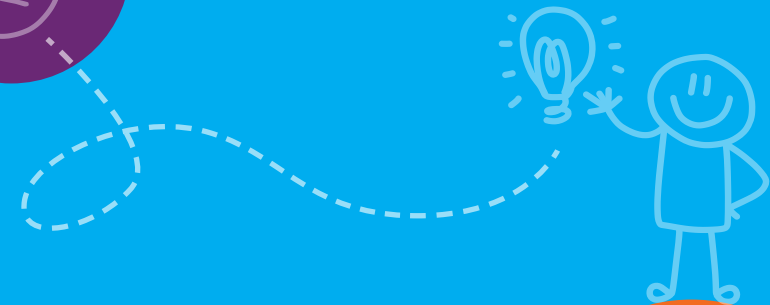
1. As part of the National Youth Strategy 2030, **enhance the ways adolescents participate in shaping society** by taking steps to inform policy, identify gaps and support the allocation of appropriate resources. This includes prioritizing **working with national youth networks and councils** to address structural barriers to civic participation and tackle harmful sociocultural norms.
2. **Create a sense of citizenship and agency for change** among adolescents and **promote social cohesion** with young refugees through peer-to-peer and intergenerational communication initiatives that combat harmful stereotypical behaviours and promote the right to contribute to society.

“ Enhance the ways adolescents participate in shaping society by taking steps to inform policy, identify gaps and support the allocation of appropriate resources, as well as prioritizing working with national youth networks and councils. ”



Priorities in policy and programming

1. Through continued support of the National Bureau of Statistics and other stakeholders, **prioritize the gathering of good-quality evidence to inform strategies, policies and actions** on cross-cutting issues that affect children.
2. **Lead and coordinate the mobilization of resources and partnerships for children, and fine-tune the mechanisms and processes used to monitor and protect child rights.**
3. **Enhance the management of child-sensitive public finance** by increasing efficiency, transparency and equity, and improving the impact of public spending on children.
4. **Advocate for changes to the main social assistance programme** to reduce child poverty through improved targeting, coverage and effectiveness, including the promotion of adequate child- and gender-responsive social services at local level.



What difference will UNICEF have made in the lives of children in Moldova by 2027?

By 2027, the situation of children will have improved and their rights will have been increasingly realized through transparent and inclusive policymaking based on good-quality evidence and by aligning resources with national targets for children.

The goals for all children:

to grow up in **caring and protective family environments**;

to have their **developmental needs and learning supported**; and

to **enjoy good-quality health care**.

Every child and adolescent, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, will have a better chance of a good start in life.

ABC



The goals for all adolescents:



to have equitable **access to good-quality education**; and



to enjoy **expanded opportunities for civic engagement and participation**.





Making a difference in the lives of children in Moldova 2023–2027 is based on UNICEF's 'Country Programme Document: Republic of Moldova 2023–2027', 2022, and was developed and designed by Handmade Communications.

Statistical information and data are those available at the time of the development of the 'Country Programme Document: Republic of Moldova 2023–2027'.

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